

UNDERSTANDING THE DEMAND FOR SCHOOLING

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COUNTRY REPORT: CZECH REPUBLIC

DEMAND FOR SCHOOLING IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC

(Country Report)

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When reporting on the demand for schooling at the current stage of development of the Czech Republic, it must be taken into account that this is a country which, in 1989, underwent transition from a totalitarian political system and centrally planned, state-owned economy to democratic governance respecting human rights, the restoration of private ownership and a market economy. The changes also affected the education sector which, until then, was under the exclusive control of the central power. Particularly in the decades following the Prague Spring of 1968, this prevented any free expression of opinion on the part of the public as a whole, or specific sections of it, from infiltrating education policy. The present still shows some traces of the past, which appears to be one of the reasons why the views of Czech society concerning education are not crystallised. This is also why the concept of “demand-driven education” is not often used in current public debate.

This reality has led us first to describe the basic trajectories of Czech education policy in the 1990s and in the initial years of the 21st century. Their proponents will also be indicated.

1. Immediately after the political changeover in late 1989 there was a radical censure of the existing state of affairs in education, which had been marked by four decades of pursuing political, ideological, centralistic and pedagogical principles invoked by the domestic and Soviet communist parties. The aim was immediately to redress the shortcomings in education caused by the totalitarian regime and to establish such conditions as had marked Czech education in pre-war Czechoslovakia – i.e. before 1939. The changes consisted, above all, in replacing senior personnel at all levels and adopting legislative measures whereby education would comply with the new constitutional, political and legal order. New laws, or amendments, codified the *de-ideologisation* of the objectives and content of education, provided for freedom of opinion, ensured the *de-monopolisation* of state education by facilitating the setting up of private and denominational schools, and stipulated that parents and students should be free in their choice of an *educational route and school*. However, some measures within the first wave of reforms had destructive effects (e.g. abolition of the institutional system for the continuing training of teachers or reducing public pre-school education). Other measures

prompted the restoration of the traditional *gymnasia* (secondary grammar schools) operating on the basis of early selection and segregation of children with high cultural capital, but failed, among other things, to restore the status of teachers as state (public) employees with appropriate remuneration. These changes were prompted by the student activists of the November revolution, rehabilitated teachers and political forces linked to the 1970s and 1980s dissident movement and their supporters belonging to the so-called “grey intelligentsia”, the leaders of which took up influential positions in political life, in education and at universities. In the first stage of the transformation, and even later, there was no doubt that most efforts were necessary and fruitful. The trend of “*negating the past and restoring the ‘status quo ante’*” was pursued – particularly in political and academic circles - with the lack of profound knowledge of West-European and global developments in education policies and without a constructive view of the long-term prospects of the development of democratic schooling. This is why, in the later stages of transformation, the pursuit of principles governing education in developed countries came under criticism.

2. Very soon after the political changeover a very strong trend occurred in the Czech education sector, seeking to minimise the role of the state in the education system) and to promote a maximum degree of *liberalisation* in line with analogous efforts promoted by the new economic policy. As part of this trend new terms and principles were introduced into education, such as educational demand and supply, the education market, private services and business activities of schools, competition, publishing school “league tables” etc. Moreover, strong emphasis was placed on the economic, legal and pedagogical autonomy of schools managed in line with management principles that originated in industry and trade. The trend was based on certain foreign, primarily Anglo-Saxon views of the education policy. It was suggested that new sources of funding of schools be sought in the private sector. The ideas of liberalisation and better economic performance of schools found their ways primarily to the new sector of private education – of which the main part were secondary technical and vocational schools. After the first surge this trend weakened in the mid-1990s. However, it is currently growing in intensity and takes the form of proposals for the introduction of paid, “above-the-standard” services at schools, tuition fees at higher education institutions and promotion of home education. The proponents are mostly representatives of liberal politics, employers’ associations and private schooling. The proposals are strongly backed by the media. One of the major documents where these liberal and business-like views are described by a number of experts was produced by the National Training Fund and is entitled “*Strategy for Human Resources Development in the Czech Republic*” (2000). It was written as a parallel

to the National Programme for the Development of Education in the Czech Republic (the so-called White Paper of 2001) and adopted by the government in 2003.

3. Besides this liberalising trend there is perhaps a somewhat opposing trend pursuing traditional positive features of the Czech education system, its relative stability and firm position in social life. As part of this trend there are recommendations for approaching changes through gradual, partial legislative, organisational and pedagogical actions. The trend of retaining the “status quo” with a deliberate partial adaptation to new conditions was promoted, above all, by representatives of school administration and conservative teachers. In the 2nd half of the 1990s political pragmatism appeared which, in the economic recession of the mid-1990s, was not opposed to education budget cuts and stagnation of teachers’ pay levels. Austerity measures and increased teaching loads during this period negatively affected the level of funding of education, which, in higher education, gradually reached a critical point. The proponents of this trend in the political spectrum included, above all, conservative forces which failed to see education as a public value. Later, however, it was also the government of the political left and centre that underestimated the need to increase expenditure on education. The supporters of the pragmatic course dismiss the strategic planning called for by the professional public and consider it to be the legacy of so-called social engineering. The transformation of education in line with this approach is spontaneous, based on operational, “ad hoc” measures.

4. At the very beginning of social transformation in the CR another trend appeared and continued to exist later on. The core of educational changes was seen to consist in internal reform of school life, and the content and methods of teaching. The maximum possible degree of school (particularly pedagogical) autonomy was pursued. The central focus was on humanization of education, a new teacher-pupil relationship, and social, personal and professional development of the teacher. As a result, networks of innovative schools and teachers have been established – the teachers feel personal responsibility for formulating the topics of their pedagogical efforts (alternative pedagogical approaches, “healthy school”, schools stressing environmental education, critical thinking etc). The proponents of this trend are assisted by various professional teachers associations. Representing a similar viewpoint, there are groups of parents and other members of the public, and various foundations focused on educational or social issues. Various specialist projects were initiated as part of this trend, which aim at changing the nature of the Czech school. They are financially supported – to a varying degree of intensity depending on resources available – from the relevant school administration bodies. In the mid-1990s a trend occurred and gradually gained momentum

which promoted reform of Czech education on the basis of an analysis of general development trends in education systems in developed democratic countries and on the basis of a critical evaluation of Czech education based on continuous comparison with the situation in the world (including the developments in neighbouring communist countries). The development of a consensual model of schooling, taking account of the prospective membership of the European Union, was also envisaged as part of these efforts. A determining role in the shaping of this approach was played by various comparative pedagogical studies, OECD and Council of Europe membership, the participation of foreign experts in analytical surveys into Czech education and their recommendations concerning education policy. Following the establishment of a minority social-democratic government in 1998, this approach received support at government and ministerial levels with the relevant declaration concerning priority support for education in the future knowledge society. This established the conditions for undertaking a new education strategy, which, in recent years, has become a new phenomenon in Czech education policy. In this way the CR joined analogous trends occurring in EU member states and other developed countries of the world which are associated in the inter-governmental Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. These developments came to a head in the form of the White Paper (MoEYS 2001), which is also a synthesis of the positive aspects of the other trends, and the Long-Term Plan for the Development of Education and the Education System (MoEYS 2002). Both documents will be dealt with as part of the description of legislative and policy papers.

1. DEMANDS AND VIEWS ABOUT SCHOOLING IN SOCIETY

1.1 Public opinion polls

The results of public opinion polls, carried out in the Czech Republic in the last decade by renowned agencies, show that the views of the Czech population on the issue of education are not very crystallised. It appears that people in the Czech Republic do not consider education to be a matter of concern and do not see a need for radical changes. On the scale of nine areas of public life education is rated as the second least problematic area (following the environment). The Czech respondents do not see certain problems which are disclosed as a result of international comparative studies (e.g. social inequalities, barriers to access to advanced levels of education, shortcomings in certain key competencies). Their views of education are positive, although somewhat superficial. They are not much concerned about this issue and lack a comprehensive, critical opinion. They normally take clearer positions on

topical measures related to the preparation and implementation of reforms. The public demands of schools and education are being monitored primarily by means of public opinion polls focusing both on evaluation of the Czech education system and on various specific and topical issues.

In recent years education has become an issue of increased public concern, particularly in relation to the White Paper and the Strategy for Human Resources Development in the Czech Republic. The issue of access to education has, not only in the CR, increased in political significance, thus raising public interest. Although opinions vary, a majority of the adult population agree, in key points, that the state should provide more support for the development of schooling and raising the level of educational attainment. Since an increased level of educational attainment is one of the prerequisites for and major features of modernisation of the country, this social climate favouring education promotes not only the development of a skilled labour force and economic growth, but also the level of cultural awareness of the Czech population. The government and other bodies active in this area may reckon with popular support for policies promoting educational attainment as one of their central development priorities.

Generally, Czech people expect that the level of educational attainment should increase now and in the future as well. According to a survey carried out by the National Institute of Technical and Vocational Education in 2003, people in the Czech Republic assume that their children will achieve a higher level of education than they did. Education is perceived, particularly by young people, to be a very important factor in success and satisfaction in various areas of life. Financial gain and an interesting job appear to be the most important stimuli for raising one's qualifications. Family tradition seems to be the weakest incentive. It is most often young people leaving schools at the lowest level of education who wish to change their educational route and who are unhappy about their qualification. It is an alarming fact in this respect that, since five years ago, the number of pupils leaving the education system at the end of compulsory education has been increasing. According to experts, roughly one half of the relevant reasons can be addressed by good counselling at basic schools.

The trends in public opinion in the CR are similar to those occurring in the OECD countries, although, on the whole, the proportion of definitely positive answers as regards the requirements and objectives in the area of education was, still in the mid-1990s, lower in the Czech Republic. It is interesting to compare the views of the lay public with those of individuals professionally concerned with education (basic and secondary school directors,

staff of district education authorities, mayors, staff at the MoEYS, Members of Parliament) resulting from a survey carried out for the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports by AMD Agency in 1996. The two groups (the lay and professional public) turned out to have entirely diverging views on some issues. This may be explained by various degrees of experience, awareness, social disparities, earlier and current political views or a varying level of commitment to and responsibility for the state of education.

Traditionally, the level of satisfaction on the part of professionals is somewhat lower than that of the lay public, although the difference is very small (46% of satisfied professionals in 1996 compared to nearly 50% of the lay public – a considerable degree of accord in comparison with other areas of public life). Certain groups of respondents – primarily basic school teachers and directors – are far less satisfied than the lay and professional public in general.

Almost one half of the public believe that education receives inadequate attention. The need for increased flows of resources into education is normally viewed as less urgent by politicians as compared to basic school teachers and directors, although the differences are not large. In late 1990s roughly one quarter of Czechs were willing to pay higher taxes, provided that the resources would be used to promote the development of education.

There are significant differences in views of the changes that occurred in education in the early 1990s (after the Velvet Revolution): according to the aforementioned survey of 1996 three quarters of professionals (almost twice as many as lay persons) assessed the changes to be positive, while the lay public is not very much aware of them, or their views ranged between slight satisfaction and slight dissatisfaction. One third of the lay public and 44% of professionals believed that the quality of schools in the mid-1990s was higher than before.

The two groups do not differ very much in assigning the responsibility for education to the state over the long term. A comparative study of the results of various national and international educational surveys, undertaken by AMD Agency for the MoEYS in 1995, revealed that the Czechs' views of the division of responsibilities for education and personal development between the school and the family are similar to those of respondents in other European countries. The specific details are that nearly two thirds of the population believe that the school and the family bear an equal share of responsibility, one third of the population assigns the responsibility primarily to the family (professionals and politicians stress the family role), and only some 50% of the population believe that the core responsibility for education rests with the school. Czech professionals concerned with education more often assign exclusive responsibility for education to the family.

Specifically, schools in the Czech Republic, as in other European countries, are expected to assist their pupils in learning and choosing a career, and to co-operate with the family. However, the proportion of the population requiring this from the school is far lower in the CR as compared to other countries. Czech people would appreciate it if teachers, school directors and parents had a greater influence on the education process. Professionals underscore the influence of school directors, teachers and, also, the Czech School Inspectorate. Public opinion suggests that the influence of political parties in power and the churches should be lower.

