



MINISTRY OF EDUCATION,
YOUTH AND SPORTS



STRATEGIC PLAN

OF THE MINISTRY FOR HIGHER EDUCATION

FOR THE PERIOD FROM 2021

June 2020



A WORD OF INTRODUCTION BY THE MINISTER

The vast majority of the present document was prepared and discussed in 2019 and early 2020. However, its completion was affected by the unexpected COVID-19 pandemic. What did the crisis situation we were confronted with reveal?

With their enormous commitment to and prompt involvement in addressing the problem, higher education institutions showed that they play an irreplaceable role in the national emergency-response infrastructure. In situations such as the pandemic of a previously unknown disease, both the physical capacities of higher education institutions' laboratories and research centres and the know-how of their experts in medicine and various technical, social-science and other fields are indispensable. The significance of the 'third role' of higher education institutions was also confirmed by the great willingness demonstrated by both students and staff of higher education institutions to participate in volunteer activities and civil-assistance organisations.

In addition, the need to respond quickly to an unexpected situation has also shown that it is important for higher education institutions' bodies to be flexible and quick in their decision making. While some problems can be effectively addressed by individuals and specific teams at the working level, for many issues it is necessary for the higher education institution to work as a single unit, in close coordination with its internal and external partners. The rapid transformation from full-time to distance form of operation, as well as any other change in the future, would not be possible without expert and technical support from specialised organisational units or without intensive communication and sharing of experience. If the management of higher education institutions is unable to play a strong role in adapting the higher education institutions to new conditions, this will mean much more work and uncertainty for each individual staff member who will have to seek a solution on their own. I am therefore grateful for the atmosphere of constructive cooperation and solidarity that I have observed at many higher education institutions.

At the same time, the state of emergency gave us all a chance to try all that can be done remotely, online and through the use of new technologies, especially in teaching. I think we have all confirmed that in some situations personal contact is unique and difficult to replace. At the same time, however, it turned out that higher education institutions are ready to implement a substantial part of their teaching activities – although I am certainly not saying all activities or in all fields – through distance learning, often with the same or higher efficiency as in full-time teaching. Hence, I believe that there are also positive lessons to be learned from this often unpleasant situation, which will allow us to combine full-time and distance learning methods more effectively in the future and make use of the wide range of methods and tools that are available to us.

What does this experience suggest for the Strategic Plan? First of all, we will strive to build on the positive things that have been achieved in response to the pandemic, namely involving experts from higher education institutions in addressing societal problems, sharing and collaborating to adapt to new conditions, as well as further developing distance learning methods and applying technology in teaching.

The Strategic Plan is being adopted at a time of economic uncertainty – we do not know how hard we will be affected by the economic crisis that is likely to come. While we will strive to minimise its consequences

for higher education institutions' budgets, the implementation of some measures, for example in the area of doctoral scholarships, may have to be put off for a year or even several years, and strategic changes may have to be approached more slowly than we would have liked. However, a significant portion of the Strategic Plan's objectives do not directly depend on additional funding and, rather than new costs, they bring about a change in culture, processes and the way we think about some issues. Therefore, their achievement is not at risk due to potential economic problems, and the Strategic Plan's objectives are as relevant now as they were before the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Strategic Plan is not a revolutionary document that would take Czech higher education in an entirely new direction. Instead, what we are looking to do is to take prudent steps to continue the good that has been achieved in the past, and fine-tune the shortcomings that have quite naturally arisen in the implementation of fundamental changes. I believe that a stable course is exactly what higher education institutions and other partners need in order to be able to adapt to the recently adopted reforms in the area of accreditation, funding and evaluation of research organisations and to complete building their internal processes and capacities.

The present Strategic Plan is the result of more than a year of discussions with representatives of higher education institutions and experts from many other sectors. As with its preparation, the implementation of the Strategic Plan is a joint commitment of the Ministry and higher education institutions that cannot be fulfilled without mutual cooperation, communication and without each party taking its share of responsibility. The constructive debates that led to this document give me hope that together we will be able to achieve the objectives set.



Ing. Robert Plaga, Ph.D.

Minister of Education, Youth and Sports

SUMMARY

The Strategic Plan of the Ministry for Higher Education for the period from 2021 (“SP2021+”) details the general priorities that have been formulated by overarching documents, especially the *2030+ Education Policy Strategy and the Innovation Strategy of the Czech Republic: Country for the Future*, and it brings additional relevant topics specific to the higher education sector.

SP2021+ formulates a general vision for higher education and its significance for society, which has been developed into twenty points. The Ministry’s long-term objective and task is to create conditions for all higher education institutions to provide quality education to students both in full-time, combined and distance form of study, as well as through lifelong learning courses that are open to the general public; to carry out research, development, artistic and other creative and professional activities, the outputs of which will support the social, economic and cultural development of the country; and, last but not least, to make higher education institutions themselves active actors in society that are open to cooperation, discussion and knowledge sharing.

Six priority objectives have been derived from this ideal, the fulfilment of which will be crucial for the development of the sector in the coming period. Each priority objective is detailed down to the level of operational objectives and specific measures, which take several possible forms: from regulatory changes (changes in legislation and by-laws, or other standards) or the use of financial instruments (especially targeted support for specific activities) to providing information support to higher education institutions and the public or measures to be taken at the level of individual higher education institutions.

As a separate annex to SP2021+, the *Strategy for the Internationalisation of Higher Education for the period from 2021* formulates objectives and measures aiming to strengthen the international dimension of higher education institutions’ activities.

The text of SP2021+ is the result of a long and intensive discussion between the Ministry, higher education institutions and other relevant partners from both the public and private spheres. The resulting document constitutes a joint commitment of key actors, which is essential for achieving the objectives formulated.

VISION:

Higher education institutions – as the uppermost tier of the education system – are the ultimate centres of education, independent knowledge and creative activity. They play a key role in the scholarly, scientific, cultural, social and economic development of society.

MISSION OF THE MINISTRY:

The mission of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports in the area of higher education is to defend the public interest, moderate discussion between higher education institutions and other actors in society and, while respecting the autonomy of higher education institutions, to create conditions for their effective operation and provide impetus for their development towards better quality, openness and international competitiveness.

PRIORITY OBJECTIVES OF SP2021+:

1. Develop competencies directly relevant to life and practice in the 21st century
2. Improve the availability and relevance of flexible forms of education
3. Improve the efficiency and quality of doctoral studies
4. Strengthen strategic management and the effective use of capacities in research and development at higher education institutions
5. Build capacity for the strategic management of higher education
6. Reduce the administrative burden on the staff of higher education institutions so that they can fully pursue their mission

STRUCTURE OF SP2021+ OBJECTIVES:



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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS USED:

LLL	Lifelong learning
CR	Czech Republic
LCDRO	Long-term conceptual development of a research organisation
DDP	Doctoral degree programmes
ECTS	European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System
ESG	Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area
ESIF	European Structural and Investment Funds
R&D&I IS	Research and Development and Innovation Information System
Methodology 2017+	Methodology for evaluation of research organisations and evaluation of programmes of targeted support for research and development and innovation
MOOCs	Massive open online courses
MEYS	Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports
Government Regulation on Standards for Accreditation	Government Regulation No 274/2016 Sb., on standards for accreditation in higher education
NAA	National Accreditation Authority for Higher Education
NRQ	National Register of Qualifications
SB	State budget
SP2021+	Strategic Plan of the Ministry for Higher Education for the period from 2021
TA CR	Technology Agency of the Czech Republic
R&D / R&D&I	Research and development/Research and development and innovation
HEI	Higher education institution
Higher Education Act	Act No 111/1998 Sb., on higher education institutions and amending other acts, as amended

INTRODUCTION

I. STARTING POINTS OF THE STRATEGIC PLAN

The Strategic Plan of the Ministry for Higher Education for the period from 2021 (“SP2021+”) is a “strategic plan for educational and creative activities for the area of higher education institutions that has been prepared by the Ministry” – the Ministry is obligated to publish the plan under Section 87(b) of the Higher Education Act.

SP2021+ is a basic strategic document for higher education that is adopted at the national level and that sets out the development priorities for the coming period. It outlines the activities that the Ministry plans to implement in order to accomplish the objectives set, and it also contains measures that need to be implemented at the level of individual higher education institutions, taking into account their specific mission and profile.

The Strategic Plan enters into force on 1 January 2021 and it is expected to be valid for 10 years. SP2021+ is considered a “living” document, which means that it may be revised from time to time through annually adopted Implementation Plans. An update to the document may be adopted based on the progress achieved in implementing the various measures, and a major revision may take place in the event of a significant change in the external environment. Suggestions for revisions to the document may also result from its ongoing evaluation.

On the part of the Ministry, the implementation of SP2021+ is carried out through a number of regulatory instruments, rules for accreditation, evaluations of research organisations, funding from both the state budget and the European Structural and Investment Funds and, last but not least, information and methodological support for higher education institutions in priority areas. In this regard, an important role is played by the Plans for the implementation of the Strategic Plan, which annually specify the priority tasks and the course of work for the next period. At the level of higher education institutions, implementation will be ensured by their own strategic plans, which will be supported mainly through the Programme to Support the Strategic Management of Public Higher Education Institutions.

BASIC PRINCIPLES OF THE STRATEGIC PLAN

ŽTo date, no strategic (previously “long-term”) plan of the Ministry has been adopted after such a long and intensive discussion with representatives of higher education institutions and other partners (for additional information see the section entitled Process of Developing the Strategic Plan at the end of the document). Thanks to that, the resulting document represents a joint commitment of the Ministry and higher education institutions, which will be fulfilled through joint effort and in mutual coordination.

On the one hand, SP2021+ formulates a broad vision for the entire higher education system, yet on the other hand, it selects a limited number of priorities, which are then developed into specific measures both at the national level and at the level of individual higher education institutions. The Strategic Plan focuses on a selected range of priorities, which were determined on the basis of a broad discussion and which cover the core activities of higher education institutions. The priorities were selected taking into account both the social relevance and importance of each topic, as well as whether it can be tackled in technical and political terms. Representatives of higher education institutions and other partners had a key role to play in this process.

The Strategic Plan builds on the reforms that were adopted in the previous period and it further develops their principles while taking into account previous experience with their implementation and the ever-changing external environment. In previous years, fundamental measures were adopted in the area of quality assurance and accreditation in educational activities, evaluation of creative activities, financing of higher education institutions and others. The common denominator of these changes is in strengthening the self-governing role of higher education institutions, i.e. on the one hand in developing their autonomy and ability to strategically manage their activities, and on the other hand in holding them accountable to the public for the results and quality of their activities. The Ministry perceives these features of the system as strengths and it intends to develop them further through this Strategic Plan.

