

Measuring the quality and labor market results in education – Case of Czech Republic

DRAFT ANALYSIS

Michal Hejl, CETA, Czech Republic

October 2015

The document offers a brief overview of the indicators used for measuring the quality (test scores, labor market and other results and characteristics) of particular schools and/or their pupils and students in Hungary. Further, it includes information on how the results impact the financing of particular schools. It also offers an overview of tools informing the public about the results with major focus on published school reports, and previous school rankings. Finally, the document lists some of key lessons learned in measuring the quality in education as well as some of key challenges in this respect discussed in the country.

The document was prepared for a webinar “Education, measurement of quality and (labor market) results” taking place on October 2nd, 2015 under the project “Hidden Triggers of Economic Growth in V4 plus Ukraine” supported by the International Visegrad Fund.

Summary overview

Q: Overview of indicators used for measuring the results of particular schools. The results may include national testing (mainly for primary and secondary education), but also labour market data (for secondary and tertiary education), plus any other performance indicators that might be used in your country. Particularly we would be interested if there is any system for measuring the value added of particular schools, and if there are any data available about average wages and unemployment rates of graduates of particular school/program.

A: Does not really exist, performance indicators are usually collected. Some schools will publish data on how their former students are doing, but it is usually impossible to verify this (the reporting format is most often like: X% of alumni are employed, the median salary is Y CZK)

Q: Information about if and how the results impact the financing of particular schools.

A: Not at all, schools are financed by the number of students, the only time when performance is looked at are research grants.

Q: Overview of tools informing the public about the results. We would be mostly interested if there are any school rankings in the country. Please, mention also if there is any information about results provided to the schools internally, i.e. without making it public.

A: No comprehensive system exists, while secondary school exams are partly centralized, the reporting system is intentionally made in a way that does not enable the creation of school rankings. Once again, some schools may publish data on how their graduates are doing.

Q: Overview of key challenges discussed in the country. We would like to know if there are any plans to move forward in this respect and what are the main barriers to do so.

A: The greatest challenge is the direction in which the educational system should be moving, i.e. having an educational system that is working in the 21. Century. Main barrier to do so is lack of consensus how the educational system should be changed.

Primary education

Compulsory education in Czech Republic is currently set at 9 years and pupils may spend all of them in primary schools.

There is no formal examination at the end of primary school, pupils receive end of year grades as usual. It probably does not need to be said that chances of someone with only primary school in the jobs market are quite poor.

Secondary education

There is a great range of secondary schools of various types in Czech Republic. The most prestigious are High schools which students attend for 8, 6 or 4 years (it depends on how early they leave the primary school)

State leaving exams (maturita)

Since 2010 there is a partly unified secondary school leaving exam. Part of the tests is unified for the entire country, part is done by the schools. There are 2 levels of this exam, but since very few students take this option, it is quite irrelevant (a few universities have promised admission without exams for students passing this exam with good marks, but very few students are willing to take the risk

Passing this exam is a mandatory condition for being accepted at a university. However, since one exam is used for a wide spectrum of schools starting from various craft schools, to grammar schools, the test is simply too easy to serve as anything more than that.

The results are published online which allows to look for specific schools or a set of other results, the system however is intentionally designed as to make a creation of a "top list" of best schools very difficult. In fact the head of the exam authority has called any attempts to rank schools as deeply misleading.

National comparative exams, commonly called Scio tests

Scio is a private company that focuses on the educational sector, it offers various courses, tutoring, etc. but for the purpose of this study, the most interesting the company does are these tests.

By now, this is the most common method used by universities for admissions, test takers are sorted by their percentile rank and individual faculties will then decide their admission criteria according to their needs. Scio offers several variants of the test, most universities base their admission on the common study aptitude test, which is supposed to not test for knowledge but the general ability to think and solve problems.

Tertiary education

Both public and private universities exist, but unlike many other countries, the public ones are considered a good deal more prestigious than their private counterparts. In fact quite a few of the private schools are considered to give nothing more than a degree to their students. To explain the existence of such schools, it should be noted, that having an academic degree is considered highly prestigious socially in Czech Republic (many people will put all of their academic degrees on their doorbells for example) and having a degree is also *conditio sine qua non* for almost any non-menial employment by the state.

There is no tuition at public universities now, there have been attempts to introduce it, but those attempts have been met with strong protests which have prevented the adoption of tuition fees. Private universities are of course free to set their tuition as they wish.

Study at university is ended by a comprehensive exam which differ by schools, but there is always a thesis defense and usually an oral exam. The marks received on this exam are completely irrelevant, employers do not usually ask about them. This can be said about school marks in general, employers simple do not care, there is no equivalent of the all-important GPA as it is in the USA for example.