In terms of comparison with other European countries, the Czech population ascribes more importance to language teaching than to the teaching of the mother tongue, which is a phenomenon occurring, as a rule, in small European countries. The importance of humanities is rather underestimated in comparison with other countries. Czech people traditionally place great emphasis on the preparation of pupils for further studies and for employment, on promoting self-confidence and on acquiring logical thinking and decision-making skills. Good schools should, according to them, assist in addressing learning difficulties and the choice of a career, maintain discipline and co-operate with parents (interestingly, the lay as well as professional public turned out to know relatively little about school councils).

One of the far less important demands of schooling is the aspect of understanding (the least importance is attributed by the public to learning to understand life in other countries). Moreover, the public does not believe homework is relevant. The greatest discrepancy, in the eyes of the population, in what schools should develop and what they actually do develop is the issue of self-confidence and independence. The overall level of satisfaction with schools meeting these demands is lower in the Czech Republic than in other countries.

Professionals aspire to achieve a situation where the qualifications issued by Czech schools will be unreservedly recognised in all developed European countries. Other aspirations include appropriate language skills on the part of school leavers, the implementation of an information system concerning schools, better working conditions for teachers etc. Professionals and the public ascribe an equal deal of importance to these goals. The lay population is far less satisfied with the availability of information about schools.

According to surveys carried out in recent years by polling agencies (CVVM and STEM 2003), most of the Czech population sees its schooling in a favourable light. Three quarters of the respondents acquired through schooling a general awareness and a necessary qualification. Schooling helped two thirds of respondents in developing their sense of responsibility and

independent opinions. According to 51% of the respondents, school contributed to enhancing their inter-personal skills (46% denied this). However, only 17% of the respondents thought school promoted their understanding of politics.

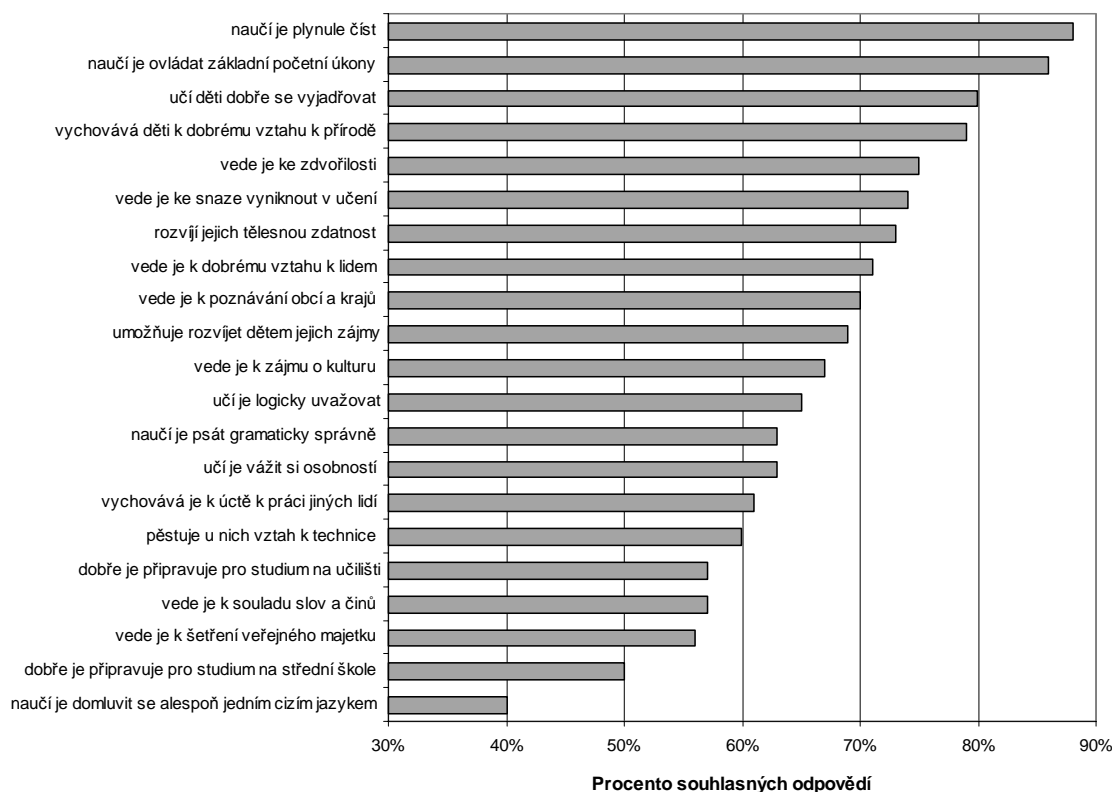
If we compare both groups of respondents in the 1996 AMD survey – the lay public and professionals – 85% of professionals and 77% of laypersons believed that the quality of teaching at schools should be controlled by the state (a slightly smaller proportion required state control over school management of resources). Both groups preferred school autonomy in the area of human resources and finance to autonomy in teaching. Nearly one fifth of professionals and one third of the general public voiced a demand that the MoEYS should determine what teachers should do and how they should teach. According to 70% of professionals and 60% of laypersons the standards of schools do not differ, and the differences are more among teachers. One tenth of the general public and one fourth of professionals believe schools in their region to be better than elsewhere.

Basic school education

The Czech population is and has for some time been largely satisfied with the quality of Czech schools. In 2002 the standard of basic schooling was, along with *gymnázia*, viewed as the highest of all types and levels of education (opinion polls carried out by CVVM and STEM, 2002). One year later, in 2003 (CVVM) the rating of basic schools was slightly lower and was ranked as third after *gymnázia* and universities. For several years, approximately two thirds of respondents have assessed the quality of basic schooling to be good, and 72% of them even believe it to have improved since the late 1980s.

According to an AMD Agency survey of 1999 the respondents credit basic schools mainly for the following:

Figure: Skills and attitudes developed in children by basic schools – according to the population



According to the latest surveys (CVVM, STEM 2002) other contributions of basic school include promotion of independence and understanding of the world (half of the respondents agree). Almost three quarters of the population believe that pupil achievement at basic school should be a criterion in admission to secondary education.

As regards evaluation of the work of basic school teachers, more than a half of respondents (56%) in an AMD Agency survey in 1998 believed that teachers at basic schools have too many pupils in classrooms. Over 80% of those polled thought basic school teachers were interested in working with children, showed appropriate expert knowledge and were able to communicate the subject matter properly. However, almost one third of the people believed that teachers are not fair to pupils. Almost 50% said that teachers' actions do not follow their words, and over one half of the respondents were of the opinion that basic school teachers lacked a sense of humour, placed excessive demands on pupils and were too strict.

Equal access to education – the issue of six- and eight-year gymnázia (grammar schools)¹

¹ (Note: the term “multi-year” gymnasia used previously has been replaced by the term six- and eight-year gymnasia, which captures the Czech reality more accurately)

One of the topical issues on which opinion polls have focused in recent years is the issue of equal access to education. This issue has come under the increased attention of experts as it is one of the most closely examined subjects in all developed OECD countries. Another reason is that various international surveys in the area of education, in which the Czech Republic has been taking part since the mid-1990s, have revealed that it is a serious problem in the CR. In addition to the professional debate, the views of the general public are also monitored.

According to a survey carried out by the STEM Agency (2002), Czechs' views of the education system are ambiguous: educated people may enjoy certain privileges, but education should be freely accessible to all. This is a view held by over one third of the population. The second most frequently held opinion shows an egalitarian dimension – educated people do not deserve any privileges and education should be free of charge. Those promoting the liberal approach (privileges for the educated and privately funded education) account for less than one quarter of the population.

The poor economic situation of families and high financial costs of studies, particularly at secondary and tertiary levels, are currently considered to be the most severe obstacle to equal access to education. Most of the population believes that only wealthy people can provide good education for their children. Nearly two thirds of Czechs are concerned that many talented children in the CR do not get a chance to study. However, roughly 50% of Czech people agree that the existing system of schooling provides equal opportunities for all. Approximately 60% of the citizens identify with the claim that the level of educational attainment is dependent solely on aptitudes and willpower to study. Most people also believe that the fact that some people achieve a higher level of education than others can be attributed to varying aptitudes and therefore there is nothing to be done about it.

Based on comparison of the outcomes of the longitudinal PISA-L survey conducted in the CR in 2003 and the results of a CVVM opinion poll of the same year, parents of fifteen-year-olds who are completing compulsory education are less critical than the rest of the adult population of inequalities in the education system. However, apparently due to utterly different experience on the part of the parents there are far larger differences depending on educational attainment.

	Parent	Population as a whole
Many talented children in this country do not get a chance to study	54 %	68 %
All children regardless of their talents, aptitudes or social background should be educated together as long as possible	49 %	64 %

Aptitudes and willpower to study are the sole factors determining the level of educational attainment in the CR	75 %	59 %
Only wealthy people can provide for a truly good education of their children	46 %	58 %
Six- and eight-year <i>gymnázia</i> provide better conditions for children from wealthy families	23 %	55 %
Because of six- and eight-year <i>gymnázia</i> children who cannot study there lose out	22 %	48 %
Without appropriate contacts a young individual does not get admitted to a university	35 %	46 %

Politicians as well as the general public were stirred by certain information contained in the aforementioned White Paper. One of the issues that aroused controversy was the proposal of the MoEYS envisaging a gradual abolition of six- and eight-year *gymnázia*. This type of school is selective and provides part of compulsory education at lower secondary level to selected individuals. The capacity of the *gymnázia* is regulated by the state and they provide schooling for less than 10% of the relevant age group. The pupils are admitted at the age of 11 on the initiative of their parents and test results which, at such an early age, reflect, above all, a better socio-cultural background. The chances of those who complete this type of schooling of getting admitted to a university are significantly higher as compared to other secondary school leavers. This opinion is backed up by an overwhelming majority of the population and various statistical analyses drawing on precise data confirm it.

Six- and eight-year *gymnázia* were the subject of the aforementioned opinion polls conducted by CVVM and STEM and also of the PISA-L survey. Their results are summarised in a study undertaken by the ISEA company entitled “Better Education only for the Elite”? According to the study over 70% of Czechs believe that six- and eight-year *gymnázia* provide considerable better education than other secondary schools and an even larger proportion (81%) of the population agree that six- and eight-year *gymnázia* significantly increase chances of getting admitted to a university. Moreover, a majority of the population think that these institutions facilitate better conditions for children from well-off families.

Public opinion concerning the effects of six- and eight-year *gymnázia* in terms of preparation for universities was, even in the 2nd half of the 1990s, very favourable. University graduates, non-manual workers, people living in large cities and those with higher living standards were particularly positive in this respect. The appropriateness of the differentiation between the talented and less talented at such an early age was viewed slightly less positively. These negative aspects were perceived less clearly by the youngest generation, university graduates, people living in large cities and those with higher living standards. In the late 1990s the Czech

population was definitely not in favour of dramatic changes in the number of six- and eight-year *gymnázia* – only 13% of respondents favoured their abolition in 1999, while 63% thought they should remain in existence or even increase in number.

However, people in the Czech Republic did note the problems of which, during the same period, Czech as well as foreign experts (mainly the OECD) warned and which concern the very nature of six- and eight-year *gymnázia* causing inequalities in access to good quality education. This issue was raised in a broad public debate supported by the media, and the public attitude changed considerably. In 2003 almost two thirds of the population believed that six- and eight-year *gymnázia* should not exist and that children should be educated together as long as possible.

	Definitely agree or rather agree
Six- and eight-year <i>gymnázia</i> considerably increase the chances of getting admitted to a university.	81 %
Six- and eight-year <i>gymnázia</i> provide a far better education for the children.	71 %
All children regardless of their talent, aptitudes or social background should be educated together as long as possible.	64 %
If the quality of basic schools was better, there would be no need for six- and eight-year <i>gymnázia</i> .	52 %
Six- and eight-year <i>gymnázia</i> provide better conditions for the children of wealthy parents.	52 %
Because of six- and eight-year <i>gymnázia</i> children who cannot study there lose out.	48 %

While the age of the respondents does not affect their opinions on six- and eight-year *gymnázia*, their education does to an extent. People with a higher qualification are more aware of the importance of six- and eight-year *gymnázia* for a “good start” for their children, but do not see this to be very unfair. The largest differences in attitudes to these institutions depend on the respondents’ political orientation: the right do not see any injustice, the left do. However, all respondents agree that the *gymnázia* facilitate a better starting position. Another alternative (“all children should be educated together as long as possible) was rejected by over one third of the population and even by more than a half of the parents of those fifteen-year-old pupils who are directly concerned.