Both the objectives of SP2021+ and the expected measures at the level of individual higher education institutions are formulated at a general level in a way that allows for further diversification of higher education, which is an important principle underlying its development. The vision described here must therefore be understood as an objective for the entire higher education system in the Czech Republic, and each higher education institution will contribute to its accomplishment in a different way in accordance with its specific mission and profile. This means that the “expected measures” that are listed for each operational objective must also be implemented at the level of individual higher education institutions, while respecting the role that the institution plays in the Czech higher education landscape and taking into account its specific situation. Not all measures at the level of higher education institutions can be applied completely universally, for example, activities in the area of doctoral studies are of course irrelevant to higher education institutions that do not have doctoral studies. Similarly, some measures may not be applicable to their full extent e.g. in artistic or professional degree programmes or at small higher education institutions. That said, even in these cases it is often possible to find analogous measures or to implement them on a smaller scale. Last but not least, the document contains a number of measures that have already been adopted by many higher education institutions in the past and that have been derived from well-established good practice. However, the “expected measures at the level of individual higher education institutions” are one of the pillars of funding by the Programme to Support the Strategic Management of Public Higher Education Institutions (announced concurrently with the approval of this document) and they will be taken into account when discussing the strategic plans of higher education institutions.

In this respect, the position of private higher education institutions is particularly specific – they are covered by all main objectives of SP2021+, but only some of its measures. National policy views private higher education institutions as a full-fledged component of the education system, yet the activities of private higher education institutions only receive very limited support from public sources. Therefore, they will generally be unaffected by measures that are implemented through financial instruments. However, at the time finalising this document, a debate has been opened on the possibility of supporting private higher education institutions using the European Structural and Investment Funds.

LINKS OF SP2021+ TO OTHER STRATEGIC DOCUMENTS

SP2021+ follows trends at the European and global level, builds significantly on foreign experience and develops the principles on which the Bologna Process and the European Higher Education Area are based. Czech higher education is perceived as part of the wider European area, it deepens its compatibility with it and strives for deeper connections both at the level of mobility of students and staff of higher education institution, and through joint projects and activities.

SP2021+ was prepared in coordination with the *2030+ Education Policy Strategy*, which was developed in the same period. Its main strategic objectives are as follows (according to the document entitled *Key Directions for Education Policy of the Czech Republic until 2030+*, i.e. the version that was current at the time of adopting the Strategic Plan):

1. To focus education more on acquiring the competences that are required for active civic, professional and personal life,
2. To reduce inequalities in access to quality education and enable maximum development of the potential of pupils and students.

These are followed by four strategic directions:

1. Transforming the content and method of education
2. Supporting teachers, school heads and other personnel in education
3. Improving expertise, trust and mutual cooperation
4. Increasing funding and ensuring its stability

The Strategic Plan develops measures especially in those of the areas mentioned above that proved to be the most relevant to higher education institutions during discussions and, at the same time, that can be addressed within the purview of the ministry. In connection with the Strategy for Education Policy until 2030+, the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (MEYS) will develop a concept for undergraduate training of teaching staff, which will then be translated into measures at the level of higher education institutions.

SP2021+ follows up on the *Innovation Strategy of the Czech Republic: Country for the Future*. Two of its pillars are particularly relevant, namely *The Country for R&D: Financing and evaluation of research and development* and *The Country for Technology: Polytechnic education*. Both these pillars have been reflected in the relevant measures in the respective chapters of the Strategic Plan.

The preparation of SP2021+ was coordinated with other strategic documents that were being developed at the national level, especially the *Strategy for Economic Policy of the Czech Republic*, the *National Research, Development and Innovation Policy* (NP R&D&I) and the *National Research and Innovation Strategy for Smart Specialisation of the Czech Republic* (the “National RIS3 strategy”). These documents will not be completed until after the publication of the Strategic Plan, so it was not possible for all the tasks arising from these documents to be taken into account in the Strategic Plan. However, links to these documents will also be maintained in the implementation phase and the relevant measures resulting from these strategies may be reflected in the annual Plans for the implementation of the Strategic Plan and its possible updates.

The *Strategy for the Internationalisation of Higher Education* constitutes a separate annex to SP2021+. Both documents were prepared in such a way that they were mutually consistent and their measures complemented each other synergistically.

II. VISION OF CZECH HIGHER EDUCATION

Section 1 of the Higher Education Act stipulates that:

Higher education institutions – as the uppermost tier of the education system – are the ultimate centres of education, independent knowledge and creative activity and play a key role in the scholarly, scientific, cultural, social and economic development of society by carrying out the following:

- a) maintaining and expanding acquired knowledge as well as cultivating scholarly, scientific, research, development, innovation, artistic and other creative activities in accordance with the type and orientation of the institution;*
- b) facilitating access to higher education in compliance with democratic principles; providing appropriate professional qualifications and training for research work and other demanding specialised activities;*
- c) offering other forms of education; facilitating the acquisition, expansion, deepening and refreshment of knowledge in various areas of learning and culture and thus contributing to lifelong learning;*
- d) playing an active role in the public discussion of social and ethical issues, cultivating cultural diversity and mutual understanding, shaping civil society and preparing the younger generation for life in such a society;*
- e) contributing to development on both the national and the regional level, while cooperating with the various levels of state administration and regional and municipal government as well as with the business and cultural communities;*
- f) developing international and particularly European cooperation as a fundamental aspect of their activities, supporting joint projects with similar institutions abroad, implementing the mutual recognition of studies and diplomas, and facilitating the exchange of academic staff and students.*

The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports and higher education institutions will work together to ensure that Czech higher education fulfils these values and that it comes as close as possible to the following ideal by 2030:

- ▶ Higher education makes a vital contribution to the economic, technological, social and cultural **development of the country** and its individual regions.
- ▶ All the **roles of higher education institutions are interconnected**, they reinforce one another and none of them is overshadowed by others. Creative activity is key to supporting the educational and social activities of higher education institutions and, at the same time, it draws significant inspiration and feedback from them.
- ▶ Higher education is **developing evenly as a whole** and the standard of quality of the activities that are provided by all institutions keeps improving. At the same time, the various institutions differ in terms of their mission and role within the system, and they also adapt their management style and quality assurance processes to their mission. Public, state and private schools, with their specific missions and profiles, have a place in the system.

- ▶ The activities of higher education institutions have a significant **international dimension**. The knowledge that is produced and transferred within studies, creative activities and the third role is also relevant in a global perspective and it is based on global best practice. Another integral part of every academic community are its foreign members who work with their domestic colleagues on a daily basis.
- ▶ Higher education institutions have a **strategic management capacity**, that allows them to respond to the changing conditions, take measures to improve the quality of their activities and coordinate them among their various components. Self-governing bodies of public higher education institutions have clearly-defined competencies and responsibilities – they perform their functions effectively and represent the interests of all members of the academic community, other staff of higher education institutions and the general public.
- ▶ Higher education institutions are **learning organisations**, organisations that use their own activities and evaluation of experience to improve themselves. They adapt their organisational models and processes to changing social, economic and technological conditions and bring innovative practices in all their activities.
- ▶ Higher education institutions employ **academic and non-academic staff**, who best contribute to achieving their strategic objectives. The selection procedures for filling vacancies at all levels are also open to applicants from outside the higher education institution and from abroad. Higher education institutions hire staff largely from among the graduates and employees of other higher education institutions, including foreign ones. In this way, they obtain new valuable experience and perspectives, and prevent academic inbreeding. Higher education institutions create good conditions for their employees to do quality work, i.e. conditions that allow them to balance their personal and professional lives, support the integration of foreign and disadvantaged employees and ensure equal opportunities for women and men to pursue successful careers. Higher education institutions recognise and value the different types of expertise of their academic and non-academic staff, and support the lifelong development of their talent so that they are prepared to respond to the changing conditions of the world around them. Academic culture is based on openness, critical thinking, cooperation and the sharing of knowledge and experience both among higher education institutions and with society at large.
- ▶ **The proportion of young people who have completed higher education** is not declining, it will exceed 35 %¹ by 2030 and, in the long term, it is converging to the EU average. On the one hand, the number of applicants admitted to degree programmes follows demographic trends, but another means to increase the number of graduates is also to create conditions for increasing the success rate. For bachelor's degree programmes, the proportion of students who complete their studies successfully before the end of the standard period of study plus one year is at least 60%, and at the same time, 75% of students successfully complete at least one degree programme within seven years of their first entry into the higher education system.

¹ The target is for 35% of the Czech Republic's population aged 30–34 to have attained a bachelor's or higher degree (compared to 34% in 2018). However, people who will be 34 in 2030 are already 24 years old in 2020, and many of them have not only started but also completed their formal education. For this reason, this target needs to be understood in a longer-term perspective and any evaluation of its achievement must be based on a projection of future trends in the number of graduates in relation to the size of the relevant population cohort. That projection will be based on the number of students in the year of evaluation, their age structure, the expected success rate of their studies, the rate of delayed entry, migration and possibly other relevant factors. The rather modest increase from 34% in 2018 to 35% in 2030 conceals a substantial increase in the absolute number of students which results from demographic trends.

- ▶ Higher education develops **competencies for work, personal and civic life**. On the one hand, studying provides graduates with specific and relevant qualifications that are directly applicable in the labour market, but it also equips them with a broad range of general knowledge, the ability to approach new challenges critically and creatively, and the willingness and commitment to learn throughout life. As access to higher education expands, the nature of higher education, the way it is organised and the teaching methods change. At the same time, the meaning of higher education qualifications is changing – they are no longer a certificate of exceptionality, but rather a prerequisite for developing one’s professional career and personal life.
- ▶ The quality of education is understood primarily as its **value added**, i.e. what students learn and how much better they are prepared for future life than if they had not studied at a higher education institution. Both higher education institutions and degree programmes that develop applicants with a rather low level of initial competencies and higher education institutions and degree programmes that are able to further develop above-average gifted applicants have a high value added and, in turn, bring a substantial benefit to society.
- ▶ One third of graduates of bachelor’s and master’s degree programmes graduate from **professional profile** degree programmes. Their training takes place with close links to practice and cooperation with employers, without being subordinated to the particular interests of specific businesses, and it prepares students for future trends in the labour market.
- ▶ In addition to general competencies, **bachelor’s degree programmes** develop skills that are directly applicable in the labour market. Half of the graduates of bachelor’s degree programmes do not immediately continue their full-time study in the Czech Republic. However, some of them further improve, expand and deepen their qualifications through a distance or combined form of study or in lifelong learning courses (“LLL”), or they resume their study at a later point in life, once they have gained work experience.
- ▶ **Doctoral degree programmes** prepare graduates who are able to successfully pursue careers in research and in highly qualified positions in the Czech Republic and abroad. Students in full-time doctoral degree programmes have access to tangible and intangible support, which allows them to devote an appropriate amount of time to their studies and dissertation research, and most will complete their studies successfully. In each calendar year, the number of graduates of doctoral degree programmes never drops below 2 000.
- ▶ Higher education offers **equal opportunities** to attain education and is open to all persons, regardless of their gender, age, ethnicity or social and family background. Adequate support is provided to those who face economic, social, cultural, health or other barriers in accessing their studies.
- ▶ Studying, especially in the full-time form, is a key **period in students’ life**, which includes not only teaching, but also gathering fundamental experience, establishing personal and professional relationships, integrating into civil society and forming their own identity. Higher education institutions accompany their students during this period and the support they provide to them is not limited to matters directly related to their studies.
- ▶ Higher education institutions play an important role in providing **lifelong learning** and they actively help the population to adapt to social, economic, environmental and technological change. The number of people who complete at least one lifelong learning course keeps increasing every year.

