

ADULT EDUCATION IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC.

Adult education in the Czech Republic – introduction.

In initial stages, adult education was a matter of individual initiative. At the beginning of the last century trade organisations in certain professions (e.g. medical) or fields (e.g. agriculture) became the main providers of such education. To a certain extent, schools have also provided it as well.

The period following 1948 saw a boom in adult education, especially its school-based form, due to two phenomena of post-war development. First, the re-structuring of the economy required a different structure of the workforce; and second, many people were prevented from continuing their career for political reasons and had to be replaced by others. Selected "workers" were allowed to take up regular full-time studies, and even more importantly, there were new possibilities for employed people to study at secondary schools or universities. There were two options for on-the-job study: evening classes or distant study (attendance at the latter being limited just to monthly consultations). These courses used the same curricula as regular full-time study. Graduates received the same certification as graduates from full-time courses. Participation in such programmes was conditional on the consent of employers, but employers were obliged to provide their employees with study leave as specified by the law. Learner numbers on these courses were remarkably high. They reached their peak at the beginning of the 1960s, when adults made up 22% of all secondary school students and 37% of all university students. In the 1980s, for instance, learners in secondary on-the-job study programmes represented 13-15% of all secondary students, and 20-24% of the total number of students at the university level. Adult education represented a "second chance" for those who had earlier decided not to finish their studies for various personal reasons or those who had been prevented from studying for political reasons which later disappeared. In the past, when there was a wide range of on-the-job study, there were specialised upper secondary schools for "workers". Nowadays, in general, education takes place in regular schools offering full-time study.

The whole area of further education, both in the professional and personal development sphere, has been deeply affected by the social and political changes following 1989. The transformation of the economy brought a decrease in the GNP, changes in the structure of industries and in the requirements for qualifications, a breaking up of enterprises into small units, and unclear perspectives for future development. This initially had a negative impact on education within organisations and later also on school education, because this was dependent on the interest of the organisations, since enterprises gave their employees study leave. Changes in state administration and a shift toward self-administration did not provide a good context for educational activities organised by local government bodies. There was a rapid decrease in the level of educational activities for adults. The number of private educational initiatives, on the other hand, increased slightly. The development of commercial adult education is controlled only by the market principles of supply and demand. The supply is very flexible, but suffers from a general lack of co-ordination and an insufficient flow of information. The quality of the education is yet another concern. At first, the demand was aroused by the need to compensate for the insufficient access to education under the previous political system. Nowadays, it is stimulated by the changing labour market, but at the same time it is impaired by a lack of knowledge about present and future educational needs.

Educational activities associated with employment policy, especially retraining, are a new phenomenon. The national employment plan approved in May 1999 is a new challenge for their development. Schools can provide adult education leading to qualifications identical with those provided by initial education. They also can provide retraining courses and recreational education on a commercial basis.

As for the forms of teaching and learning, distance education based on multi-media, organised both by schools and non-school institutions, has been developing alongside more traditional forms. The main aims of adult education are outlined in The National Programme for the Development of Education in the Czech Republic, which the Government debated at the beginning of 2001. Three key recommendations are as follows:

- to create a legal framework for the development of adult education,
- to develop and introduce a system of financial and non-financial incentives,
- to establish mechanisms for the systematic development of adult education.

Its implementation is the Long-term Concept of Education and Education System Development of the Czech Republic that the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports was obliged to prepare on the basis of an amendment to the Law on State Administration and Self-government in Education from 2000. It was approved in March 2002. It lays down the measures on the State level and determines the space for solutions on the regional level. The task of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports is

- to prepare a Law on Further Education;
- to prepare a design of complete system of the financial incentives motivating demand;
- to prepare a Development Support Programme for Further Education at Schools;
- to support the development of module structure of educational programmes;
- to prepare and implement an accreditation system of further education;
- to prepare and implement a system of information, quality monitoring and certification.

All the tasks are under preparation. Efforts to put into practice the ideas of the European Commission Memorandum on Lifelong Learning from 2000 are another positive trend. A discussion on the Memorandum was organised by the National Observatory for Vocational Education and Labour Market of the National Training Fund and sponsored by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports. The results of the discussion were presented at a national seminar in the middle of 2001. The 2001 National Action Employment Scheme put some tasks into concrete terms: it suggested increasing the scope of retraining activities and, above all, "defining powers and responsibilities in the area of further education, and stipulating basic rules, including those for funding". However, these measures have been implemented rather slowly.

Legislative framework for adult education in the Czech Republic.

There has never been legal provision in the Czech Republic for adult education as a whole. Educational policy for this sphere that would shape public interest was only formulated in the

2001 National Programme for the Development of Education in the Czech Republic. The proposals of the Act on Lifelong Education worked out between 1991 and 1994 have not been debated in Parliament because issues connected with funding had not been successfully resolved, particularly those relating to the tax system and the responsibilities of employers. The work on the new bill started again in 2002.

The current legislation consists of older regulations of lesser legal value and of various new laws and decrees. Four types of regulations can be distinguished:

- The School Act and the Higher Education Act, which specify the forms that adult education may take at various educational levels (including the attainment of basic education).
- Regulations related to work performance: the Labour Code, the Employment Law, government decrees on the provision of requalification opportunities. In general, it can be said that various amendments have made the responsibilities of employers in terms of vocational training for their employees looser. Their obligation to take responsibility for the development of their employees' qualifications, for example, has been removed from the Labour Code.
- The Law on Technical Standards and the Law on State Supervision: these form the basis for rules on vocational skills and qualification requirements, regular in-service training and re-examination; they include laws regulating qualification requirements for non-manual jobs (the law on courts and judges, the law on patent representatives, on tax advisers, etc.).
- The Commercial Code, which regulates the provision of education on a profit basis without specifying any educational, organisational or personnel requirements or conditions. When educational institutions want to offer retraining programmes, these must be accredited by from the Ministry of Education.