The issue of equal access to education in the Czech Republic concerns not only six- and eight-year *gymnázia*, but also secondary and, in particular, university education. Only 18% of the respondents in a CVVM survey in 2000 believed in equal chances at these levels, and one third of those polled even thought that, in years to come, such studies will only be reserved for

children of wealthy parents. As regards secondary schools, less than 50% of the population believed in equal access. The other half thought that the wealth of the families will be an important factor in such studies.

Unlike previous years, in 2000 the pessimistic view held by women, concerning the chances of all students attending public secondary schools and universities in the future irrespective of the financial situation of the family, was not confirmed. Moreover, it turned out that, along with increasing educational attainment and living standards, there is a growing proportion of the people who believe that children from poor as well as rich families will in future have equal chances of getting admitted to public secondary schools and universities. A relatively more positive view of future prospects is held by non-manual workers. Contrary to this, pensioners are highly sceptical. The opinion that universities will only be reserved for children from wealthy families is more common among manual workers. In terms of election preferences, optimism was more frequently expressed by right-wing supporters, while those favouring the extreme left-wing parties were pessimistic about the future in this respect.

Other subjects of public debate on education

School environment, working conditions and remuneration of teachers

According to the AMD Agency opinion poll survey of 1996 schooling in the Czech Republic was facing the following severe problems: proliferation of drugs among pupils, tuition fees at some types of school, lack of good teachers, overall lack of funding, excessive feminisation and violence and bullying among pupils. The least problematic issues include a decreased role of the state in school operations and inappropriate school management. These problems appear to be more severe in the eyes of the public as compared to professionals. As distinct from professionals, lay people mention favouritism in admission proceedings and the content of teaching as serious problems.

The age of teachers is not believed to pose a problem by either group. One third of the Czech population in 2002 and as many as 40% in 2003 supported the intention of reducing the number of teachers and ensuring better pay for the remaining ones (CVVM opinion polls).

Increasing the number of university students and the issue of tuition fees

The key issue in terms of the increase in educational attainment levels in the Czech Republic is an increase in the number of university students, which lags far behind more advanced countries. The Czech population is quite well aware of this, probably thanks to expert debates

and the relevant media coverage. According to a poll carried out by CVVM in 2000, over one half of the people in the CR thought the number of university students should increase – 10% of them were in favour of a rapid and substantial increase in the number of study places at universities. In 2002 the proportion of the population supporting expanded opportunities of studying at universities was nearly 80%.

Expansion of university education was supported most by the youngest age groups, secondary school leavers and university graduates, non-manual workers (particularly those with professional skills), students, people with relatively high living standards and inhabitants of large cities. Manual workers divided into two approximately equal groups, one supporting increased student intake and the other one believing that the existing figures were sufficient. Skilled workers were more positive than unskilled ones. As regards opinions across the political spectrum, right-wing voters favour expansion (particularly the supporters of the Freedom Union which promotes this issue as one of its priorities), and the adherents of the extreme left advocate that the existing figures should be maintained.

It is interesting to see what public opinion is as regards the proposed ways of funding the expansion of university education – i.e. increased resources from the national budget and the introduction of tuition fees. A total of 62% of respondents were in favour of a substantial increase in public spending and against tuition fees. Young people and people with a relatively high socio-economic status supported increased public expenditure more than the average population. The proportion of the population disagreeing with tuition fees further increased in the following years and reached roughly one third of the population in 2003. Traditionally, the most fervent advocates of tuition fees are right-wing voters (again the Freedom Union), the most severe opponents are on the extreme left of the political spectrum.

The issue of an increase in the number of people with “full” secondary education (“maturita”) is analogous. Moreover, people believe it is directly linked to the expansion of university education. Over 50% of the population wish to see an increase in the number who have passed the “maturita” examination. The structure of the respondents who take this view is similar to the structure of those supporting higher enrolment at universities.

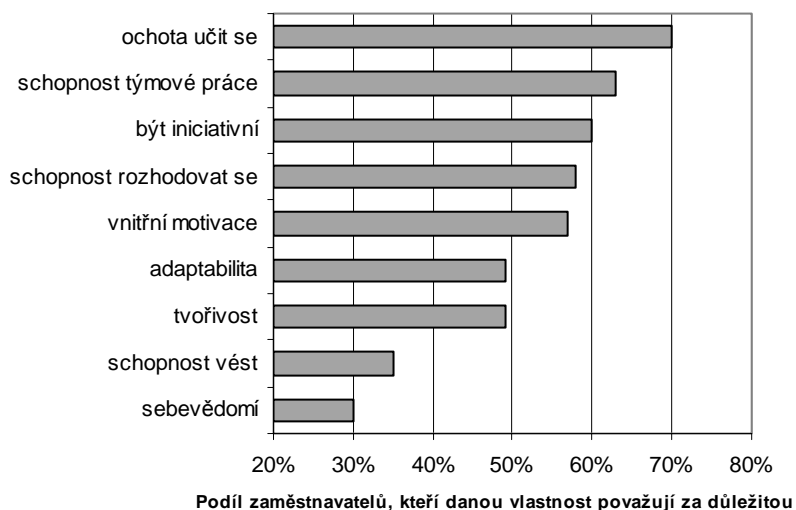
1.2 Employers’ demands for schooling

Research into the demands on the part of employers carried out in the late 1990s by the AMD Agency and funded by the Czech Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports focused on employers’ experience in relation to employment of secondary school leavers and university

graduates. However, the demands articulated do not only concern advanced levels of education, since the relevant qualities and skills should undoubtedly be developed in pupils by all schools from the lowest levels of the education system. In this survey managing directors and human resource managers in companies with five and more employees which had recently employed school leavers articulated general priorities in terms of various skills they seek in school leavers.

Personal qualities and competencies

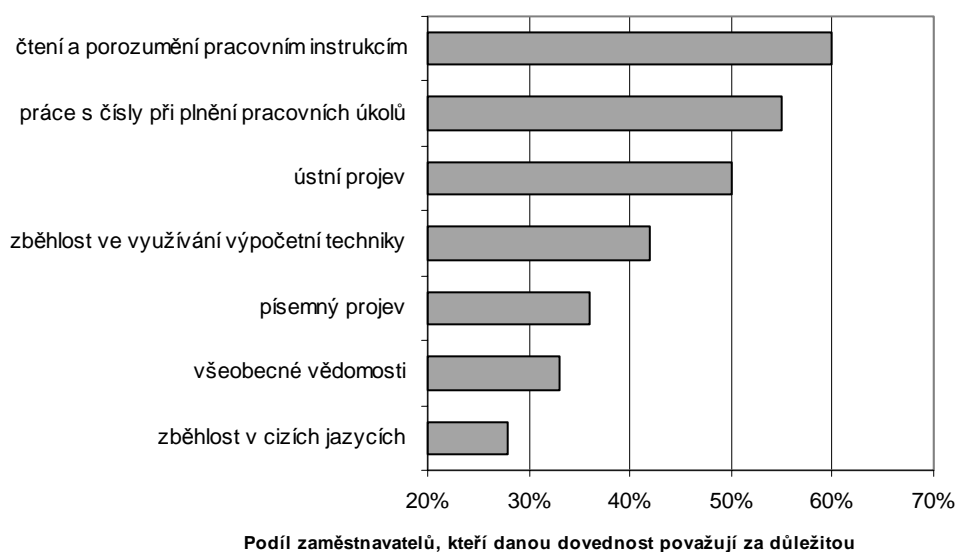
The first area on which the survey concentrated covered personal qualities and competencies of the school leavers. The employers polled agreed that, out of the list of various characteristics, they ascribed priority importance to the willingness to learn, capacity for teamwork and personal initiative. The largest shortages in school leavers include leadership and decision-making skills and also the most important quality, which is the willingness to learn. Although the responsibility for the development of certain qualities and competencies is, according to employers, equally shared by the school and the employer's organisation, the nurturing of the willingness to learn is almost exclusively attributed to the school. The school should not only communicate knowledge, but also teach methods of acquiring such knowledge.



Basic competencies

Another issue under review covered school leavers' basic competencies. The largest proportion of employees ascribe importance primarily to reading and understanding work instructions, numeracy in performing work tasks and oral skills. Surprisingly, the smallest proportion of employers placed emphasis on language skills (it must be noted that the

importance of these skills has grown since then substantially – one of the reasons being the impending accession of the CR to the EU). Employers also agreed that these skills are in short supply in school leavers. In addition to the two most important competencies – reading and understanding work instructions and numeracy in performing work tasks, where employers believe the school and their organisation bear an equal deal of responsibility - they require that the school should be exclusively responsible for the development of all the remaining skills in this category.



Qualities in relation to employment

Employers believe that the responsibility for the development of qualities directly linked to employment rests more with employers' organisations than schools. For employers the most important qualities in this respect (and in general as well) include the capacity to discern quality performance, intelligent resource management, and client-oriented approach. These qualities are also very hard to find in school leavers.

Employers require that schools should better promote the development of the following:

- Capacity to discern quality performance
- Willingness to learn,
- Initiative,
- Decision-making skills,
- Intelligent resource management,
- Basic vocational skills,
- Creativity,

- Language skills,
- Oral skills.

Schools and business organisations share responsibility for the development of the above (in some cases the latter have greater responsibility than the former). Still, these qualities are most hard to find and therefore the demands on schools in this respect are high.

According to employers, the areas which the school develops most include writing (three quarters of employers agree), general knowledge, oral skills, foreign languages, IT skills, basic vocational skills. One half of employers believe that the school also nurtures the willingness to learn. Conversely, the areas least developed by the school include leadership skills (only 14% of employers are satisfied with schools' performance in this regard), intelligent resource management, capacity to manage client relations, advanced vocational skills, sense of safety and health at work, adaptability, internal motivation, capacity to discern quality performance and personal initiative.

Employers believe that, on the whole, schools are performing tasks that they should be performing. According to them, less attention is devoted to the development of personal competencies and qualities. The only skill which most employers believe schools are entirely neglecting is leadership. The demand for quality performance and willingness to learn clearly predominates over the volume of knowledge.

1.3 Presentation and debate in the media

One of the important forums for public discussion about the demands for schooling in each country is the media. Unfortunately, the image of education presented by the media in the Czech Republic has not yet been well explored. The only data available is contained in two studies undertaken by experts in the Teacher Training Faculty of Charles University in Prague and the Philosophical Faculty of Masaryk University in Brno.

One general feature of debate in the media is that, for various reasons, it is only partial and therefore is a frequent source of improper generalisations. The topics of debate in the media are chosen not in relation to their importance for society, but in relation to their entertainment value. Education often becomes an interesting subject for the media only thanks to certain extraordinary events, while the truly important issues are often presented without the relevant context or explanation of essential perspectives and aspects. According to a survey carried out in the mid-1990s, information about education presented by the media was followed by almost 90% of the population and 40% deliberately sought it out.. Another survey revealed

that the contributions concerned with education in the media only accounted for a very small proportion (approx. 0.5-1,20) of space in the daily press and on TV.

The Czech media coverage of education in 2000 was primarily (one third) focused on the education system, particularly thanks to the topical discussion of the White Paper as the key strategic document concerned with education policy. The topics included, above all, the role of six- and eight-year *gymnázia*, the form of the “maturita” examination and the reform of public administration. In comparison, only about one half of media contributions were concerned with teaching and the school as an institution. A mere 3% of contributions was related to the role of parents. Negative views prevailed over positive ones in the contributions (38% and 29% respectively). One third of the contributions provided neutral views without any ambition to evaluate.