- ▶ Higher education institutions provide quality undergraduate training for a sufficient number of **teaching staff** for lower levels of education. Public administration formulates what it expects from teacher training and supports higher education institutions in meeting these expectations.
- ▶ The **creative activity** of higher education institutions – which includes basic and applied research, development, innovation, artistic activity and other professional activities – demonstrates high quality in all areas and it is firmly linked to educational activity. Neither creative nor educational activities at higher education institutions are burdened with unnecessary administrative costs.
- ▶ The outputs of higher education institutions' creative activities are **relevant to the needs of society** on a regional, national or global scale. Higher education institutions use their research capacities to address societal challenges and produce innovation in all areas of human life. Higher education institutions cooperate with companies, public administration and the civil sector in transferring knowledge into practice.
- ▶ Higher education institutions are **active members of civil society** and promote the democratic and humanist values on which they are based. They use the knowledge to which they have access to cultivate public debate, promote knowledge-based decision-making and disseminate innovation. Higher education institutions also encourage their staff and students in their active civic life, including volunteering.
- ▶ The fulfilment of the vision described here is ensured through **adequate financial and non-financial public support**. Public spending on higher education as a share of GDP is at least at the EU average in 2030.

Some points of this Vision are already being fulfilled, at least in part – these are fundamental values that must not be put at risk. Some points are being fulfilled by a parts of higher education institutions or in some disciplines and degree programmes that can serve as good practice examples for others. Some points are not entirely in the hands of higher education institutions, as they also depend on political, economic and social conditions. Nevertheless, all these points describe the ideal situation that serves as a starting point for the preparation of strategic measures at both the national and institutional level.

MISSION OF THE MINISTRY:

The mission of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports in the area of higher education is to defend the public interest, moderate discussion between higher education institutions and other actors in society and, while respecting the autonomy of higher education institutions, to create conditions and provide impetus for their effective operation and development towards better quality, openness and international competitiveness.

Number of 19-year-olds in CR (CSO projection up to 2035)

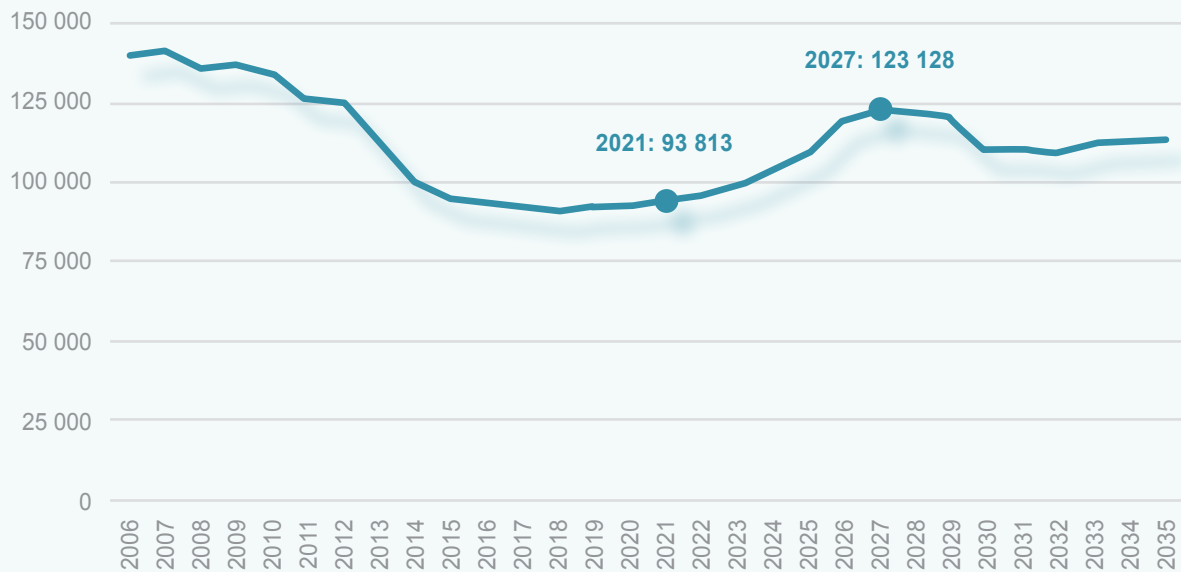


Chart 1: Trends in the number of nineteen-year-olds in the population of the Czech Republic 2006–2035. Data source: Czech Statistical Office.

During the validity of SP2021+, the number of fresh graduates of secondary schools who are interested in studying at higher education institutions in the Czech Republic is expected to increase significantly.

Tertiary education attainment, age group 30–34

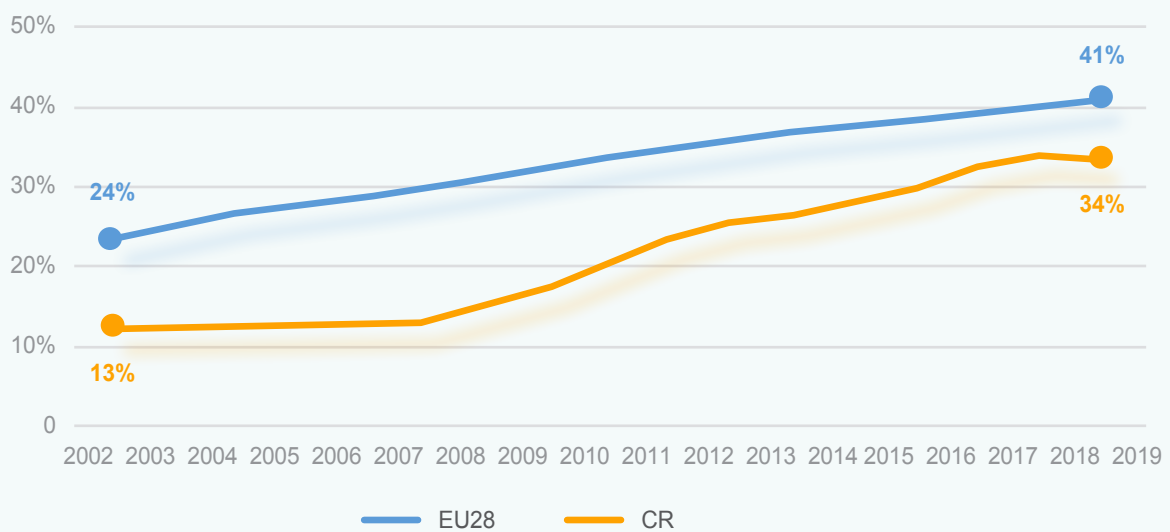


Chart 2: Trends in the proportion of persons aged 30–34 who have attained higher education in the population of the Czech Republic and the EU28 in the years 2002–2019. Data source: Eurostat.

Despite a significant expansion of access to higher education, the Czech Republic remains below the EU average.


PRIORITY OBJECTIVES OF THE STRATEGIC PLAN

In order to fulfil the vision described above, the following priority objectives of the Strategic Plan have been discussed and adopted. In the coming years, both MEYS and higher education institutions will focus their attention on accomplishing these objectives:

- 1. Developing competencies directly relevant to life and practice in the 21st century;**
- 2. Improving the availability and relevance of flexible forms of education;**
- 3. Improving the efficiency and quality of doctoral studies;**
- 4. Strengthening strategic management and the effective use of capacities in research and development at higher education institutions;**
- 5. Building capacity for the strategic management of higher education;**
- 6. Reducing the administrative burden on the staff of higher education institutions so that they can fully pursue their mission.**

The next part of this document expands on these general objectives and details them down to the level of operational objectives and specific measures. Key measures of a systemic nature are marked graphically – these have the potential to significantly affect the functioning of higher education and, at the same time, require further discussion and cooperation between higher education institutions and the Ministry in their implementation. In addition to the measures specified for the various operational objective, the achievement of the set priorities will also be supported by means of investment financing.

Selected goals have been identified as the most important on the basis of a discussion between MEYS, representatives of higher education institutions and other invited partners and experts. The process of creating the Strategic Plan is described in the Conclusion of this document. Other important areas that may require the adoption of measures at the national level are summarised in the final section of this document. These topics may be further developed in more detail in the future, based on public demand, provided that MEYS has adequate strategic capacities and is able to make sure that relevant interventions are implemented.



PRIORITY OBJECTIVES OF THE STRATEGIC PLAN FOR HIGHER EDUCATION FOR THE PERIOD FROM 2021+

1. DEVELOP COMPETENCIES DIRECTLY RELEVANT TO LIFE AND PRACTICE IN THE 21ST CENTURY
2. IMPROVE THE AVAILABILITY AND RELEVANCE OF FLEXIBLE FORMS OF EDUCATION
3. IMPROVE THE EFFICIENCY AND QUALITY OF DOCTORAL STUDIES
4. STRENGTHEN STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT AND THE EFFECTIVE USE OF CAPACITIES IN RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT AT HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS
5. BUILD CAPACITY FOR THE STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT OF HIGHER EDUCATION
6. REDUCE THE ADMINISTRATIVE BURDEN ON THE STAFF OF HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS SO THAT THEY CAN FULLY PURSUE THEIR MISSION

I. DEVELOP COMPETENCIES DIRECTLY RELEVANT TO LIFE AND PRACTICE IN THE 21ST CENTURY

THE DEFINITION OF THE OBJECTIVE:

Today's learners will enter a world whose development in the coming decades is very difficult to foresee. They can be expected to change occupations and jobs several times over the course of their lives, and to have to cope with the rapid social and technological changes brought by Industry 4.0 and, in the longer term, by other economic and social revolutions after that. Graduates of higher education institutions should be able to do well in the world and adapt to it, but they should also be prepared to actively transform it for the better, play an active role in civic life, take up leadership positions and bring innovations that will make the world a better place to live for all. So it would be a mistake to only prepare them for life as it used to be in the past. On the contrary, it is necessary to develop their general competencies and value orientations, which are a necessary prerequisite for the future success of the individual and society.

Skills related to working with information have recently become more important. Today, citizens need to navigate a lot of information, be able to work with it, apply it and defend the right solutions in discussions. Therefore, one important task of higher education institutions is to convey the basic values on which they are built, including an emphasis on critical thinking and belief in knowledge, personal integrity, principles of ethical work, knowledge sharing, orientation in a global environment, and more generally, the humanist ideals of freedom, equality and solidarity. Competencies such as the ability to analyse problems and derive possible solutions, cooperate effectively, communicate constructively in business, personal and civic settings, make effective use of new technologies, being open to new stimuli and changes, flexibility and a healthy and environmentally sustainable lifestyle play a fundamental role for graduates' successful career and quality of life. One basic precondition for success in the future world is the ability and willingness to learn and develop one's general and professional competencies throughout life, and thus a positive attitude towards learning.