The Labour Code states that employees are required to maintain, extend and renew their qualifications. Employers are entitled to require their employees to participate in training to upgrade their qualifications. For employees without qualifications, employers provide training and issue certificates upon completion. If employees are transferred to another position or are required to switch to a different type of work, they are entitled to further training.

Retraining is one of the tools of active employment policy and is controlled by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs through Labour Offices. Most of participants are employment seekers registered in the Labour Office. Less participants in retraining are persons employed, that their employer intends to transfer to other work or dismiss from employment or persons that take part in retraining on their own will. Labour Offices organise courses on the basis of the current state of unemployment in their areas. These courses may be provided only by educational institutions with study programmes accredited by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs. Accreditation is granted for a period of three years (the Employment Act and a related decree on accreditation of retraining courses). By the year 2000, about 1 500 retraining courses within 1 800 institutions had been accredited.

Adult education at universities offers study towards specific educational qualifications, organised in the form of combined study. Distance learning, the University of the Third Age and other forms of lifelong learning also fall within the area of competence of authorised higher education institutions.

The education of employees of enterprises and organisations is managed by the enterprises themselves. They organise it either through their own departments of education or through external educational institutions, mostly commercial ones.

Adult education institutions in the Czech Republic.

Adult education institutions in the Czech Republic can be divided into two types, namely school institutions and non-school institutions.

School institutions.

School institutions can offer adult education that can take the place of full-time education and leads to a state educational qualification. It is organised at the upper secondary level in the form of work release studies and at higher levels either in the form of distance studies at post-secondary professional schools or combined study at the higher education institutions. (The combined study is a combination of full-time and part-time study). This applies to the majority of subjects and vocational training branches that exist in full-time form. The extent of such programmes depends on the applicants' interests and on the conditions of each school.

For those who have reached the end of their compulsory school attendance but have not completed basic education, both primary and secondary schools can organise courses aimed at completing this. Usually the same schools organise courses of supplementing education provided for people who passed remedial special school or auxiliary special school.

For persons with secondary education who want to achieve complete secondary education (i.e. to pass the maturity exam), upper secondary schools organise follow-up study. Achieving complete secondary education is a necessary precondition for access to university education and for some jobs. The number of learners in follow-up studies rose significantly, reaching three quarters of all learners in work release studies. Nevertheless, after 1998 their numbers went down by almost 40% as a consequence of decreased funding possibilities.

Secondary schools also organise short courses for adults. There is no statistical register on vocational training courses organised at technical and vocational secondary schools. These courses are provided on a commercial basis. If the courses are to be recognised as retraining for unemployed people registered at Labour Offices, the schools must be accredited by the Ministry of Education. About one third of secondary schools offer retraining courses. As far as enterprise education is concerned, schools are one of the smallest providers: secondary schools 1.4%, higher education institutions 3.7% (survey by the Czech Statistical Office in 1999).

Higher education institutions can provide lifelong education courses in addition to their regular study programmes. Usually they do not aim at a diploma. The number of participants on courses organised by universities has been rising. Statistical records are not kept. Lifelong education courses can be work-related or personal development oriented (e.g. the University of the Third Age). Explicit conditions of lifelong education are specified in the internal regulations of each institution. In keeping with the Higher Education Act, participants in lifelong education are not seen as students as such. Graduates of lifelong education courses receive certificates. A higher education institution can recognise up to 60% of credits of

successful graduates of lifelong education courses in accredited study programmes needed for continuing in the regular courses.

Non-school institutions providing adult education are:

- training centres within companies, organisations and state administration bodies;
- specialised profit and non-profit organisations.

There is no obligation to be registered or report, and consequently it is not possible to obtain complete information or statistics on this type of institutions.

Company training.

Extensive restructuring of the business sphere after 1989, particularly reductions in company size, soon led to the closing of the former company education organisation. A new organisation is taking shape only very slowly because of the vague definition of educational needs - a problem rooted in the lack of long-term perspectives in the majority of companies, and a possibility to purchase training from specialised institutions.

Sociological survey focused on problems of company training was carried out in 2002 by the Institute for Information on Education. The sample represented 428 companies with more than 10 employees, covering all spheres except education, health and state administration. Regional sample composition corresponded to the regional distribution of the companies. More than 70% of companies train their employees and at the same time more than 40% of them contribute to their education even if this is out of scope of their request. Courses are most often dedicated to the economy and accountancy, languages, computers and their use, technology, marketing, and driving. As far as organisation concerns, the courses are most often provided through specialised training institutions.

Adult training organised by specialised training agencies.

After 1990, private training institutions were founded rapidly. These institutions have the possibility to apply for the accreditation for offered training programmes. Research of the Ministry of Education has shown that there were about 1500 of such institutions in 1995, and they provided the largest amount of adult education. At the end of 1999, 1578 educational and non-educational institutions had been accredited. The 2000 survey of the Ministry of Education shows considerable movement on the providers' market; institutions appear and vanish, and some of those with accredited programmes reduce their activities.

Teachers of adult education do not receive any special training. However, topics relevant to adult education are part of in-service training of primary and secondary school teachers.