The press

The school is viewed by the press as an institution that should facilitate an optimal environment for schooling and, at the same time, take account of the children’s intellectual needs. Education is most often presented as an instrument for decreasing unemployment. The school is presented as a place which children should attend without fear and which will equip them, using appropriate methods, with the basic knowledge they will need in life. The readers (including parents) in their contributions stress demands for performance, as they view it to be an instrument facilitating useful discipline and work habits in children. At the same time, they believe that the school of today is outdated and overburdened with knowledge and its reproduction. The level of knowledge acquired by pupils is not rated as very high and the education process in schools is described as based on memorising facts rather than learning to think and solve problems. A simplified image of the school in the press is clear from the fact that instead of emphasizing the application of the knowledge to further learning, the school tends to require a simple reproduction of knowledge. The press describes the Czech education system as unsustainable in the long-term, as it fails to respond to the current trends – there are often allusions to its lacking focus on flexibility, independence, preparation for a successful entry to the labour market, prevention of xenophobia, intolerance and racism. Common demands expressed by parents and experts concern an educated child with good chances of a career and prerequisites for emotional and personal development, and education which will not be a burden endangering the child’s healthy development and a burden for the family in terms of time. Parents are willing to pay for various “above-standard” educational services, but journalists oppose any economic burden on families and, lately in particular, social

inequalities in access to education. Attention is quite often paid to so-called innovative schools

(schools with non-traditional teaching methods). The room taken up by this topic in the press gives the impression that there are far more of these schools than the actual number. The implementation of ICT in schools has, in recent years, also attracted increased interest on the part of the press, and so has prevention of bullying, capital grants (for buildings) and maintaining the standards of schools in poorer regions in the wake of decentralisation of state power.

What receives relatively little attention in the press is the protective function of the school. Journalists often voice demands for less formalism in favour of more dynamic approaches, , individualisation of the education process, integration of all children irrespective of their disadvantages and preparation for further education. They highlight the educational function of the school, which is followed by the social and protective functions (particularly as regards drugs and bullying). Quality is usually associated with the school's capacity to meet children's requirements, expand the provision and provide the right to home education. Formal features normally appear to be more important than internal school reform in the press. Generally, there is little concern in the papers in relation to education – the greatest concerns stem from decentralisation of state administration resulting in schools in poor regions becoming poorer, from the demands standardised “maturita” will place on schools of non-academic type and from the abolition of six- and eight-year *gymnázia* .

The television

The content of TV reporting on education is generally more narrow as compared to the press. The debate concerns more the political and economic context of education. The most frequently discussed topics include teachers' remuneration and social security of disabled children. Due to the relatively large room given to these issues they appear to be far more serious than in reality (as is the case with the presentation of so-called innovative schools in the press). The need for integration of disabled children and children belonging to national minorities predominates as a trend that must be followed on the way to achieving the standards of developed countries. Successful examples are presented, giving the impression of success. Children's aggressiveness towards teachers is often mentioned, while the press most frequently focuses on violence perpetrated on children. This issue is associated with inappropriate quality of teaching staffs and their working conditions – particularly the level of pay, excessive feminisation and ageing. The TV pays relatively little attention to the solving

of the problems on which it reports (violence, bullying), to the issue of choosing a school and an educational route and teaching methods.

The radio

Reporting on educational issues on the radio focuses primarily on the broad issue of “education as a priority”, parents’ views, advice on the choice of a school, difficulties in child-raising and evaluation of teachers’ work. Elderly people predominate among those who call in with their contributions. Their views are somewhat nostalgic and often involve concerns about liberalisation in education, reduced parent influence on children’s behaviour, the loss of school ethos and respect for the school and teachers, their qualifications and authority.

1.4 Differentiation in views and demands for schooling in political parties’ policy statements

The overall description of major trends in education policy after 1989 is presented at the beginning of the national report. It was only in relation to the general elections in 1998 and 2002 and as part of the current debate on the new schools bill that political parties have taken a more distinctive position on education. At present there are significant differences to be discerned in this respect among the left, centre and right-wing parties in the CR.

Noticeable differentiation of opinion began to occur in the 2nd half of the 1990s. At the first stage of transformation prior to this, which was in the hands of right-wing governments, education was set aside as a matter of negligible importance amidst fundamental political and economic changes. These government views reflected public opinion, as the Czech population did not consider education to be a matter of concern and tended to hold the opinion that it would suffice to build on successful traditions and adapt to new circumstances. This is why they were not much concerned about cuts in public spending which, in the critical year of 1996, affected schools and teachers to a considerable degree. This trend was radically disrupted in 1998 by the Social Democratic government, which declared education to be one of the priorities in the socio-economic development of the country. This position, which remained more in the form of a declaration, was followed by centre-right parties – i.e. the Christian Democrats and the Freedom Union which, in 2002, joined the Social Democrats in a coalition government. The opposition – the liberal conservative Civic Democratic Party - did

not ascribe too much importance to education even before the 2002 elections and did not even mention this issue in their election manifesto. Only in 2003 did they begin to articulate and promote their education policy in relation to the forming of a shadow cabinet. The other opposition party, the extreme left-wing Communist Party which, until recently, operated in political isolation, included education in their policy statements. In these special emphasis was placed on equal access to educational opportunities, a controlling role of the state in respect to education and the position of teachers, and the party clearly stated its position on democratic citizenship and the totalitarian past.

The education policy of the incumbent coalition government rests on the following requirements:

The government considers education to be a priority and will seek to increase the **quality of education** so as to ensure a good position of the Czech Republic in terms of **international comparison**. The government agrees with the policy documents on education adopted by the previous government and considers them to be the **starting points for the implementation of education policy** (the principal lines of education policy – see the White Paper below).

The government will **finalise education reform** with a view to developing a coherent and integrated education system focused on lifelong learning. Modernisation of education will more clearly aim at the development of key competencies, improvement of information and civic literacy and enhanced language teaching. The government will therefore prepare a **law on education**. The pillars of structural and content-related changes will include: the lifelong learning principle, framework educational programmes for various levels and fields of education, the **reform of secondary school leaving procedures** – i.e. the national part of “**maturita**”, final examinations and the necessary development of diversified forms of tertiary and adult education.

The government also undertakes to **expand considerably educational opportunities at tertiary level**. The priority in this respect is to increase the number of places in Bachelor programmes which would guarantee the possibility of continuing at more advanced levels.. The plurality of programmes and forms of tertiary education must not put at risk the transferability and compatibility of the system as a whole, nor should it threaten the decisive position of public higher education institutions, particularly universities.

The government undertakes to continue pursuing the principle of free public education at primary, secondary and tertiary levels. In **executing the right to education** the government will focus on the following:

- Support for as broad a participation of children in pre-school education as possible, particularly in the final year of kindergartens, with respect to local and financial accessibility;
- Development of optimal conditions for the integration of disabled and socially disadvantaged children into educational programmes at basic and secondary schools;
- Promotion of access to advanced levels of education for children from less stimulating social backgrounds;
- Development of comparable educational conditions at the second stage of basic school and lower years of six- and eight-year *gymnázia* (lower secondary education);
- Facilitating equal educational opportunities for members of various ethnic groups;

- Support for education in arts and language schools as an integral and indispensable part of the education system.

The government undertakes to increase the pay of teachers and trainers to a level comparable with that in the EU countries, and to develop a career system which will provide for career development opportunities which will not be primarily dependent on the length of experience, and which would take account of continuing training. The government will therefore develop instruments for enhancing the working conditions of teachers and other staff in education. The government **will not allow for a softening of the existing qualification requirements for teachers at basic and secondary schools.**

In its approach to education the government pursues the principle of shared responsibility between the national, regional, municipal and school levels. By means of delegating certain powers the government assumes responsibility for policy-related, regulatory and methodological issues and facilitates the integrity and quality of the Czech education system.

Changes in the concept of education and demographic developments require **optimisation of the schools network.** Although regional and municipal self-governing bodies play a decisive role in this area, the government is responsible for the **setting of the rules which will govern the optimisation processes,** efficient funding and accommodation of specific public interests. Special attention will be devoted to optimisation of vocational training in view of labour market developments.

The government will support an **increase in public spending** on education. The funding of **innovative and development programmes** will play an important role. The specific focus of the programmes will take account of the needs and goals of national and regional bodies and, in particular, independent educational institutions, social partners and other relevant organisations. The government will establish conditions for increasing the chance of using EU funds to support the development of education.

The government undertakes to maintain a comparable status for schools regardless of their founding bodies and promote the principle of co-funding of schools and school facilities.

The government will finalise the project concerning state information policy in education.

The National Programme for the Development of Education (White Paper) set out the following lines of education policy:

The National Programme for the Development of Education agrees that **education must be the priority of socio-economic development of the Czech Republic,** as it has decisive effects on society's human and social capital, the values people embrace and the quality of their day-to-day lives. It sets out a requirement that public expenditure on education should gradually increase so as to be comparable with other developed countries in accounting for 6% of gross domestic product.

1. **Implementation of lifelong learning for all.** To satisfy and promote the educational needs of children, young people and adults by means of increasing the capacity of schools and other educational institutions. This policy will ensure accessibility at all levels of education and provide opportunities for the maximum development of various capacities in individuals throughout their lives, while respecting the principle of equality and use of talent.

2. **Adapting curricula and study programmes to the needs of the knowledge society.** To achieve higher quality and relevance of education by means of developing new curricula and study programmes in line with the needs of the information and knowledge society, sustainable development, employment and the need for active participation in the life of a democratic society in integrated Europe, while respecting individual differences and the living conditions of learners.
3. **Identification and evaluation of the quality and effectiveness of education.** To finalise the system of evaluation of educational institutions' operations at all levels of governance and administration; monitoring the outcomes of education, examination, evaluation of the level of personal development and professional orientation in children and young people.
4. **Promoting internal change and openness of educational institutions.** To develop autonomy, the innovative potential and facilities of schools, their openness towards society and links to the social environment by means of initiating development programmes and forming networks of co-operating schools. As regards tertiary education, to support co-operation between educational institutions and research and development organisations, and to promote their involvement in regional development.
5. **Changing the role and professional prospects of teachers and academics.** To support change in the concept and performance of teaching activities in all educational institutions, to support the socio-professional status of teachers and academics, to increase the quality of their initial and continuing training, and to establish conditions for their career development and higher motivation for individual improvement and teamwork.
6. **From central control to sharing responsibility for decision-making.** To implement, by means of state and self-governing bodies and efficient participation from social partners and other representatives of the civic society, decentralised governance of education. This is a process involving planning, organisation and evaluation in line with strategic aims, in particular with the use of indirect instruments . As regards higher education, to achieve balance between the autonomy and self-governance of educational institutions and to ensure they are responsible for their operations.

The requirements above have resulted from a political compromise. Smaller parties of the democratic left and social and liberal centrist parties joined the positions expressed in the White Paper, which was developed by experts and approved by the previous social-democratic government. In spite of this, they stressed the following requirements:

- To increase the influence of parents as concerns the content of education through their active co-operation with the school
- To facilitate the choice of a school in line with the pupil's capacities, and to retain six- and eight-year *gymnázia* as selective schools providing more demanding education for groups of children with higher aptitudes, which would be identified at an entry examination at the age of 11
- To promote integration of pupils with special learning needs into mainstream schools

- To maintain comparable conditions for the funding of public, denominational and private schools from public budgets
- To reduce direct managerial functions of the ministry and strengthen its policy-making, controlling and methodological functions as part of a decentralised education system and high level of autonomy for schools
- To replace compulsory school attendance by compulsory education
- To adapt education to lifelong learning needs

A new education policy, which is being developed by the opposition ODS and is entitled “Blue Chance”, requires that the government policy must be abandoned and subjected to criticism, even including its generally acceptable features. The subheading of the ODS programme is “trust and opportunity”, its basic policy principle states “the role of the government and of the education ministry is not to serve the system, but to serve the pupils, their parents and students”. Despite the stress on liberal approaches, the programme espouses the traditional concept of education as it has developed in Central European cultures. Education is viewed as an important condition for personal prosperity and a major public service provided by various public and private entities which enjoy equal status. “None of the issues on which a citizen can decide freely should be decided on by the state bureaucracy”. All measures adopted must stem from trust in parents who, at their discretion, make use of the educational services provided, and from the trust in school directors and teachers who freely decide what education they offer within prescribed parameters. The specific measures include reduced powers of the ministry and a delegation of responsibilities to regions and municipalities to the largest extent possible. The allocation of resources should be consistently based on the number of pupils and financial demands of the respective programme, while no distinction is made between so-called direct (i.e. teachers’ pay and the costs of the pedagogical process) and indirect (material and operational costs) costs.). As regards tertiary education, the programme proposes expansion of educational capacity and requires that co-funding should be applied including tuition fees, whereby the student would become a client. Compared to the White Paper and operational plans of the Ministry of Education, Blue Chance is far less specific and needs to be elaborated upon. Still, it may be considered as an impetus to reinforce market principles in education.