However, higher education policy must not overlook the fact that, for most students, higher education is a step that leads directly to their transition to full economic activity, and their studies must prepare them for that. Therefore, professional and field-specific experience undoubtedly has a place in their studies. In addition, the issue of professional orientation is also related to the problem of academic failure – the failure rate is currently untenable, especially in bachelor's degree programmes. Most students expect professional relevance from their studies, and if they feel that their expectations are not being met, they often lose motivation and quit their studies. Strengthening the relevance of study so that it offers students clear (albeit definitely not closed or narrowly specialised) career prospects from the first semester of their study, and it is therefore also a step towards improving the success rate of study.²

Therefore, the big challenge for higher education is to strike the right balance between two principles – training practical skills that can be applied in practice immediately after completion of study on the one hand, and developing more general intellectual and social competencies to enable graduates to respond to new situations in the labour market and in society in the future on the other hand.

² The perception of the relevance of study for career success is certainly not the only factor, and probably not even the strongest one, affecting study success. Other factors that play a significant role include social issues (whether soft, cultural factors or the economic need to work during study), the competencies that applicants have when starting their studies, the availability of information for a good choice of a branch of study, the social integration of students and the environment of higher education institutions, as well as many other aspects. The failure rate is also increased by the fact that degree programmes are often very narrowly specialised, even at bachelor's level, as this does not provide students with flexibility in choosing their orientation, so if they are not satisfied with the content or form of study, they cannot easily change the composition of the subjects they study and are forced to quit their studies and start a new degree programme. Moreover, quitting one's studies is not always a negative event, and the national policy does not aim to completely eliminate study failure. However, these issues are not directly related to this priority objective.

Yet these two principles are not in direct contradiction, on the contrary. Developing general competencies and soft skills in isolation, with no links to specific problems and situations, is only possible to a limited extent. It is therefore possible, if not necessary, to combine teaching such competencies with addressing specific professional tasks, whether aimed at deepening the theoretical understanding of the given field or at acquiring practical professional skills. The purpose of higher education is to educate professionals who – through work aimed at obtaining a profound understanding of several specific problems (whether intradisciplinary or interdisciplinary) – will acquire a wide range of broader competencies that will prepare them for addressing new unexpected problems in the future.

Combining their educational role with the highly professional background of a creative organisation is what makes higher education institutions unique and irreplaceable actors in society. Their educational activities must be properly evaluated and adequate attention must be given to assuring their quality. Although there has been a significant shift in this direction since the 2016 amendment to the Higher Education Act, it is still the case that the prestige of a higher education institution and its economic success depend mainly on its research performance, and the same applies to individual members of academic staff. In this regard, the aim is to emancipate educational activities and to support the further diversification of Czech higher education so that even higher education institutions that focus on roles other than research have a chance to achieve excellence and be recognised as excellent.

Share of degree programmes in a professional profile in newly accredited bachelor's and master's degree programmes

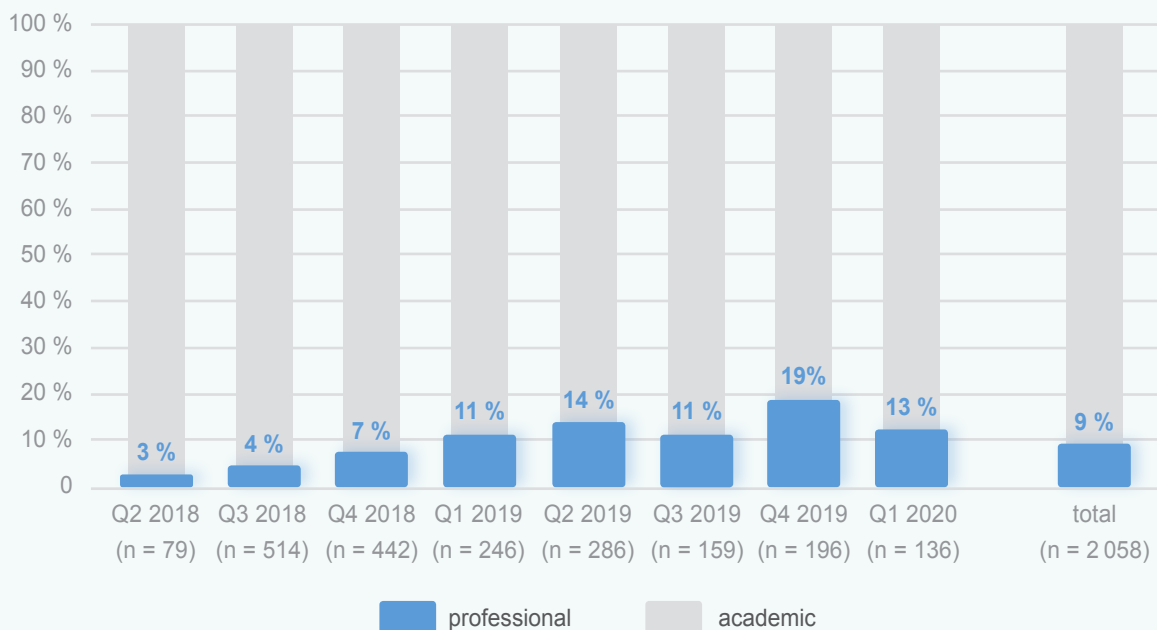


Chart 3: The share of degree programmes that are accredited in a professional profile in the total number of newly accredited bachelor's and master's degree programmes in individual quarters since Q2 2018, when the new accreditation regime was introduced under the 2016 amendment to the Higher Education Act. Data source: Register of higher education institutions and degree programmes.

According to the objective formulated in the Vision of the Strategic Plan, professional programmes should account for 33% of graduates of bachelor's and master's degree programmes by 2030. Data source: Register of higher education institutions and degree programmes.

The following operational objectives are assigned to this priority objective:

- A. Support the development of staff competencies for teaching and degree programme design;
- B. Develop methods for quality assurance in education and verification of learning outcomes;
- C. Strengthen the link between study and practice, and preparation for future employment;
- D. Further develop the professional profile of study and increasing its prestige;
- E. Support the building of infrastructure for interactive methods of education and integration of students;
- F. Evaluate the experience with the functioning of the new accreditation model to date, and proposing modifications to it;
- G. Strengthen the international dimension of higher education.

OPERATIONAL OBJECTIVES AND MEASURES:

1.A SUPPORT THE DEVELOPMENT OF STAFF COMPETENCIES FOR TEACHING AND DEGREE PROGRAMME DESIGN

The ability to set educational goals correctly, choose educational methods adequately, clearly formulate abstract knowledge, use educational technologies, evaluate fairly, communicate with a diverse group of students, and provide adequate support to the disadvantaged is not a matter of course. The professional erudition of academic staff in their field is only one of the prerequisites for quality teaching, which is why other competencies relevant to quality teaching must be adequately developed as well.



Financing [SB, ESIF]: MEYS will support the initial and continuing education of teachers, with a focus on using interactive and innovative educational methods and taking into account the specific needs of disadvantaged groups of learners. Education does not need to take the form of full-time or distance courses only, it may also take the form of coaching, mentoring of novice teachers by more experienced colleagues, or internships at partner institutions.



Financing [SB, ESIF]: MEYS will support the availability of support services for academic staff who are involved in developing degree programmes (especially their 'guarantors') and in innovating subjects, which will provide them with professional know-how in the development of degree programmes and educational design, with particular emphasis on the application of a learning-outcome-based approach and student-centred learning. The providers of these services may be both organisational units of higher education institutions (e.g. centres of pedagogical competence) and, especially in the case of small higher education institutions, external providers; these may be both experts in higher education pedagogy and experts with experience directly in the field of accreditation of higher education programmes.



Financing [SB]: MEYS will support joint projects of higher education institutions aimed at creating institutional "standards of the degree programme guarantor" and revising the way guarantors' competencies are specified within the organisational structure of a higher education institution. The position of guarantors must provide them with adequate personnel and financial tools to perform their role, i.e. so that they can make qualified decisions about the composition of curricula and really guarantee the quality of teaching. Outputs of projects in the form of recommendations will be publicly available.



Expected measures at HEI level: Systematising the requirements for the initial and continuing education of teachers in the field of teaching methods. The aim is for all employees to whom it is relevant to have access to professional support for their educational activities and to continuously develop and update their competencies. This requirement is particularly important for early-stage teachers (who are often also doctoral students) and for those who are using new educational technologies or practices for the first time, or possibly who are innovating the content and organisation of degree programmes and subjects. Developing the pedagogical competencies of staff can be linked to their evaluation, or possibly career advancement, and for relevant groups it may also be made obligatory.



Expected measures at HEI level: Motivating academic staff to develop their teaching competencies, among other things by making teaching quality a criterion within the career rules that is verified during the habilitation procedure and the procedure for the appointment of professors. To this end, developing methods for evaluating the quality of educational activities of academic staff, including the use of inspections (sitting in on classes) and the collection of qualitative data from students, which place the results of student surveys in a critical context.



Information support: Once the forms of ensuring the development of pedagogical competencies of early-stage academic staff have been pilot-tested at individual higher education institutions, MEYS will evaluate the experience gained and consider the possibility of anchoring them within the system at the national level. The result of this evaluation may be a non-binding recommendation, but also the creation of a certificate of initial training that is recognised nationwide (a kind of “pedagogical minimum” for the staff of higher education institutions) or the specification of minimum requirements for professional training in the relevant regulations. However, if adopted as mandatory, such requirements would need to be flexible enough in order to prevent them from hindering the involvement of practitioners and other guests (including from abroad) in teaching, preventing the recognition of foreign and prior learning, and complicating the performance of specific forms of teaching, such as practical internships, leading independent creative work of students and more.



Expected measures at HEI level: Creating opportunities for regular meetings of staff who are involved in teaching within a higher education institution or across them. Creating platforms for exchanging experience, an open formative discussion on innovations in educational activities, and sharing good practice.

1.B DEVELOP METHODS FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE IN EDUCATION AND VERIFICATION OF LEARNING OUTCOMES

High-quality educational activities of academic staff deserve the same recognition and financial remuneration as high-quality results of research and other creative activities. However, recognition of teaching is not possible without monitoring and evaluating its added value, i.e. without verifying the extent to which students actually acquire the competencies expected. For this purpose, it is necessary to develop methods for evaluating the quality of education and verifying learning outcomes so that good practice can be recognised as objectively as possible and reflected in the evaluation of staff. This is naturally associated with strengthening the processes of internal quality assurance of educational activities – this must not be limited to the function of internal accreditations in terms of verifying compliance with the minimum standards, but it must also have a strong development function aimed at improving quality in the future.



Information support: MEYS will make sure that an overview of well-proven tools for measuring the quality and added value of education is developed and made available for use to higher education institutions. In the case of foreign tools, MEYS will arrange for them to be translated and adapted to the Czech context. These may include, for example, student and self-evaluation questionnaires, methodological manuals for inspections and qualitative probes, support for the evaluation of student projects and portfolios, and other methods, including those aimed at measuring the development of general competencies and soft skills. The aim is to give Czech higher education institutions access to domestic and foreign good practice and provide them with tools that they can directly implement or use to develop their quality assurance processes.