There are several variants of the tests, some test knowledge of particular areas, but most faculties use the common study aptitude test which is supposed to measure the ability to study, not knowledge

Oversight of educational system

There are two institutions that monitor the individual schools. Oversight over primary and secondary schooling is done by Czech school inspectorate. The inspectorate is supposed to evaluate the quality of education, monitor the use of state grants and compliance with laws. In reality, the inspections usually focus on easy to check formal compliance with various laws and ministerial edicts. While parts of the results are available online, they are meant primarily as feedback for the school. The inspectorate does not have direct power over schools, but it can make suggestions to institutions that have ranging from dismissing a teacher or headmaster to closing down the entire schools.

Universities are monitored by the commission of accreditation. Like the inspection, its monitoring is based mostly on formal grounds, for example it checks whether individual universities have sufficient number of full time professors and lecturers, not whether the teaching is actually any good or whether the graduates manage to find employment. The key difference is that the commission is much more powerful, it decide which branches of study individual universities can offer and its decisions cannot be appealed. The commission publishes the results of individual schools on its website.

Public funding

Primary and secondary education

For the purposes of this study, the most important fact is that performance on the job market plays no role in determining public funding for schools.

Schools on this level are financed both by the central government and regional authorities

Schools are allocated lump sum of money for every student enrolled. Czech constitution guarantees free primary and secondary education for every student. Consequently, there is no tuition in public schools. Private schools do charge for education, but receive less money per student than their public counterparts, this income is guaranteed for private schools.

Tertiary education

For the purposes of this study, the most important fact is that performance on the job market plays no role in determining public funding for schools.

Most of the funding is allocated on the basis of per capita payments which. There is a modifier based on how expensive it is to teach the particular study branch (for example, a medical faculty gets more money per student than say philosophical faculty).

A small part of the funding are research grants, which makes them the only part of public funding that is at least a little performance based.

Unlike at the previous levels of education, private schools are not entitled to any public funding, they may, like public universities apply for various grants.

There is currently no tuition. One of the previous governments attempted to introduce tuition, but the proposal was widely opposed and the government was forced to shelve the plans. The current government has no plans to revisit this matter.

Challenges

There are many, some more significant, some less so. Many of them are political, there is no consensus on where the Czech educational system should go between different political parties and sometime not even inside one party. The average tenure of minister of education is only 17 months and their replacement, even if he comes from the same party often has very different ideas. For example the last minister wanted to introduce mathematics as a compulsory subject at maturity as fast as possible, but the current one has postponed it several times and has even stated that she is against it. Also not helping is the tendency of most ministers to make radical changes in order to “build a monument for themselves”. There are fairly frequent structural changes which tend to make things worse, not better.

Speaking of visions, the lack of consensus extends beyond politics. Many employers have been lobbying for more practical education, especially on the level of secondary schools. This has been opposed by most experts on education. This is a clash of two mindsets, one which claims that schools should primarily prepare students for work in a narrow field, the second claims that schools should primarily educate students and make them “better people” since narrow work qualifications can always be acquired later. As of now

There is also the issue of inefficiency, most university students study for at least 5 years, since undergraduate study alone is still not considered by many to be “real university”. Since master’s degree does not add anything of significant value to many students, increasing the number of people who study at university for just 3 years has been one of the goals of the ministry of education for some time.

Devaluation of university degrees is another commonly voiced concern, many members of the public and educational experts alike have expressed. On the other hand this has not been helped by the attitudes of both state and private sector, which tend to demand a university degree as a prerequisite to apply for any non-menial job and even for some menial ones. Universities also make this issue worse by taking as many students as possible in order to get as much state funds as possible.

Most important data sources (all regrettably only in Czech)

Analysis of Czech statistical office on the importance of education on the jobs market

https://www.czso.cz/documents/10180/23203246/analyza_vzdelani.pdf/885d8a85-75a6-4c5b-961e-787aea2eb39e?version=1.0

Employability of Czech university graduates

<http://www.strediskovzdelavacipolitiky.info/download/Zam%C4%9Bstnatelnost%20a%20uplatn%C4%9Bn%C3%AD%20absolvent%C5%AF%20vysok%C3%BDch%20%C5%A1kol%20na%20pracovn%C3%ADm%20trhu%202013.pdf>

Unemployment rates by types of secondary schools

<http://www.infoabsolvent.cz/Temata/ClanekAbsolventi/5-1-04>

Results of maturita exams

<http://vysledky.ceremat.cz/graf/Default.aspx>