2. PARENTS' ATTITUDES AND EXPECTATIONS

2.1 What is the evidence relating to levels of expressed parental approval of/satisfaction with what is achieved by: a) schools in general; b) those which their children actually attend.

Parents' level of satisfaction with schools in general and with the school attended by their child

It has been illustrated in the first chapter that the Czech population's views of education are in no way crystallised and that there is overall satisfaction. This chapter will focus on parents and the extent to which they are satisfied with the schools attended by their children. Parents face school-related problems on a day-to-day basis - therefore they have more to say than other groups and their answers are likely to reflect the reality of school life more accurately. Unsurprisingly, the population at large may differ considerably in its opinion from parents and teachers. A survey conducted in the mid-1990s revealed that, on the whole, 51.8% of respondents expressed satisfaction. The proportion of satisfied parents was smaller (45.1%), and teachers formed the most critical group. Only 30.9% of them were happy with the state of education (Gulliová and Průšová 1997). The parents of fifteen-year-olds mentioned educational attainment as one of the major preconditions for their children's success in life. Individual opinion and beliefs and the knowledge of foreign languages were the only preconditions that received more weight (PISA-L 2003).

In this part we will concentrate on the question of how parents evaluate the school their child attends. We will draw on three studies of the ways parents assess the school quality at various stages of education undertaken by their children. First, the focus will be on the parents of children at pre-school age, parents of children in the 4th year of basic school (PIRLS 2001) and finally parents of fifteen-year-old pupils (PISA-L 2003).

Pre-school education

An extensive survey was carried out among kindergarten teachers and parents as part of the development of the National Report on the State of Pre-School Education in the CR. It revealed that most parents (70%) agree that kindergartens provide all children with pre-school education of high standards, three quarters of the parents believe the network of pre-school

facilities is appropriate. This is due to the long tradition of pre-school education and an extensive network of kindergartens. A total of 53% parents consider kindergartens to be the most robust component of the Czech education system. Other details in this respect and statements of teachers and parents, which may be compared, are illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1: Views of teachers and parents about the arrangements within and standard of pre-school education

Statements	Kindergarten teachers		Parents	
	Agree	Disagree	Agree	Disagree
1. Czech kindergartens have traditionally been designated as the most robust component of the education system. Do you agree this is so at present?	33	28	53	10
2. Generally, Czech kindergartens provide pre-school education of good standards for all children.	85	2	70	6
3. Czech kindergartens are accessible for all children at the relevant age, whose parents decide to enrol them.	83	5	75	9
4. The most important task of a kindergarten is to prepare children well for entering the 1st year of basic school.	58	11	75	6
5. The most important task of a kindergarten is to facilitate a peaceful and responsive environment for the children.	98	0	87	2
6a. Each municipality should be responsible for ensuring that each child can be placed in a kindergarten.	85	4	-	-
6b. Each family is entitled to a place in a kindergarten for their child.	-	-	94	2
7. There should be a larger supply of various forms of pre-school care of children – not only kindergartens.	43	24	66	11
8. Kindergartens should follow various curricula and promote their programmes so that the parents may choose.	74	7	80	5
9. Parents should be able to obtain objective information about the standards of pre-school care and education provided by the kindergarten they have chosen.	97	1	95	1
10. The provision of public pre-school care of all children is the obligation of the state and the municipality.	84	4	78	7
11. The responsibility for the care of a pre-school child is the responsibility of the family.	23	45	26	48
12. Employers should pay respect to employed mothers.	87	1	88	2

The first stage of basic school (Primary education)

As part of an international survey of reading literacy among pupils in the 4th year of basic school (PIRLS 2001) some questions were designed for their parents. The questionnaire did not focus on the overall level of parents' satisfaction with the school, but focused on three important aspects of the school's operations. The first aspect concerned the involvement of the parents in the education of their child. A total of 83.4% of parents believe the school facilitates their involvement properly (36.2% definitely agree and 47.3% rather agree). Over one half of parents (52,3 %) definitely agreed that the school takes care so that their child makes good progress, and another 41.9% of parents broadly agreed with this. The parents were also asked whether the school assists their child in their reading efforts and whether the

assistance is appropriate. The level of satisfaction in this respect was also high (49.6% definitely agree, 40.7% broadly agree).

The second stage of basic school and secondary schools

In spring 2003 the second round of a survey into the levels of reading, mathematical and scientific literacy of fifteen-year-old students was conducted (PISA). A total of 10,000 pupils took part. Questionnaires were also distributed to their parents as part of a subsequent longitudinal project PISA-L. The questionnaires were filled out by 7,019 parents. Out of this large number 37% of parents expressed total satisfaction with the school attended by their child and another 54% of parents said they were fairly satisfied. The parents also evaluated specific aspects of the school's operations. There is general satisfaction as to communication between the school and the family. A total of 93% of parents were happy about the way the school informs them about their child's study achievement and behaviour. Moreover, most parents believe that the school maintains discipline well and do not see any socio-pathological disorders in the children (drugs, alcohol, violence). 90.4 % of parents of fifteen-year-old pupils believe that their child is happy at school. Matějů and Straková (2003) state that the parents' views do not differ according to their level of education. Detailed information and the questions are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Parents' opinions about specific aspects of the school's operations (%)
 ++ Definitely agree. + Broadly agree, -- Broadly disagree, - Definitely disagree

	++	+	--	-
This school provides sufficient information about the study achievement and behaviour of our child.	50.2	42.7	6.1	1.0
I am happy about the discipline in this school.	29.3	55.8	12.3	2.7
Pupils in this school have problems with drugs and alcohol.	5.8	17.7	48.0	28.6
Violence frequently occurs in this school.	3.3	9.7	43.2	43.8
I am happy about the level of teaching in this school.	30.4	55.9	11.5	2.2
This school enables my child to make full use of his/her capacities.	21.2	49.5	24.3	5.0
I am happy with the preparation of my child for future studies or a career.	34.5	50.6	12.2	2.7
This school places appropriately high demands on the pupils.	31.3	48.4	17.2	3.1
Generally, my child is happy in this school.	38.9	51.5	7.6	2.1

Source: PISA-L (Matějů and Straková 2003)

In another research project Rabušicová et al. (2003) focused on the parents' roles in relation to the school and the ways in which they identify with them. It turned out that parents are most commonly perceived as customers. A total of 82% of parents and school representatives assign parents this role. According to the author parents in the role of customers intentionally choose a school, wish their child would have teachers with the best

qualifications and require that the school provide them with the necessary information. The second most frequent role was that of partners (38%), and 28% of respondents saw parents as a difficult group. Parents were viewed as citizens by the lowest proportion of respondents. The research revealed that as the child grows up, partnership and co-operation weaken. The strongest partnership and co-operation between the family and the school occur in kindergartens and in primary education.

All in all, parents are on the whole happy about the state of education and schools attended by their children. This could be evidence of the quality of the schools and their provision, but the reason may also be that parents are not too interested in the school and do not have great expectations.

2.2 What evidence exists on the priorities held by parents in general, as well as different groups of parents, about the main aims of schooling and on how well they assess that these priorities are actually achieved? Is anything known about parental satisfaction with the demands made on their children by the school system?

What do parents consider to be important? What should be the objectives of education according to them?

The issue of the content and objectives of education is normally subject to debates between pedagogues and education policy-makers. Parents in this country appear to have little impact on the education content and objectives. In the present situation, where curricular reform is under way, there is no systematic effort aimed at identifying what parents require and expect from education. Such data are not available and we must therefore draw on some partial information obtained during broader research concerned with these issues.

Two questions concerning the objectives of pre-school education are presented in Table 1 (see above). The answers reveal that most parents (75%) whose children attend a kindergarten believe that the most important task of pre-school education is to prepare the child to enter primary education. This task is attributed more importance by mothers with lower qualifications (90%) compared to mothers with university degrees (55%). This difference reflects varying views of the objectives and tasks of pre-school education. A large majority of parents (87%) and teachers (98%) agreed that “the most important task of a kindergarten is to facilitate a peaceful and responsive environment for the children”. This suggests that, more than cognitive development of the child, parents stress socialisation

aspects, the child's learning to co-exist in a group of peers and his/her development in the affective domain. Nevertheless, they expect the kindergarten to fulfil both objectives. Although the questionnaire was not designed to identify detailed preferences of parents as regards the aims of pre-school education, it appears that parents opt for the customer role in this area as well. A large proportion of parents (80%) requires that pre-school education curricula should vary so that they could choose that which suits them best.

While there is no data available on the preferences of parents whose children attend basic school, we may infer from the PISA-L questionnaire (2003) the degree to which parents are happy about the demands placed on their children by the school. Table 2 (see above) includes certain aspects of the school's operations which were commented upon by the parents of fifteen-year-old pupils. When reviewing the answers we may conclude that almost 86% of parents are definitely or fairly satisfied with the standard of teaching, i.e. with the quality of the educational provision. However, if we compare the data in Table 2 it turns out that, although there is general satisfaction with the relevant aspects of the school's operations, the full use of the pupil's capacities is viewed as the most problematic issue. Almost one third of the respondents believe that schools fail in making full use of their pupils' potential and that there is a lot of room for improvement.

In view of the short supply of data from empirical research into parent opinions, we are not able to provide more comprehensive answers to the questions stated in this part. We do hope, however, that the opinions and expectations of parents will be better chartered in the following years.

2.3 Is there any basis to the assertion that parents tend to be conservative as regards their children's education? Is anything known about the extent to which parents regard schools as a "public good" or instead as a "private consumer good"?

There has been no research on the basis of which these questions could be answered. However, we believe that parents generally see education from the perspective of the child, i.e. as an individual benefit. This tendency is apparent particularly as regards the issue of fairness. Many professionals concerned with education admit that early selection of children promotes inequalities and injustices in the system, but seek to place their own children in these selective programmes. The issue of fairness is dealt with in the following section.

2.4 How well do particular groups of parents feel they are served by the school system? How equitable do different groups of parents believe the system to be - in general and in relation to their own children?

Fairness in the education system as viewed by parents

The first part was concerned with the question of whether the population considers the education system to be just. We made a particular point about early selection of pupils on the basis of “putative” aptitudes, whereby some 10% of pupils aged 11 attend selective six- and eight-year *gymnázia*. As many international surveys pointed out – particularly PISA - this early differentiation has negative effects on the performance of the system as a whole. In fact, selection is applied in the Czech education system even earlier – after the 2nd year of basic school when pupils may be admitted to selective basic schools with additional teaching in a particular subject (foreign languages, mathematics etc.).

Table 1 (part 1.1) illustrates, using the results of a survey among parents as part of the PISA-L 2003 project, that the parents of fifteen-year-old pupils are less critical as regards unfairness of the education system as compared to the adult population as a whole. However, the perception of unfairness differs considerably, depending on the parents’ level of education. Parents with lower secondary education see in six- and eight-year *gymnázia* an unjust favouring of a group of children, while parents with university degrees tend to support this practice. It turns out that the children from more stimulating backgrounds score the best results in the competition for a limited number of places at *gymnázia*, and therefore the parents with higher qualifications are happy about their existence and, on the whole, do not view this practice as unjust. Better educated parents believe six- and eight-year *gymnázia* will facilitate a more favourable starting position for their children as regards their future development. These parents spoke out most in the public debate about the abolition of this type of school. This is one reason why only 24% of parents with university qualifications agreed that “all children regardless of their talent, aptitudes or social background should be educated together as long as possible”, while this view is held by 63% of parents without a full upper secondary qualification (“maturita”). Moreover, almost one third of them are convinced that “because of six- and eight-year *gymnázia* children who cannot study there lose out”. A large majority of parents without “maturita” (63%) also believe that “many talented children in this country do not get a chance to study”, while only less than one third of parents with university qualifications agree with this statement.