Financing [SB]: MEYS will support the exchange of experience among higher education institutions in the area of measuring the quality of education. Financial support will be provided for joint projects of higher education institutions, which will lead to the unification of student questionnaires and the exchange of data for benchmarking. In this way, higher education institutions that have made a lot of effort to develop their internal tools will be motivated to share know-how with other institutions.



Expected measures at HEI level: When staffing internal evaluation boards, including also experts in higher education pedagogy and development of degree programmes (curricular design) and other experts with an understanding of international trends in education, who will be able to professionally assess the plans for degree programmes with regard to the desired profiles of graduates.



Financing [ESIF]: MEYS will support projects that are aimed at improving internal quality assurance processes, which also includes improving the validity of evaluation of teaching by students and strengthening the processes through which the results of student surveys have an impact on improving the quality of education.



Financing [SB]: MEYS (e.g. in collaboration with the Technology Agency of the Czech Republic, “TA CR”) will financially support higher education research, the implementation of evaluation studies in education and the experimental development of educational methods. MEYS will support joint projects of higher education institutions aimed at building expert capacity, implementing research in higher education and applying its results in practice. One type of supported projects will be the implementation of reforms of the organisation and form of education on the basis of randomised studies and pilot verification, along with an ongoing rigorous evaluation of implemented measures.



Information support: MEYS will expand the Award of the Minister of Education, Youth and Sports for outstanding educational activities at a higher education institution to include an award for excellent teams, e.g. entire degree programmes or projects that bring significant educational innovations. As a result, recognition will be provided not only for the excellent work of individual, but also for collaborations of wider teams that are systematically aimed at developing the quality of educational activities.



Expected measures at HEI level: Starting the design of curricula by first describing the graduate’s profile pursuant to the Higher Education Qualifications Framework, deriving relevant learning outcomes from the graduate’s profile and, based on these, preparing individual study subjects and choosing appropriate teaching methods and study organisations. When designing curricula, use the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) and a learning-outcome-based approach. Useful materials include the ECTS User’s Guide and the manual entitled *Use of Learning Outcomes at Higher Education Institutions*. These tools emphasise the students’ perspective (student-centred learning) and the “learning outcomes”, i.e. orientation towards the activities that graduates will be able to perform. The appropriate application of these methods leads to improved quality and efficiency of learning processes, mainly through supporting the choice of the most appropriate educational methods for the set educational objectives.

1.C STRENGTHEN THE LINK BETWEEN STUDY AND PRACTICE, AND PREPARATION FOR FUTURE EMPLOYMENT

The preparation of students for practice and employment is not done in professional degree programmes only. Academic programmes, too, must prepare students for their transition to the labour market and successful career, albeit in the research field, and must adequately adapt the content of degree programmes and choose appropriate educational methods. To do this, it is necessary for institutions to keep up-to-date on the requirements of practice and how well graduates are doing in practice. The employability of graduates shortly after completion of study is a necessary, though certainly not the only, criterion of the quality of education.



Information support: MEYS will continue to collect data on graduates’ employment at the national level and will strive to further improve data collection so that the results are as relevant as possible both to national policy and to individual higher education institutions and their teaching quality assurance. As part of strengthening the quality of the tools used, MEYS will build on international good practice and cooperate with foreign partners. In addition, MEYS will strive to establish cooperation with other ministries, the Czech Statistical Office and other organisations that gather large amount of information on graduates’ employment. The aim is to create a system to track graduates’ employment (graduate tracking) that will provide the public administration, higher education institutions, potential students and the general public with robust information on graduates’ employability in practice.



Financing [SB]: MEYS will support the cooperation of higher education institutions in collecting data on graduates, including joint analysis of the data and harmonisation of questionnaires in order to ensure data comparability. The subject-matter of the projects may also include the translation and implementation of relevant foreign tools and good practice.



Financing [SB, ESIF]: MEYS will support the exchange of experience between higher education institutions in the area of internships and placements, including their contractual and organisational aspects and quality assurance. The output of the projects should be recommendations and tools (e.g. model contracts, evaluation tools, quality standards, etc.) that can be used by other higher education institutions.



Financing [ESIF]: MEYS will support the creation of new and modernisation of existing degree programmes in areas in which a significant societal demand for graduates has been identified. In designing these programmes, emphasis will be placed on cooperation with practice and the use of modern educational methods. Cooperation with secondary schools will also be supported, especially with regard to supporting students and appropriately setting the conditions in the transition between the two levels of study.



Financing [SB]: MEYS will support capacity building in degree programmes that prepare graduates for professions with a significant societal demand, for which the Czech government has identified a shortage of qualified workers, especially in relation to the provision of basic public services. Support will be conditional on the implementation of support measures to increase the study completion rate and improve the quality of learning, including the use of innovative teaching methods, curriculum updates, increasing applicants' interest in these programmes, strengthening the predictive validity of the admissions procedure, developing teachers' competencies and supporting graduates' transition to practice in the field they have studied.



Accreditation: The National Accreditation Authority for Higher Education (NAA), in cooperation with MEYS, will evaluate what steps need to be taken in the area of accreditations in order to support the use of modern and interactive educational methods and ensure there is linkage between the educational methods selected and the set learning outcomes that are relevant to future employability, i.e. so that students learn to apply general knowledge and methodological procedures in practice. In addition, this discussion may also result in an amendment to Government Regulation No 274/2016 Sb., on standards for accreditation in higher education (hereinafter the "Government Regulation on Standards for Accreditation").



Expected measures at HEI level: When designing curricula, paying adequate attention to the development of soft skills and general competencies that arise from the *Higher Education Qualifications Framework* or that are needed in order to meet the graduate's profile in the relevant field of education, and verifying the fulfilment of these requirements. The development of these competencies must be reflected in the choice of educational methods and the organisation of study.



Expected measures at HEI level: Supporting students' entrepreneurship, the creation of student start-ups and other forms of projects that carry out knowledge transfer between the academic and the application sectors. Encouraging students' involvement in innovation activities, both through curricula and through extra-curricular activities, including business incubators and accelerators. Including the development of competencies for entrepreneurship and innovation in degree programmes in all areas of education.



Expected measures at HEI level: Using resources from scholarship funds to support activities that improve the quality of study, develop students' professional and transferable competencies, and support their academic and social integration. Increasing support for student activities and associations and, in turn, supporting the active involvement of students in teaching and life at the higher education institution.



Expected measures at HEI level: Reducing the share of lectures – not only in professional but also in academic degree programmes – and developing interactive teaching methods, through which students learn to apply general knowledge and methodological procedures in practice, e.g. through student projects, practical workshops, simulations or the involvement of external partners in preparing essays, bachelor's and master's theses. Bachelor's and master's theses do not need to take a written form (project and other creative forms are already common in many areas) and their nature should correspond to the set learning outcomes according to the graduate's profile. Convenient forms of education also include involving students in the higher education institution's creative activities and in reflected placements and internships, which are recommended to be used in academic degree programmes as well, beyond the accreditation requirements.



Expected measures at HEI level: Designing curricula so that students develop an understanding of the practical application of their learnings from the first semester and have a chance to understand their importance for future employability, thus developing their positive motivation to learn as an effective way to prevent academic failure and encourage efficient learning.



Expected measures at HEI level: Monitoring long-term changes in labour market requirements, taking them into account when updating educational content, and transforming relevant degree programmes to reflect trends towards Industry 4.0, which is related to digitisation, robotisation in all economic sectors. Reflecting the development of new industries in their strategies, and preparing students for adaptation to technological change.



Expected measures at HEI level: Ensuring that external partners – especially practitioners as employers' representatives, or possibly graduates – are adequately involved in the preparation of curricula. The aim is not to tailor curricula to specific companies whose requirements may change even before students complete their study, but rather to rid curricula of outdated practices and redundant knowledge and to look for opportunities where practitioners may become involved in the teaching of specific subjects for example as lecturers or sponsors of student projects.



Expected measures at HEI level: Developing an internal methodology for organising placements and internships, which will provide guidance for relevant areas such as contracts, awarding credits, support for students, quality standards, verification of learning outcomes, methods of reflection on the experience gained by students, and others. Supporting the implementation of practical internships abroad. Collaborating with businesses and other organisations (public, non-profit), in which students complete their placements, in designing their internal methodologies for the organisational, personnel and material aspects of placements, and provide these partners with good practice. Systematically creating opportunities for higher education institutions' staff to meet with employees of cooperating organisations, which will make it possible to develop personal ties, deepen cooperation and streamline communication. Allocating personnel for the administrative aspects of internships so that the administrative burden does not fall on academic staff, and appointing responsible persons who will actively seek out potential partner organisations and develop cooperation with them.

1.D FURTHER DEVELOP THE PROFESSIONAL PROFILE OF STUDY AND INCREASING ITS PRESTIGE

The professional profile of study is a new thing in Czech higher education, and it is still only slowly finding its place. Yet its potential for diversifying the educational offer, adapting it to the needs of students and developing competencies relevant to future employment is crucial. Education in degree programmes with professional orientation and degree programmes with academic orientation is different – it has different goals, methods and quality criteria, and their specifics must be adequately reflected in the accreditation process. The aim is to further support the development of the professional profile so that it becomes the second pillar of the system, and the proportion of students studying in it continues to increase.

The Ministry does not intend to limit the access of institutions that will provide education in professional programmes to institutional or targeted support for research and development. The implementation of professional programmes does not in any way suggest that the same organisational unit cannot be an excellent centre of research, artistic or other creative activity.



Accreditation: NAA, in cooperation with MEYS, will review the underlying methodological materials of accreditation standards and expand them to include clarifying comments and examples so that the requirements placed on the professional and academic profile are significantly different and reflect the different objectives of study in both profiles. Clarification is desirable especially in the case of criteria that are imposed on the guarantors of degree programmes, academic staff and practitioners, but also on the content of curricula, the organisation of professional internships and other aspects. Specification of the requirements that are placed on practitioners is a necessary prerequisite for the transparent and consistent assessment of competence of those experts whose experience cannot be documented by publication outputs. The requirements must allow experts to work simultaneously at the higher education institution and in the application sector. In this context, the activities that will be recognised as relevant creative activity will include not only research, development, innovation and artistic activities in the conventional sense, but also other professional work that produces new products or services, improves their quality or improves the effectiveness of public or private organisations' processes. The question will be raised as to whether, and if so in which areas, the requirement that the guarantor of a master's professional degree programme should be an academic staff member who has been appointed professor or associate professor is relevant. If necessary, follow-up Government Regulations on Standards for Accreditation will be proposed.



Financing [SB]: MEYS will open a discussion on the possibilities of financial support for professional degree programmes taking into account the specific nature of the creative activities of organisational units with professional orientation.



Accreditation: MEYS in collaboration with NAA will propose a revision of the Government Regulation on Standards for Accreditation so that only those degree programmes that place emphasis on acquiring theoretical knowledge required for carrying out an occupation, including performing creative activities (see Section 44(5)(b) of the Higher Education Act) and that have a direct link to the research or other creative activity of the higher education institution are accredited in the academic profile. Therefore, degree programmes with a de facto professional focus should not be accredited in the academic profile, even though these are highly prestigious programmes with high demands on students.



Information support: As part of the Award of the Minister of Education, Youth and Sports for outstanding educational activities at a higher education institution, MEYS will recognise excellent education in professional degree programmes on an equal footing with academic programmes. By doing so, MEYS will emphasise that both study profiles may differ in their objectives and methods, yet they are equal in their importance. At the same time, the award will contribute to the visibility of good practice, and offer inspiration to other educators.



Expected measures at HEI level: Developing cooperation with tertiary technical schools, and where both parties show interest in integration, transforming the educational programmes of tertiary technical schools into professional bachelor's programmes accredited by the higher education institution. Of course, such a transformation envisages that the curriculum will be modified and the conditions for teaching will be provided in a way that meets the relevant accreditation requirements.

1.E SUPPORT THE BUILDING OF INFRASTRUCTURE FOR INTERACTIVE METHODS OF EDUCATION AND INTEGRATION OF STUDENTS

The currently prevalent interior design of the buildings of higher education institutions provides good facilities especially for frontal teaching methods and is usually not suitable for interactive and innovative methods of education. These often require specific infrastructure facilities, whether these be maker spaces, hubs, incubators, simulators, field workplaces, facilities for practical training, instrumentation, electronic resources or spaces where students can meet to work on team projects. The physical environment of higher education institutions naturally influences the

way students and staff behave in it, how often they meet, communicate with each other, how much time they spend at school and the extent to which they feel welcome in it. Therefore, when renovating or constructing buildings, the aim is to ensure that they offer a pleasant environment and adequate facilities for individual and team work and meetings, and to invest in the necessary instrumentation and technical equipment.



Financing [SB, ESIF]: MEYS will support modernisations of higher education institutions' environment, purchases of equipment and the development of physical and digital infrastructure based on the principles described above in order to improve the quality and relevance of education and strengthen the competitiveness of Czech higher education institutions in an international comparison. In doing so, it will take account of the latest educational trends and the need to provide a wide range of services for the successful study of a diverse student population. The use of investment resources from public budgets is conditional upon compliance with the Plans of Investment Activities of each higher education institution.



Financing [SB, ESIF]: MEYS will support the development of the facilities for student associations and organisations that strengthen the social integration of students, interconnect the academic community and contribute to improving the quality and relevance of learning. In terms of preventing academic failure, organisations and events that bring together students from the very beginning of their studies (e.g. 'icebreaker' courses) and that provide them with support in their first year, are of particular importance.



Expected measures at HEI level: Providing material facilities and financial and organisational support for the activities of student associations and organisations that meet the characteristics as per the previous point.

1.F EVALUATE THE EXPERIENCE WITH THE FUNCTIONING OF THE NEW ACCREDITATION MODEL TO DATE, AND PROPOSING MODIFICATIONS TO IT;

The 2016 amendment to the Higher Education Act introduced a new accreditation model. At the time of entry into force of this document, the model will complete the first five years of its existence and, after the implementation phase, it will be useful to evaluate the experience to date and propose partial revisions to the accreditation processes where the system fails to meet expectations. Therefore, the aim is not to bring a revolutionary change, but rather to prepare partial evolutionary modifications to relevant regulations and especially to the accompanying methodological and technical documents so as to improve efficiency, transparency and fairness of the process and strengthen its ability to support the quality of higher education wherever shortcomings are found.



Information support: MEYS, in cooperation with the TA CR, will support the implementation of a research study that will evaluate the impacts of the 2016 amendment on internal and external quality assurance processes in the educational activities of higher education institutions.



Information support: MEYS will strengthen communication with NAA. To that end, a joint working group will be set up which will meet regularly to ensure the exchange of information between the two institutions, help align their strategic orientation and support the implementation of the measures planned.



Information support: MEYS and NAA will involve representatives of higher education institutions in all discussions aimed at amending the Government Regulation on Standards for Accreditation, and they will discuss proposed changes with the representative bodies of higher education institutions in accordance with the law and in a way that takes into account their experience from practical operations in the areas concerned.



Accreditation: MEYS, in cooperation with NAA and higher education institutions, will evaluate the impacts of the current Government Regulation on Standards for Accreditation and the Government Regulation on Areas of Higher Education on quality assurance in artistic degree programmes. A discussion will be opened on possible additions to these documents so that they better reflect the specifics of art education.



Accreditation: NAA will strive to integrate into the European network of accreditation agencies and will take all necessary steps to obtain full membership in the European Network for Quality Assurance (ENQA) and to be registered in the European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR). NAA in cooperation with MEYS will take

measures to ensure compliance with the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area* (ESG).

The following points represent initial assumptions which may be rejected or modified based on the evaluation of previous experience with quality assurance under currently valid regulations:



Accreditation: In accordance with ESG, NAA will monitor the implementation of internal quality assurance systems at higher education institutions with institutional accreditation, and assess the extent to which their functioning in practice complies with the regulations and principles on the basis of which the accreditation was granted. NAA will provide higher education institutions with formative feedback and recommendations for further strengthening the quality and efficiency of their systems, especially with regard to their ability to guarantee the quality of teaching in all degree programmes.



Accreditation: NAA in cooperation with MEYS will strive to improve the effectiveness of the work of NAA's evaluation committees. It will adjust the rules for the selection of evaluators and the conditions provided to them so as to strengthen the professionalism of the evaluation process. The persons who carry out evaluations must have a good understanding of all related regulations and methodological guidelines, and be familiar with evaluating the quality of education. Evaluators who do not have this professional background will be provided with adequate training and methodological support. Also, membership in evaluation committees will be open not only to recognised experts in the different fields, but also to experts in the field of higher education pedagogy, quality assessment and the related disciplines. MEYS in cooperation with NAA will propose to the Government an amendment to the NAA Statute so as to increase the remuneration of evaluators to a level that corresponds to the importance of their work and the demands placed on them.



Information support: Persons who are involved in internal quality assurance at higher education institutions will be offered similar training opportunities by NAA as those offered to NAA's evaluators. At the same time, NAA will support sharing the experience of these experts through joint workshops or conferences and other forms of meetings. Education will focus, among other things, on using the graduate's profiles and the learning-outcome method in designing curricula. NAA will strengthen its activities in the area of methodological and information support for quality assurance of higher education institutions.



Accreditation: NAA in cooperation with MEYS will adjust the processes for evaluating applications for accreditation so that their administrative and technical component is separated from field-specific quality evaluation. Evaluators from among academic staff will not be burdened with unnecessary administrative work and checks of the fulfilment of formal requirements for the application and objective criteria (compliance with the rules for employees' FTE, allocated hours, spaces and more).



Accreditation: NAA in cooperation with MEYS will revise, simplify and technologically modernise the accreditation application forms in order to make them user-friendly and clear for both applicants and evaluators. In doing so, they will make use of the experience and good practice of higher education institutions which have created their own tools for the purposes of internal quality assurance. The appearance of the forms naturally focuses the attention of both applicants and evaluators, which is why they should be structured in a way that places emphasis on the aspects most important for evaluation and on the links between the graduate's profile, the curriculum and that conditions for its provision.



Accreditation: NAA will propose adjustments to its relevant regulations and internal processes in order to reduce the time required to process each application and to comply with the statutory time limits.



Accreditation: MEYS will open a discussion with NAA and higher education institutions on the possibility of accepting internationally recognised accreditations (e.g. AACSB, EQUIS or their equivalents in other areas) as equivalents to institutional accreditation under the Higher Education Act. If a solution is found that does not pose a risk to quality assurance and subsequent quality evaluation, MEYS will propose an amendment to the relevant legislation.

1.G STRENGTHEN THE INTERNATIONAL DIMENSION OF HIGHER EDUCATION

The internationalisation of higher education is a key tool for the development of students' professional and general competencies. Meeting foreign experts and students gives them an opportunity to significantly broaden their horizons, confront new perspectives and develop their communication skills in foreign languages, which are of great importance to their future professional and academic career. In addition, international mobility represents a fundamental formative period for students, in which they form their identity and learn to deal with life situations on their own.

Increasing the number of students who make use of foreign mobility opportunities is only one of the objectives – it is obvious that only a limited number of applicants will always personally participate in mobility programmes. Therefore, it is equally important to strengthen the internationalisation of the environment of higher education institutions as such ("domestic internationalisation"), i.e. to increase the number of foreign students and staff, to support their social integration and to moderate their cooperation with domestic colleagues.



Information support: As a separate annex to this document, the Strategy for the Internationalisation of Higher Education has been adopted by MEYS as a complementary document to the Strategic Plan that is equally binding. The internationalisation strategy has been developed in cooperation with the Czech National Agency for International Education and it forms a framework for further financial support for various types of mobilities, recruitment of foreign students and staff, strengthening cooperation with foreign partners, and other measures to support the development of the international profile of higher education institutions.

II. IMPROVE THE AVAILABILITY AND RELEVANCE OF FLEXIBLE FORMS OF EDUCATION

THE DEFINITION OF THE OBJECTIVE:

The growing dynamism of society, the economy and the labour market brings ever-increasing demands on the education of the population throughout their lives and on updating, increasing, deepening and expanding their qualifications. In the foreseeable future, it can be expected that entire economic sectors will disappear, relocate production outside the Czech Republic or, as a result of automation, radically reduce or change their demand for labour. On the other hand, entirely new industries and professions will emerge and develop into unforeseeable forms. All indications are that the citizens of the 21st century will change their job several times in the course of their life and will have to deal with many technological and social changes. Thanks to their unique infrastructure and know-how, higher education institutions should play a key role in their adaptation.

Flexible forms of education represent a way to increase and expand the qualifications of people for whom full-time study in accredited degree programmes is difficult to access, especially due to socio-economic, but also health, geographical and other barriers. Short courses and distance learning make it easier to reconcile study with professional, family and personal life and to better adapt to the specific needs of individual students, especially 'non-conventional' students. Promoting these forms of education is therefore one of the ways to reduce inequalities in access to higher education.

The aim in this area is to build a wide offer of further education that is provided through flexible forms both in accredited degree programmes leading to an academic degree (combined and distance learning) and in shorter courses and course modules (lifelong learning), and to improve the accessibility and quality of open educational resources for informal learning. The contribution of individual higher education institutions to implementing this objective may, of course, vary in terms of both nature and scope, and not all forms of education described here are relevant for all types of degree programmes and all fields. However, even areas that reasonably rely on intensive full-time teaching may have something to offer, for example in the field of further education or interdisciplinary programmes not preparing for regulated professions. Of course, the offer of education through flexible forms does not have to match the structure of full-time degree programmes at every higher education institution.