A great majority of parents, regardless of their socio-economic status, realize that six- and eight-year *gymnázia* provide better education (70%) and that those who leave them are more successful in admission proceedings to higher education institutions (80%).

The issue of six- and eight-year *gymnázia* was also subject to the PIRLS 2001 research. The parents of 4th year pupils in basic school face a choice of whether or not to apply for admission. When asked whether they will register their child for enrolment in a six- or eight-year *gymnázium* 57.2% of parents (where both parents were university degree holders) gave a positive answer, while only 11.5% of parents with lower secondary education said yes. As the table below illustrates, the interest on the part of parents in their child studying at a six- or eight-year *gymnázium* increases along with their level of education.

Parent categories by level of education	% of parents who will seek for their child admission to a six- and eight-year gymnasium
Both parents – lower secondary education	11,5
One parent has “maturita”	16,4
Both parents have “maturita”	19,7
One parent has a university degree	38,5
Both parents have a university degree	57,2

Source: PIRLS 2001

The reasons why parents sign in their child for admission to a six- or eight-year *gymnázium* are also important. Most parents (64.3%) who applied did so to increase the child’s chances of getting admitted to a higher education institution. One third of the parents believe this is the most important reason. The second most frequently stated reason is the wish of the child, closely followed by the parents’ conviction that this type of school will better develop their child’s talents. The other reasons are stated in the table.

What reasons make you enrol your child to a six- or eight-year <i>gymnázium</i>	% of parents	
	The most important reason	All relevant reasons
Dissatisfaction with the basic school the child attends	1.8	4.9
Safer environment at a <i>gymnázium</i>	0.7	5.2
Better teachers at a <i>gymnázium</i>	4.2	16.8
Better equipment	2.1	25.5
Better chances of admission to institutions providing higher education	33.4	64.3
Better opportunities for developing the child’s talents	21.4	40.3
At a <i>gymnázium</i> the child can be in the company of children with the same level of talents	5.6	25.3
Good experience of older siblings at a six- or eight-year <i>gymnázium</i>	0.9	14.4
Efforts to resolve the issue of transfer to a <i>gymnázium</i> as soon as possible	4.1	22
The child wishes to study at a six- or eight-year <i>gymnázium</i>	25.8	42.2

Source: PIRLS 2001

Finally, another issue will receive our attention. The Czech education system not only isolates talented pupils, but it is also known for a large number of children educated in remedial and special schools. In this context the issue of equality is discussed together with the issue of integration of pupils with special learning needs into mainstream schools. As part of the AISA research in the early 1990s parents were asked about integration. A total of 80% of parents and approximately the same proportion of teachers agreed that disabled children should be placed in mainstream programmes. This was an agreeable finding as before the November 1989 changeover the issue of integration was taboo and children with disabilities were systematically excluded from society and placed in special establishments. The high number of pupils in remedial and special schools compared to other OECD countries may be a residue of the past. However, as statistics show, there has been progress made in this area and also as regards public opinion.

While the AISA research was more generally focused on parents' views about schooling and integration was one of its aspects, the Department of Special Pedagogy of the Teacher Training Faculty of Palacký University carried out in 2003, in co-operation with the Research Centre for Integration of the Disabled, a more detailed study into this issue. According to 35.1% of families the issue of integration is improperly regulated by legislation. The statutory legislation is even more criticised by school representatives (45.4%) and a great majority of staff at special pedagogy centres (SPC). All groups of respondents agree on the need for increased funding for integration efforts (83.9% of parents, 81.8% of schools, 80.5% of SPCs). A great majority of parents of disabled children (68.3%) and schools (74.6%) confirm, based on experience, that integration is beneficial for the disabled person and so it is for his/her able-bodied classmates. Most parents who have integrated their child into mainstream education would do this again (62.3%) and 32.8% of parents would do so again only if the conditions related to integration would improve. The parents were also asked how they evaluate progress made in this area in the last five years. Almost one third (32.6%) of parents believe integration is easier now than five years ago, 21.9% do not see any major changes and many parents were not able to express their views (39.4%). Only 3.4% of parents believe the conditions for integration have deteriorated in the past five years.

3. PARTICIPATION IN DECISION-MAKING IN THE SCHOOLING PROCESS

At institutional level, responsibility for the operations of basic schools in the Czech Republic lies primarily with school directors. Questionnaires filled in as part of the international survey into mathematical and scientific literacy TIMSS revealed that, in three quarters of cases, school directors take the final decisions on recruitment of teachers, disciplinary rules, the school budget, the purchase of materials, placement of pupils in classrooms, assignment of subjects and classrooms to teachers, the level of teachers' pay, the development of relations with the local community and the subjects taught. However, there are certain operations which are less influenced by the school directors – e.g. subject teaching methodologies (65% of the responsibility rests with heads of subject committees), pupil assessment rules (the responsibility is equally shared by heads of subject committees and teachers), the choice of textbooks and the establishment of rules governing homework and its marking (almost exclusively the responsibility of heads of subject committees and teachers), and, finally, communication with pupils' families (three quarters of the responsibility is borne by teachers). School councils exert only negligible influence on these operations. As the questionnaires revealed, pupils may influence the content and teaching methods at one quarter of schools. Parents have less to say on the content and teaching methods, and the same holds true for teachers' trade unions (one fifth of schools). Boards of governors have some influence in this area only at some 10% of schools. Representatives of religious groups and local trade and industry, according to school directors, have hardly almost any influence on the content of education and teaching methods.

The pupils's parents can take part in school operations by means of a school council. This is a body composed of 6 to 15 members who, besides parents, represent teaching staff and the founding body (municipality). The members are elected or appointed for a two-year term of office. There is no precise list of schools in the CR that have a school council and this practice is an exception rather than a rule. As the new education bill stipulates, schools will be obliged to set up school councils (see 5.3). This is both an efficient way of promoting co-operation between parents, the founding body and the school, and an effective opportunity for checking on the school's activities. Parents and the founding body represented on the council will be able to express their views of the school, its teaching and teachers. In this way they will be able to influence these matters and address problems more efficiently as compared to the established practice of regular teacher-parent meetings.

School councils are governed by the law on state administration and self-government in education. This law stipulates that the school council approves an annual school report, a budget proposal and a school financial report, thus performing the function of public supervision. The council also have their say on the programmes the school develops, school development plans and the appointment and dismissal of a school director. In justified cases they may propose to the founding body that he/she should be dismissed. The school council may also ask the Czech School Inspectorate for inspection and a regional body for a financial audit.

Co-operation between the school and employers may occur in various areas – however, this is more the case with secondary schools. The most frequent form of this co-operation is sponsoring and individual support for pupils by companies which hire many recent graduates. Such sponsors are normally larger enterprises with over 100 employees and a somewhat older management. There are more state-owned sponsors than private ones. Companies may also be represented on school councils or other bodies, or can lend schools material resources. The involvement of companies in teaching and pupil assessment tends to occur at secondary schools, where they organize the teaching of specialized subjects and lectures. Co-operation between schools and employers may also take the form of excursions and consultations related to career choice. According to research conducted in 1998 approx. one third of companies do not co-operate with schools (these are mostly smaller private companies, those with a young management and those that generally hire very few school leavers).

The population generally believes that teachers and school directors should have even higher influence on schooling. Over 50% of the population would welcome increased influence of parents and specialists, some 40% would promote the influence of school inspection and employers, and one third of people would like to see more influence on the part of regional education authorities and teachers' trade unions. Only one fifth of the population believed municipal assemblies should have more say in school matters.

4. PUPIL ASPIRATIONS AND VALUES

4.1 What do young people think about their schooling – its relevance and quality? What is known about what motivates them to study, in particular the balance between intrinsic interest and seeking extrinsic reward? How do the views of young people match with the views of others, including their parents and teachers, about what is important in education?

How do young people assess the school they attend?

In the CR, the views of pupils about schooling, its quality and relevance are not systematically monitored by means of a representative sample. Some partial information about the quality of teaching and the standards of schooling in general or some of its aspects can therefore be obtained from questionnaires that are part of international comparative studies.

The opinions of pupils in the 4th year of basic school about the school they attend were ascertained as part of the PIRLS 2001 international survey into reading literacy. When asked whether they like their school, 68.8% of the pupils gave a positive answer. Almost one quarter of girls (24.1%) and over one third of boys (38%) do not like their school. Other surveys confirm the higher percentage of boys who dislike school. The international survey coordinated by WHO “The Health Behaviour in School-Age Children” focused on the attitudes to school of 5,187 pupils in 5th, 7th and 9th years of basic school. The results are similar to those obtained through PIRLS. When asked whether they feel good well at school and like it over one third of the boys and one quarter of girls gave a negative answer. This study also showed that positive attitudes to school are less frequent in higher years of compulsory schooling. Among 11-year-old pupils 24.2% do not feel happy at school, the same holds true for 33.7% of 13-year-olds and for as many as 41.4% of fifteen-year-olds (Provazníková et al. 2004). In the PISA 2000 survey almost 30% of pupils aged fifteen stated that school is a place they do not like to be. However, this proportion of pupils with such negative attitudes is average in terms of international comparison (Straková et al. 2002).

As part of the MoEYS’s survey entitled “Attitudes of Young People to Education” (AMD 1999) 1,042 secondary school students were to assess the quality of their school – excellent, average, below average. Almost one third (31%) of the respondents believe their school is excellent, 62.9% say it is average and only 0.3% assessed their school’s quality as

below average. Another question concerned the quality of the basic school the students had attended. Only 15.5% of the students thought their basic schooling was excellent.

The level of satisfaction with the choice of a secondary school is also high. In 1999, 85.7% of secondary school students were happy about their choice. Over 50% of the respondents would choose the same school and programme again. The degree of satisfaction differs depending on the school type. *Gymnázia* students tend to be happier with their choice (37.6% in six- and eight-year *gymnázia* and 32% in four-year *gymnázia*) than students in secondary technical schools (STS - 24.9% were very satisfied) and secondary vocational schools (SVS – 23%). More *gymnázia* students also believe that their school is excellent (56% compared to 17.8% of SVS students). *Gymnázia* students realize that their school facilitates their further educational development. The answers are not so much evidence of the quality or effectiveness of *gymnázia*, as of the prestige which comes from the fact that attendance is based on selection. The students are aware that this is the easiest means to achieve admission to a university. This is also reflected in their evaluation of the educational provision. While most STS and SVS students (77.8% and 84.9% respectively) say their school provides them with a good opportunity for finding employment, this opinion is only held by a little more than one half of *gymnázia* students. They realize that gymnasium facilitates, above all, preparation for further studies. A great majority of *gymnázia* students (96.9%) agree that the school provides them with relevant knowledge. This view is held by 77.1% of SVS students.

Aspirations of Czech pupils and students

The aspirations of pupils at the end of compulsory schooling may be identified on the basis of the results of an international survey concerned with education for citizenship conducted under the aegis of IEA. In 1999 when the survey was undertaken, 40% of fourteen-year-old pupils aspired to achieve a tertiary level of education, some 43% planned to complete their education by “maturita” and only a negligible section of pupils admit they might complete their education without “maturita”.