The offer of combined study must be further developed so that its structure, organisation and teaching methods meet the needs of potential applicants, i.e. so that it makes it possible to reconciling study with work and family life, reflects the results of previous learning and flexibly adapts to changes in demand. At the same time, a well-designed combined study gives a chance of successful study to those who have to work extensively while studying to cover their living costs and, due to time constraints, are unable to fulfil their study obligations in full-time study.

At present, distance learning is only carried out in a few degree programmes, and it therefore represents a minority method of providing education in the Czech Republic. However, its combination with digital teaching methods has significant potential not only for domestic but also for foreign students from all over the world.

In the case of lifelong learning, the priority is to support the development of its offer, especially where it helps adapt to new technologies and societal changes, supports emerging industries and stimulates innovation of production processes, but also where it develops basic competencies that are necessary for further learning. Lifelong learning may take the form of short intensive training courses or summer schools, as well as continuous months-long courses, online education e.g. in the format of Massive Open Online Courses (MOOC) or a modular system of consecutive activities of various types. These courses can offer both the acquisition of a new qualification, for example for entry into a regulated profession, and the deepening of the professional competencies of experts who already work in the given field. One important segment is corporate education that is provided to businesses and other organisations based on their specific demand. At the same time, higher education institutions should focus on the fields in which they actually carry out research and creative activities, and on courses that develop competencies, whose level corresponds to higher education.

However, education that is provided through distance methods is also relevant in full-time degree programmes. As shown by the COVID-19 pandemic, which interfered with the final phase of the preparation of this Strategic Plan, higher education institutions are prepared to implement a large portion of their degree programmes and subjects online. This opens up opportunities for a significantly greater use of *blended learning* methods, i.e. such organisation of teaching where full-time and distance methods are used synergistically. This usually means replacing frontal lectures with videos or other media that give students the flexibility to watch the content anytime, anywhere, even repeatedly or with interruptions, depending on their needs. At the same time, this frees up space to use precious time in full-time teaching for discussion, teamwork or practical teaching.

Number of participants in re-skilling and up-skilling courses of at least 15 hours



Chart 4: The number of participants in lifelong learning courses at public higher education institutions that are oriented towards the pursuit of an occupation, with a duration of at least 15 hours, 2010–2018. Data source: annual reports of higher education institutions.

Even though the total number of participants is not negligible, it has not shown steady growth in recent years.

The following operational objectives are assigned to this priority objective:

- A.** Increase the use of distance learning methods in full-time degree programmes;
- B.** Stimulate higher education institutions to develop their offer and innovate the methods of flexible forms of education, including education provided online;
- C.** Assure the quality of education provided through flexible forms while respecting their specifics;
- D.** Enable better reconciliation of study with family and work life, and creating conditions for successful study in a combined form;
- E.** Improve the recognition of prior learning outcomes in further study;
- F.** Increase the information value of evidence of learning outcomes achieved in lifelong learning to employers;
- G.** Promote the offer of lifelong learning through career counselling that is provided to students and the general public and in cooperation with the Labour Office of the Czech Republic.

OPERATIONAL OBJECTIVES AND MEASURES:

2.A INCREASE THE USE OF DISTANCE LEARNING METHODS IN FULL-TIME DEGREE PROGRAMMES

Blended learning is a well-established term for the synergistic combination of full-time and distance learning methods with an emphasis on taking advantage of the benefits of both forms, which makes it possible to achieve better efficiency and quality of education. The benefits of full-time teaching are perceived mainly in situations where practical acquisition of skills and intensive interaction between students and teachers may take place – in discussions, teamwork, work in laboratories and specialised classrooms. By contrast, distance methods are preferred where the aim is merely a one-way transfer of knowledge. This is by no means a new thing for higher education institutions – many of them have experimentally combined the traditional self-study of literature with interactive educational materials, videos and other possibilities. However, what is common in some programmes is not yet systematically used in many others, and many members of academic staff are either sceptical about these options or lack adequate support for the use of modern technologies and other tools. Therefore, the aim is to innovate, expand and systematically use existing practices across areas of education (although the share of teaching that can be done in a distance form is naturally smaller in some than in others) and to create standards and procedures to ensure that the application of these methods does not reduce the quality of education.

One risk associated with the online provision of education that needs to be prevented is the weakening of students' social integration and the increased demands on their self-organisation and discipline, which may result in an increased rate of academic failure. Socially or economically disadvantaged students constitute a particularly vulnerable group, as they may have only limited access to the technical equipment required and inadequate background for studying from home.



Financing [SB]: MEYS will support joint projects of higher education institutions that consist in sharing experience with blended learning and are aimed at developing its methods, especially with regard to the experience gained in connection with the COVID-19 pandemic. Support will also be provided for preparing institutional quality standards for blended learning and relevant supporting documents (sets of recommendations, technical manuals, etc.) and services for staff and students of higher education institutions.



Financing [SB]: MEYS will support the development of blended learning at higher education institutions, including building facilities for the preparation of digital materials (including software purchases), strengthening the competencies of higher education institutions' staff in the use of distance learning and evaluation methods, developing support services and acquiring tools to carry out verification of online learning outcomes (*online proctoring* and others).



Expected measures at HEI level: In areas where – given their nature – it is possible, striving to increase the share of educational activities that is implemented in the form of blended learning, increase the share of lectures streamed online, and improve the availability of study materials in electronic form. Looking for innovative solutions that will help improve the effectiveness and quality of education and evaluation that is implemented using distance forms, and involving both experts and higher education institutions' staff and students in the preparation of these measures. Creating platforms for sharing experience and mutual support of higher education institutions' staff in the implementation of blended learning methods in practice.



Expected measures at HEI level: Paying increased attention to vulnerable groups of students that may lack adequate background and material equipment to access electronic educational resources and perform distance learning tasks. Looking for suitable measures to prevent academic failure and mitigate social and other inequalities in a situation where a significant part of education is implemented in distance form.

2.B STIMULATE HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS TO DEVELOP THEIR OFFER AND INNOVATE THE METHODS OF FLEXIBLE FORMS OF EDUCATION, INCLUDING EDUCATION PROVIDED ONLINE

Nowadays, higher education institutions show little interest in lifelong learning, which is not considered an important part of their mission. Academic staff consider the implementation of courses to be extra work, often at the expense of their personal time. While the provision of courses constitutes an additional source of income for higher education institutions, its amount is usually negligible compared to other sources. Today, online study can be provided

through degree programmes in a distance form, but only a few of these are currently being offered – schools are discouraged from creating such programmes by high up-front costs, insufficient infrastructure and know-how, and low demand, which is due to poor awareness of this form of study among potential applicants. Scepticism of online study is also caused by the difficult verification of learning outcomes which, in turn, causes these programmes to be viewed as less demanding and thus of lower quality.

One important objective in this area is to remove these barriers, provide financial and organisational support to those staff members and components of higher education institutions who are actively involved in developing flexible forms of education, and strengthen higher education institutions' financial motivation for providing them.



Financing [SB]: MEYS will take into account the scope of lifelong learning that is implemented for the purpose of expanding and deepening qualifications as one of the performance and quality indicators when calculating the contribution for public higher education institutions' activities. For the purposes of financing, the courses will be registered by higher education institutions themselves, and these will also ensure compliance with quality standards. The institutions that provide lifelong learning courses will thus be rewarded indirectly, through an increased contribution for their activities. This indicator may not be applied to all segments of higher education institutions.



Financing [SB, ESIF]: MEYS will support the establishment of organisational units at higher education institutions that provide flexible forms of education (combined and distance forms of study, and lifelong learning courses) and that carry out support services for other components of higher education institutions in order to improve the quality and relevance of these programmes. The aim is to support organisational units for which the development of flexible forms of education will be their primary task, which will concentrate didactic and technical know-how and innovate educational methods, but which will also work closely with other components of the higher education institution and disseminate experience and good practice. A special subject of support will be joint organisational units of several higher education institutions, which will bring together the most active pioneers and innovators in this field. ESIF funds will be used to support development activities such as the introduction, setting up and pilot testing of services, and measures to improve their quality and effectiveness.



Information support: MEYS will prepare a legal opinion concerning the conditions under which lifelong learning courses are implemented with regard to public support, value added tax, etc., in order to ease higher education institutions' concerns and clarify the legal framework of this activity. MEYS will provide higher education institutions with related information and methodological support, e.g. in the form of workshops.



Financing [ESIF]: MEYS will support building infrastructure for creating and providing online education and for verifying learning outcomes in these courses and programmes. Support will be provided both for acquiring instrumentation and software equipment (e.g. recording studios, software for verifying the identity of students online) and for building professional facilities and developing new tools and methods.



Financing [SB]: MEYS will strive to coordinate with the Ministry of Industry and Trade, the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs and other relevant public authorities in setting the rules for supporting lifelong learning. By its nature, lifelong learning is an interdepartmental issue that brings together the perspectives of employers, (potential) employees and public and private education providers, only some of which are schools that organisationally fall within the purview of MEYS. Interdepartmental cooperation is therefore a necessary precondition for creating a functional system of lifelong learning.



Information support: As part of the Award of the Minister of Education, Youth and Sports for outstanding educational activities at a higher education institution, MEYS will recognise excellent education in flexible forms, including lifelong learning courses provided online. The award will contribute to the visibility of good practice and support higher education institutions' staff who work in this marginalised area.



Expected measures at HEI level: Where they are able to offer excellent lifelong learning courses, presenting their offer in the international market. Courses that are provided internationally, e.g. online or in the form of summer schools, can be a significant source of income for the providing institution, as well as a means of building its reputation, integrating into international networks, and a way to reach potential future students. Using internationally recognised platforms to provide MOOCs, including the European Multiple MOOC Aggregator (EMMA) project.



Expected measures at HEI level: To the widest extent possible, provide the public with the free open access to educational resources created as part of the activities of higher education institutions. As in the case of open access to research and development results, publishing online study materials, tools and publications and making them available for use for educational purposes both by other institutions and, above all, by individuals within lifelong learning. Applying this approach unconditionally, especially where the development of study materials, tools or publications has been supported by public sources.

2.C ASSURE THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED THROUGH FLEXIBLE FORMS WHILE RESPECTING THEIR SPECIFICS

The quality of education provided in flexible forms (including lifelong learning courses) must be evaluated and ensured in the same way as in full-time study, yet at the same time, the demands applied to it must correspond to its specifics. Combined or distance study requires adequate availability of educational materials and study aids more than full-time study, and it is necessary to consistently verify that the choice of educational methods corresponds to the nature of the desired learning outcomes. However, flexible forms of education may also build on students' previous or concurrent work experience, so the logic underlying the design of curricula will be different. In order to improve quality, it is desirable to better define the requirements that are placed on education provided in flexible forms and to take these consistently into account when evaluating applications for accreditation of degree programmes.