The PISA 2000 survey into the aspirations of pupils aged 15 proved a strong link between parents’ education and the socio-economic status of the family and pupils’ aspirations. This link is strongest as regards “maturita” aspiration. Over 70% of pupils who do not aspire to pass “maturita” have a mother without “maturita”, while 50% fall within the quarter of pupils with the lowest socio-economic status (Straková et al. 2002). There are also gender differences. Girls have higher aspirations to achieve “maturita” than boys. According to PISA, 14% of boys and 7% of girls do not plan on passing “maturita”. The link between

family background and children's aspirations is also apparent in the differences in aspiration based on type of school. Selective schools are attended by pupils from families with higher socio-economic and cultural capital and the pupils therefore have higher study aspirations. 97% of pupils at six- and eight-year *gymnázia* aspire to achieve tertiary education, the same is true of 83% of pupils at selective basic schools with a special focus, but of less than 50% of regular basic school pupils (Straková 2002). Matějů and Straková (2003, p. 78) have identified, that, interestingly, the aspirations of six- and eight-year *gymnázia* students are far less dependent on the socio-economic and cultural status of the family, and even on the results of the reading literacy test, as compared to basic school pupils. It turned out that average pupils (in terms of reading literacy) from families with a lower social status who study at six- and eight-year *gymnázia* have far higher aspirations to study further than basic school pupils of the same age. This confirms "peer effects" – often mentioned in specialist literature – on study aspirations. As the authors point out, the core of the problem is that pupils in the two lowest quintiles in terms of socio-economic and cultural status only account for 7% of pupils at six- and eight-year *gymnázia*, while children falling within the two highest quintiles account for 79% of these pupils.

The PISA survey also provided valuable information about the aspirations of secondary school students. Based on the PISA 2000 survey the aspirations of Czech students in 1st and 3rd years of upper secondary school concerning their future education were described by Straková et. al (2002, p. 65) as follows: "Most third-year students want to continue studying after completion of secondary schooling, 11% wish to study at a higher professional school, 51% aspire to obtain a university degree. A mere 11% of students would be satisfied about secondary vocational education without "maturita", 15% want to complete secondary schooling with "maturita"". The aspirations of secondary school students are largely dependent on the school type. An overwhelming majority of *gymnázia* students plan university education, but the same only applies to 50% of secondary technical programmes with "maturita". Similar findings were provided by a study undertaken by the Centre for "Maturita" Examination Reform (CERMAT 2002). Two thirds of secondary students were identified as planning to continue studying at a university. University is planned by almost all *gymnázia* students (97%), 59% of STS students and SVS students show the lowest interest (34%). There are no gender differences among *gymnázia* students, but more boys at other types of school apply to a university. Boys tend to choose technology disciplines, while girls tend to opt for humanities. Only 8.5% of girls applying for university studies want to study a technological programme.

What do young people consider as important?

One of the objectives of education is preparation for the labour market. A survey entitled “Education for Citizenship and Democracy” conducted by IEA in 1999 focused, among other things, on fourteen-year-old pupils’ attitudes to work and ideas about their future career. Almost all pupils believe education is an important precondition for success in the labour market. In view of the above, it is interesting to see their aspirations not only in relation to further education, but also to a future job. Fourteen-year-olds in six- and eight-year *gymnázia* express a strong preference for intellectual work which is related to their education-related aspirations. Basic school pupils tend to think of physically demanding – i.e. manual occupations. Basic school pupils are far more sceptical than *gymnázia* students as regards the prospects of self-fulfilment.

The pupils were given a list of qualities and competencies that could be important for their future career. Next, the pupils were asked to mark, using the same list, whether or not the school develops these qualities and competencies. While the answers to the first question provide a partial insight into what young people consider to be important in view of their career, the second question points to the relevance of schooling in this respect.

	% of positive answers	
	Qualities and competencies viewed by pupils as necessary for their career	Qualities pupils believe the school develops
Capacity to make decisions	91.4	77.4
Adaptability	88.9	77.1
Interest in the profession (motivation)	88.3	67.9
Self-confidence	87.4	66.9
Capacity to discern quality	86.7	58.2
Awareness of health and safety at work	86.3	74.0
Capacity for teamwork	85.8	84.0
General knowledge	84.5	89.1
Reading and understanding work instructions	82.5	76.8
Own suggestions	82.3	72.0
Creativity	81.9	78.2
Customer-focused approach	81.7	42.3
Willingness to learn	81.1	81.7
Leadership	73.2	49.0
Foreign language competencies	68.4	80.0
Writing skills	67.7	84.6
Intelligent management of resources	67.3	47.6

Oral skills	67.3	78.8
Numeracy in performing work tasks	66.6	84.1
Personal appearance	65.2	40.2
IT competencies	64.4	59.3

The choice of qualities, skills and competencies was based on another survey focused on employers' needs (Employers – Their Views and Needs, 1998). This makes it possible to compare the views of pupils with those of employers. Employers prioritise the capacity to discern quality, which was also mentioned by many students (2nd place on the list). There was no such agreement as regards the other qualities and competencies. Following quality, employers assign great significance to intelligent management of resources, a client-focused approach and willingness to learn. It is encouraging that the qualities and competencies mentioned by over 80% of students as being developed by the school are those for which employers believe schools should be exclusively responsible.

Motivation

Motivation on the part of pupils was the subject of several studies carried out by I.Pavelková (see publications of 1990, 1997, 2000, 2002). The research included a longitudinal survey conducted at the turn of the 1990s and a follow-up survey in 2000/2001. Pupils' motivation to learn and their view of the future were ascertained using quantitative as well as qualitative research methods. The follow-up survey in 2001 involved 428 pupils in the 8th and 9th years of basic school and the corresponding years of six- and eight-year *gymnázia*. Instead of the traditional categories of internal and external motivation, the author classified motivation according to the need for cognition. Therefore she identifies cognitive motivation (e.g. joy associated with learning about new things, interest in a subject, interesting features in classes), social motivation (in this respect the author discerns motivation in the sense of affiliation to parents or teachers, and in the sense of prestige), and achievement motivation (e.g. being happy about good results or feeling good about having learnt something). The author also discerns instrumental motivation where learning constitutes an instrument to achieve some distant goal and may be combined with the three other types of motivation. One example of instrumental motivation is the goal of getting admitted to a school or of obtaining a better job.

The results of the survey illustrate that instrumental motivation occurs most frequently among pupils and, partly, also cognitive motivation (the need to know a lot), or, possibly, social motivation. Fear as motivation (the need to avoid failure) is not too common and the

pupils mention that this occurs only occasionally. However, there are large differences among pupils in this respect. Reward and punishment also appear to constitute a very weak form of motivation in pupils.

In terms of comparison between teachers and pupils, teachers hold less differentiated views about pupils' motivation. These differences between teachers and pupils in the perception of motivation have not changed much over the last fifteen years. Achievement motivation is a stronger motivating force for pupils than their teachers expect it to be. Fear of failure and social motivation (particularly prestige) is a less frequent form of motivation for pupils than their teachers believe it to be. Agreement in terms of the two surveys can also be noted as concerns cognitive motivation. Pupils believe their motivation is more based on the need for meaningful receptive cognition, while teachers assume pupils are more motivated by the need to identify and solve problems. Moreover, teachers have a different perception of motivation related to future goals (instrumental), which the pupils rate – as distinct from teachers – as having a leading position in their overall motivation.

Interesting data were also obtained when basic school pupils were compared with students at eight-year *gymnázia* in terms of motivation. Pupils in final years of basic school are, understandably, far more often motivated by elements falling within instrumental motivation related to the choice of a further educational route. However, there is also higher motivation in these pupils, as compared to *gymnázia* students of the same age, as regards some elements of achievement, cognitive and self-development motivation. Compared to basic school pupils, students at eight-year *gymnázia* are more frequently motivated by social/prestige aspects.

The only area where certain changes can be traced compared to the turn of the 1990s is the development of motivation at the end of basic schooling. Overall, cognitive and achievement motivation increased in pupils, as social motivation and motivation by a sense of duty decreased. These findings suggest that the pupils' perception of motives to learn was, at the turn of the 1990s, dynamic and positively focused on strengthening internal motivation. In terms of development, the research of 2001 provides somewhat different conclusions. This research also pointed to a certain weakening of social motivation (this agrees with the previous findings). However, some elements of cognitive, achievement and self-development motivation have also weakened. Although these data need to be further analysed in detail, the findings raise a number of questions concerning the changes in education over the last decade (the introduction of 9th years of basic school and their content, the introduction of six- and eight-year *gymnázia*, etc.).

4.2 What are the rates of absenteeism from compulsory school and how does this vary from the beginning of the primary cycle to the end of the lower secondary cycle? What are the characteristics of those who are most persistently absent? Is there evidence about boredom among the young?

Rates of absenteeism and characteristics of the absentees

Although absence from school is carefully recorded and therefore the data about unjustified absence are easily available, the data is not collected at a national level. Therefore we cannot present the number of hours of unjustified absence from school in various years of schooling. International surveys only provide statements of school directors on how serious the problem is in various schools. As part of the PIRLS 2001 study school directors answer the question of the extent to which pupils' unjustified absence from school poses a problem for the school. The scale consisted of: not a problem – minor problem – moderate problem – serious problem. Interestingly, none of the Czech directors ranked absence as a serious problem (the international average in this category is 7%). According to 29.2% of directors, unjustified absence is not a problem in their school, for 61.3% it is a minor problem, and for 8.8% it is a moderate problem. These proportions are not much different from the international average. The PISA 2000 survey also revealed that Czech school directors' views in this respect do not differ from those of their counterparts in other countries (Straková 2002, p.80).

The degree of boredom with school

The only relevant sources of possible indications of boredom among pupils in relation to the school was a question in the PISA 2000 survey. Fifteen-year-old pupils expressed to what extent they agree with the statement "school is a place where I am often bored". Straková (2002) comments on the results of this survey as follows: "In view of the education system it is a noteworthy fact that negative feelings also occur to a large degree in students at six- and eight-year *gymnázia* – one half of them are bored and one quarter do not want to go to school. In this respect a question arises as to the extent to which the *gymnázia* fulfil their function as selective schools which are supposed to meet the needs of talented and inquisitive children better than basic schools".

4.3 What is the room for students and their parents to choose different programmes of study, and how far are these primarily in the hands of schools and the education authorities? How far do young people participate in the decision-making of schools? Is anything known about such influence or participation by young people in any of different types of schools referred to in 5.1?

The possible choice of study programmes on the part of parents and students is described in a broader context in part 5.2. In this part we are going to concentrate on opportunities for the participation of young people in the decision-making of schools.

Participation of pupils and students in school decision-making

Active participation of students in the school’s operations is not only a manifestation of democratic school management, but also a way of promoting education for citizenship and active participation in society. As part of a poly-thematic study entitled Youth in the CR 2002, secondary school students were asked whether, in their opinion, they had an opportunity to speak up on issues related to decisions within the family, classroom, school and municipality. The same question had occurred in a previous survey of 1997, thus facilitating a comparison of the views of students aged 15-19 five years ago and at present. The results presented in the table below show that students feel they can speak up on classroom-related matters, but most of them (61%) think they do not have a say in decisions at school level. Moreover, the question concerns the opportunity to express views on issues related to school management and not the opportunity for directly influencing the decision-making process.

	1997				2002			
	Yes %	Partly %	No %	Not interested %	Yes %	Partly %	No %	Not interested %
Family	44	46	7	3	51	41	5	2
Classroom	20	56	14	10	15	65	11	7
School	3	25	56	15	3	20	61	15
Municipality, community	4	13	51	31	3	14	53	31

The results of the study Education for Citizenship and Democracy 1999 also revealed that there is much room for improvement in terms of student involvement in decision-making at school. The research showed that the confidence of Czech students and interest in active participation in addressing school-related problems is lower compared to other countries. A total of 67.4% of secondary school students were positive as to having an opinion on school

issues, and 60.2% were involved and interested. Students at six- and eight-year *gymnázia* are more active in this respect than basic school pupils. Although there is no data as to the number of schools with student councils or parliaments, the proportion of active students is far lower than the average of the 28 participating countries. In the CR only 13.1% of students were sometimes involved in student council or parliament activities, while the international average was 27.6%. The proportion is higher in six- and eight-year *gymnázia* (20.3%).

5. DIVERSITY IN THE STRUCTURE OF THE SCHOOL SYSTEM AND FACTORS INFLUENCING THE CURRICULUM

5.1 What formal distinctions, if any, are there between types of school distinguished in terms of such factors as ability/selectivity of the student intake, public/private, religious affiliation, or specialisation based on linguistic or curriculum grounds? What is the scale of participation in private schooling and what does “private” mean? Is “home-schooling” legal and under what conditions? Where such alternatives exist, what proportions of the child and youth cohorts are involved in each?

Distinctions between types of school providing compulsory education

Nine-year compulsory basic education (i.e. primary and lower secondary), normally entered by children at the age of six (with the exception of those who have been proved not to be mature enough), is provided by two types of school: basic schools and *gymnázia* (grammar schools). While the 1st stage of basic education (i.e. primary) covers the first five years of basic school and is designed for all children within the relevant age groups (with the exception of a small proportion of disabled children), the 2nd stage of basic education (lower secondary) attended by children aged 11-15 takes place in segregated streams. The first is the 6th-9th year of basic school, the second is the first four years of eight-year *gymnázia* and the third is the first two years of six-year *gymnázia*. (*Gymnázia* also provide four-year programmes at the level of upper secondary education). At basic schools the transition of 11-year-old pupils from the 1st to the 2nd stage is automatic. Admission to six- and eight-year *gymnázia* programmes is based on selection consisting of various types of written and oral examinations designed by *gymnázia* teachers (normally in the mother tongue and mathematics), and, sometimes, intelligence tests. The decision concerning admission on the basis of examination results as the main criterion is taken by the *gymnázium* director who is

also a civil servant. The intake numbers are determined by the school administration (approximately 10% of the relevant age group) and range from 6 to 14% depending on the region. The national average in 2002/03 was 8.5%. The number of applicants for six- and eight-year *gymnázia* programmes is double the intake number.

Six- and eight-year gymnázia, which had operated in the CR until 1948, were re-established by a 1990 amendment to the Education Act. The aim was to provide more demanding education facilitating further academic studies to students as young as 11 who show a higher level of cognitive capacities. As reports by the Czech School Inspectorate have repeatedly stated, the segregation of more talented pupils from the rest, who continue attending basic schools, has resulted in a gradual decrease in the standards of educational processes and achievements of this part of the school population. The recommendation of OECD examiners of 1996 as to forming a comprehensive lower secondary school was not adopted by the Ministry of Education. The government-promoted White Paper of 2001 reiterated that the two streams of education should be gradually merged and that internal differentiation should take place within basic school. The inclusion this recommendation into the new education bill in the form of gradual abolition of lower years of six- and eight-year *gymnázia* prompted public debate which was dominated by the requirement on the part of parents with higher levels of education and socio-economic status that a more demanding education be retained for their children. The pressure exerted by the parents, *gymnázia* directors and teachers and academics on the media, not to mention their political influence, prevented the proposed reform and was one of the reasons the bill was rejected as a whole in 2001. The new education bill, currently under discussion, proposes an interim compromise in that there will be only one national curricular document for the two parallel types of lower secondary education – a framework curriculum for basic education. It will be the foundation for the development of school educational programmes at both basic schools and six- and eight-year *gymnázia*. Moreover, the number of teaching periods at basic school should gradually increase so as to be equal to *gymnázia* in quantitative terms. The levels of pay of teachers at both types of school have been made identical. However, the “*numerus clausus*” is preserved ($\pm 10\%$ of 11-year-olds) as well as the selective admission proceedings to six- and eight-year *gymnázia*, which disfavours children with lower cultural capital – as the results of the PISA reading literacy tests in the Czech Republic have revealed.

The Czech legislation concerned with schooling provides for the establishment of *schools and classes with a specific focus* which provide *extended teaching in some subjects*: foreign languages, physical education and sports, mathematics and natural sciences, music,

visual arts and information technologies. The specialised curriculum is employed from the 3rd year (languages) or 6th year (other subjects). The proportion of pupils attending these schools in the overall number of basic school pupils is 9.7% (4.4% in schools and classes with extended language teaching, 2.5% in physical education and sports and 1.2% in mathematics and natural sciences). Parents show great interest in extended teaching in selected subjects – particularly languages and sports (demand is twice as high as the number of places available) hoping for their children to achieve better results as compared to other basic schools. Admission to this type of basic school is also up to school directors who decide on the basis of entry examinations designed by the school and taken by children at the age of 8 (or 11). Again, pupils from families with higher cultural capital are in a more favourable situation.

After eliminating the state monopoly in education in 1990, independent legal entities (individuals, organisations and churches) were given the opportunity of establishing schools. The highest number of such schools provide upper secondary education (approx. 22% of all schools accounting for 13% of pupils). A large majority of basic schools are administered by municipalities (a number of special schools are administered directly by the Ministry). Only 1.3 % of schools (0.7% pupils) are administered by private entities and churches (mostly Roman Catholic). Private schools are entitled to collect tuition fees, but receive substantial state subsidies pursuant to a special law.

Home schooling is not yet embedded in legislation. It is being tested on a very small number of pupils (approx. 350) at the level of primary education. The new education bill now under discussion considers home schooling to be a different way of implementing compulsory schooling, describing it as *individual education* that is implemented without regular participation in school education. It may be permitted, based on parents' request, by the director of the school where the pupil has been admitted for compulsory schooling. The pupil's parents or legal guardians must show serious reasons for individual education, must ensure appropriate material conditions and the educator must have at least "full" secondary education (with "maturita"). Individually educated pupils take an examination in subjects prescribed by the relevant curriculum after each term (five months). The requirements of the association of parents advocating home education are strongly backed up by the media.

The requirements of an individual pupil or his/her parents as regards the forms of and progression through education are fostered by the provisions of the education act. The school director may grant permission to a pupil with special learning needs or extraordinary talents to proceed according to an *individual education plan*. The decision must be based on a recommendation of an educational counselling facility.

Members of national minorities have the right to education in the relevant national language pursuant to a special law. The details related to its implementation in special classes or schools are laid down in the education act. The right to set up such classes or schools can only be exercised with respect to larger minorities with the appropriate number of pupils to form a class or school in a particular locality. This is only the case with the Polish minority (27 basic schools and 4 secondary schools in the border area in Northern Moravia). Special attention on the part of the state is devoted to members of the Roma community, particularly as regards preparatory classes for Roma children before they enter basic school (111 preparatory classes for 1,422 pupils in 2002/03). In view of the fact that other minorities are dispersed throughout the country and the number of pupils is small, their right to education is exercised in the form of complementary programmes subsidised by the state. Members of the German minority enjoy support in the form of extended German teaching at Czech basic schools and the establishment of bilingual basic schools. .

5.2 What are the legal/constitutional possibilities for the exercise of choice by parents and students, as regards attendance at, or foundation of, the different types of school described in 5.1, or enrolment at different public schools of the same type?

Free choice of school

Free choice of school is fostered, above all, by the provisions of the new education bill, which stipulate, among other principles, the following relevant points:

- a) “Equal access to education for each citizen of the Czech Republic subject to no discrimination on the grounds of race, colour, gender, language, religious belief, nationality, ethnic or social background, property, health condition or other circumstance,
- b) Respect for the educational needs of an individual,
- c) Mutual respect, tolerance of views, solidarity and dignity of all participants in education”.

These principles have been embedded in the Czech legislation and observed since the adoption of amendments to laws on education in 1990 and the Charter of Fundamental Human Rights and Freedoms in 1992. The new education bill sets them out even more consistently.

The constitutional, statutory and other legal regulations provide for the right of parents of under-aged children to choose between the two types of school (2nd stage of basic school

and lower years of six- and eight-year *gymnázia*). This also applies to the choice of basic school with extended teaching in certain subjects. The law and other implementation documents stipulate the procedures for registering applications and admission proceedings at the relevant school. Pupils are admitted to these types of school in line with the decision of the school director, which has, so far, been taken on the basis of the results of the entry examination. The new education bill stipulates: "As part of admission proceedings, the school director evaluates the pupil based on:

- a) His/her knowledge expressed by assessment results recorded on a certificate concerning previous education, and also described in a final evaluation of the pupils at the end of basic school, if such an evaluation has been issued,
- b) The results of the entry examination or test of aptitudes (if applicable),
- c) Other evidence of capacities and knowledge appropriate for the relevant school type, even if the school is outside the catchment area where the pupil belongs by place of residence."

5.3 In what way, if at all, are groups representing civil society and parents involved in defining the school curriculum? Is their influence on curriculum guidelines and the contents of schooling significant?

The influence of groups representing civil society and parents on the school curriculum

The curriculum for basic education was introduced by the Ministry of Education in the form of a basic education standard and three alternative educational programmes derived from the standard. They have been developed by independent teams of experts in pedagogy and the relevant subjects, and by experienced teachers. Their development was accompanied by a fairly professional debate and the contribution of groups representing civil society and parents was small. The general public did not assign much importance to the development, approval and implementation of the curricula, and believed it was an internal school matter. Even teachers as a whole – with the exception of active teachers associations focusing on reform – were not much involved.

Following public debate in the late 1990s and on the basis of the White Paper of 2001 a decision was taken, which is reflected in the new education bill, that the ministry should, from now on, only issue a general curricular document for various levels and fields of education. The objectives would take the form of competencies the pupil should acquire,

subject-areas defined by content (not strictly defined subjects) and generally defined subject-matter. Schools should be obliged to develop a specific school curriculum adjusted to the relevant conditions and needs. The proposed school curriculum will be commented upon (decided upon) by the school council, which every school will be obliged to set up. One third of the council members will be representatives of the founding body (municipal self-governing authority), one third will be parents and senior pupils and one third will be teachers. It is expected that this will facilitate, at school level, a larger public influence on the content and methods of schooling. As regards the development of national framework curricula, public debate initiated by the Ministry is currently under way. Public opinion on the new curricular policy is fairly positive, although there are concerns as to whether all schools are capable of developing their own curricula. However, the debate tends to be carried out by professionals and teachers, rather than by the general public. Surveys conducted this year by the Institute for Information on Education on a representative group of school directors have revealed that the new education bill and the curricular policy it proposed are supported by some two thirds of the respondents.

5.4 Are values explicitly treated in curriculum guidelines and in what way? Is there explicit reference to citizenship/citizenship education? To different philosophical or religious beliefs?

Values in laws and curricular documents

The new education bill lays down general objectives of education as follows:

- a) Personal development to provide an individual with cognitive and social competencies and moral and spiritual values for personal life and life in a civil society, for performance of an occupation or work, acquisition of information and learning throughout one's life.
- b) Attainment of general education or general and vocational education,
- c) Understanding and application of the principles of democracy and the rule of law, fundamental human rights and freedoms coupled with responsibility for and sense of social cohesion,
- d) Understanding and applying the principle of gender equality in society,
- e) Nurturing the awareness of national and state identity and respect for the ethnic, national, cultural, language and religious identity of each individual,

- f) Acquaintance with global cultural values and European traditions, understanding and learning the principles of European integration as a foundation for co-existence on a national and international scale,
- g) Acquisition and application of knowledge of the environment, its protection, safety and protection of health in line with sustainable development.

The proposal for basic education curriculum includes the following objectives:

- To prepare pupils to act as free and responsible individuals, exercising their rights and fulfilling their obligations,
- Guidance for pupils to show tolerance and respect for other people, their cultural and spiritual values, to teach them to co-exist with other people.

The key competencies the pupils are required to have acquired at the end of compulsory schooling include a category of civic competencies. One of the subject areas proposed is entitled “People and Society” and covers history and education for citizenship. Citizenship education is defined by means of the characteristics of the pupil’s knowledge at the end of schooling, and by means of the subject-matter, which is divided into the following units: people in society, people as individuals, the state and the economy, the state and the law, international relations and the global world. The value aspects are incorporated in all subject-areas and subjects.

The framework curriculum for basic education contains, apart from the relevant subject-areas and subjects derived thereof, so-called cross-curricular areas that may be taught in addition to the traditionally conceived subjects. The decision is up to the school director. The prescribed number of optional teaching periods provides room for this. The areas include: personal and social education, education for democratic citizenship, education promoting European and global contexts, multi-cultural education, environmental education, media education. Special emphasis is placed on attitudes, moral development and the values on which the teaching should focus.

As regards religious beliefs and churches the curriculum is neutral. Religious education is provided for by the law under the relevant conditions. The curriculum tends to promote no general philosophical positions or worldviews.

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