Accreditation: MEYS in cooperation with the NAA will propose an update to the Government Regulation on Standards for Accreditation, in which it will expand and further detail the requirements for the accreditation of degree programmes in combined and distance forms so that their specifics are adequately taken into account and the requirements for their implementation are clearly outlined. The updated standards will provide higher education institutions with greater certainty as to the requirements that will be placed on their applications, thus making the accreditation process more transparent and predictable and helping to unify the decision-making practices of evaluators. When assessing the quality of degree programmes in combined and distance form, it is necessary to thoroughly assess the suitability of the choice of educational methods, including the use of student-centred methods, the availability of quality study aids, and the robustness of the methods used to verify educational outcomes. Especially in the case of distance learning, it is necessary to ensure that the achievement of the set learning outcomes is demonstrably verified for all graduates. MEYS will open a discussion with NAA about adjusting the requirement for the minimum scope of direct teaching in the combined form of study.



Accreditation: MEYS in cooperation with the NAA will propose a modification to the process of evaluating applications for the accreditation of degree programmes so that each form of study is registered as a separate degree programme and assessed separately while taking into account the specific criteria of quality. This will achieve compliance with Section 44(a) of the Higher Education Act, which does not envisage the existence of degree programmes with more than one form. At the same time, however, both institutions will look for ways to reduce as much as possible the administrative burden associated with applications for the accreditation of related degree programmes (not only similar programmes in different forms, but also e.g. of different types or taught in different languages), and they will propose that one person should be allowed to become the guarantor of several degree programmes at the same time, provided that the degree programmes have similar content but a different form or language of teaching. Applications for the accreditation of combined and distance forms of study should therefore be assessed separately from the full-time form, with an emphasis on the specific requirements on their security. Study in a combined form must not be perceived as a mere "weekend version" of full-time study, with an identically structured curriculum, but with lower demands on students' direct participation in teaching. A necessary precondition for implementing this measure consists in facilitating transfers between related degree programmes that are implemented in different forms, so that a student transferring from full-time to combined or distance form of study is not considered unsuccessful. This modification does not need to apply to doctoral study.



Accreditation: MEYS will prepare an update to the Government Regulation on Standards for Accreditation – in the section concerning the standards for internal accreditation and in the requirements for the institutional environment in the accreditation of a degree programme, it will add that the internal system of quality assurance and evaluation must also cover lifelong learning courses as part of educational activities. Although this obligation already exists under applicable legislation, it is not always fully reflected and its fulfilment is usually not reviewed when evaluating applications for accreditation. At the same time, processes for the internal quality assurance of lifelong learning must maintain a high degree of flexibility in order to make it possible for the supply of courses to be innovated and adapted to demand quickly.



Information support: MEYS will support organising conferences and workshops that will open a discussion on the organisational models for study in combined and distance forms, and arrange the transfer of good practice. The concept of study at different institutions is now very heterogeneous and many designers of degree programmes lack inspiration and awareness of appropriate teaching methods and organisation of study. Based on domestic and foreign experience, a manual can be created summarising good practice and practical recommendations for designing these degree programmes.

2.D ENABLE BETTER RECONCILIATION OF STUDY WITH FAMILY AND WORK LIFE, AND CREATE CONDITIONS FOR SUCCESSFUL STUDY IN A COMBINED FORM

An important source of academic failure and a factor that reduces the quality of learning in the combined form of study is the fact that it is difficult to reconcile study with family and work life in terms of the time required. In the Czech Republic, the option of studying “part-time” is not specified – it is common in many European countries and it allows students to spread their study obligations over a longer period of time. The aim is to propose measures that will open up more pathways to attaining education, without reducing the requirements for learning outcomes, thus supporting the reconciliation of the different life roles and contributing to increased study completion rate.



Regulation: MEYS will open a discussion on the possibilities of creating a “part-time” version of study. The discussion may or may not result in a proposal for amendments to legislation. The proposal may also include a revision of the definition of a “dependent child who is systematically preparing for their future profession” under the Act on State Social Support (the “status as a student”). This status currently includes all students in full-time and combined form under the age of 26, and it entitles them to a number of benefits, including state-funded health insurance, tax credits, reduced fare, and more. The initial versions for discussion are provided in the form of suggestions in Annex 1.



Expected measures at HEI level: Ensuring the availability of support services that will enable parents-carers and other vulnerable groups to participate fully in study in the combined form.

2.E IMPROVE THE RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING OUTCOMES IN FURTHER STUDY

Students entering any form of study already have a very diverse previous experience, whether acquired through formal or non-formal education, or through informal learning in practice or in leisure time. This heterogeneity can be expected to continue increasing, and the way in which education is organised must therefore respond to this situation in order to be relevant to the needs of students. The processes for recognising prior learning outcomes must be set up in such a way that students are not forced to fulfil study obligations that have no added value for them, and instead they have a chance to compensate for their weaknesses that have not been covered by their prior education.

In doing so, it is necessary to separate two types of recognition – on the one hand, taking into account previous education that has been certified by a trusted institution (a higher education institution or other educational or certification agency, for example recognition of courses completed during previous studies, either in the Czech Republic or abroad), on the other hand, validating prior learning outcomes for which there are no records but whose outcomes

can be verified (e.g. students who have acquired professional knowledge and skills in practice or in hobby courses in which they were not awarded a trustworthy certificate of the learning outcomes achieved, may be allowed to take examinations in relevant subjects even on extraordinary dates and without the need to attend teaching). In the former case, the aim is to set up processes that will allow most students to have their prior education recognised without unnecessary delays and administrative barriers, and that will not be burdensome for either party. In the latter case, the validation must be based on verifying the educational outcomes achieved, for example through an examination or a portfolio assessment. A relevant form of validation is also an examination of professional qualifications within the National Register of Qualifications (“NRQ”) pursuant to the Act on the recognition of outcomes of further education or through a portfolio assessment.



Information support: MEYS will create a set of recommendations for the procedures for recognising prior learning outcomes in further study, and support the exchange of good practice between various higher education institutions. In developing the recommendations, MEYS will build on domestic and especially foreign experience, taking into account the recommendations of international organisations and experts.



Expected measures at HEI level: Developing internal systems for recognising prior learning outcomes according to the recommendations of the European University Association, the ECTS Users’ Guide and other relevant documents. Recognition should be based on the Higher Education Qualifications Framework. Specifying processes for processing applications for the recognition of prior learning in internal regulations, and setting reasonable time limits for their assessment.

2.F INCREASE THE INFORMATION VALUE OF EVIDENCE OF LEARNING OUTCOMES ACHIEVED IN LIFE-LONG LEARNING TO EMPLOYERS

Although graduates are already issued certificates of completion of lifelong learning courses, these do not always provide employers with enough information about what their holders actually know and can do. The aim is to strengthen the recognition of lifelong learning outcomes by employers through increasing the information value of certificates and, in turn, increase the attractiveness of lifelong learning to applicants.



Information support: MEYS will create the recommended structure of the certificate of completion of a lifelong learning course, which will contain information on the scope of the course in term of the number of hours and credits, and the learning outcomes achieved. When creating it, MEYS will use the *Common Microcredential Framework* adopted by the European MOOC Consortium as a starting point. The recommendation will include awarding credits even in courses where it is not common practice today. A special type of certificate may be reserved for longer structured study, equivalent to what is known as short-cycle/non-degree study in some countries around the world.



Information support: Through the National Pedagogical Institute of the Czech Republic, MEYS will inform higher education institutions about the NRQ system, its importance for the recognition of lifelong learning outcomes and the possibilities of its use by higher education institutions. Higher education institutions may actively participate in creating new qualifications within NRQ, obtain the status of persons authorised to carry out examinations, or provide courses leading to the acquisition of professional competencies that are needed in order to obtain the qualifications described in NRQ.



Expected measures at HEI level: Participating in creating new qualifications at qualification levels 5 to 8 within the National Register of Qualifications, especially in fields and specialisations in which rapid technological changes are taking place, in newly formed industries or in areas in which qualifications are required for the exercise of a profession. Obtaining authorisations to carry out examinations within the National Register of Qualifications and conducting these examinations mainly for graduates of lifelong learning courses.



Expected measures at HEI level: As in the case of graduates of lifelong learning courses, issuing certificates of completed subjects to students in degree programmes who fail to complete their studies. These certificates (equivalent to the Diploma Supplements for successfully completed studies) should contain information on the number of credits for each subject and the learning outcomes achieved, thus facilitating their recognition in further studies and in the labour market. Where a group of subjects form a comprehensive portion of study that covers a well-defined group of competencies relevant to the performance of certain professions, separate certificates (*nano-degrees or micro-credentials*) may also be issued for them.

2.G PROMOTE THE OFFER OF LIFELONG LEARNING THROUGH CAREER COUNSELLING THAT IS PROVIDED TO STUDENTS AND THE GENERAL PUBLIC AND IN COOPERATION WITH THE LABOUR OFFICE OF THE CZECH REPUBLIC

The offer of lifelong learning is broad and, at first sight, potential learners necessarily find it confusing. The system thus cannot develop unless applicants are provided with accessible counselling and support services that will allow them to identify their needs and the appropriate offer of further education. Obviously, higher education institutions cannot cover the need for counselling for the general public, but they can play an important role within the wider ecosystem of services, in which they will focus in particular on people who already have a higher education degree and are interested in developing competencies at high qualification levels. When reaching out to potential learners, higher education institutions must also cooperate with other well-established actors in the system, especially with organisational units of the Labour Office of the Czech Republic.



Financing [ESIF]: MEYS will support the development of career counselling in relation to further learning, which is provided by higher education institutions to their students, graduates and potential students. If a national career guidance network is set up in the future and supported from public resources, higher education institutions will be allowed to participate in it.



Expected measures at HEI level: As part of lifelong learning, offering mentoring and coaching for graduates – especially at the beginning of their career – with a focus on their further career, professional and personal development. Through personalised services, facilitating graduates' transition to the labour market and improving their access to further education, while strengthening the links between higher education institutions and practice, which may become the basis for further cooperation and knowledge transfer.



Expected measures at HEI level: Directly approaching regional branches and contact offices of the Labour Office of the Czech Republic and working with them to offer lifelong learning as retraining courses to job seekers pursuant to the Employment Act. Courses that are provided by higher education institutions may be considered as retraining courses without further accreditation, especially in the regime of 'requested retraining', for which applicants may currently receive a contribution of up to CZK 50 000 from public resources.

III. IMPROVE THE EFFICIENCY AND QUALITY OF DOCTORAL STUDIES

THE DEFINITION OF THE OBJECTIVE:

A quality system of doctoral studies is a basic factor in the development of higher education and the research sector. Well-prepared graduates are the driving force behind social and cultural development and the knowledge-based economy, whether they pursue purely scientific careers or apply their know-how in other sectors where they will seek and implement innovative solutions to technological and societal problems.

At present, the Czech Republic has a highly above-average number of students in doctoral degree programmes (“DDPs”) compared to international figures given the size of Czech higher education; however, due to their low success rate, the number of graduates is slightly below average. The average length of successful study is almost 5.5 years and exceeds the standard period of study by about 50%. Students who remain in the system for 8 or more years are no exception. Only about 7% of students complete their studies within the regular time limit and the overall success rate is around 40% – this means that there are more unsuccessful students than those successful ones.³

The aim is to fundamentally increase the efficiency of the system both in terms of resources that have been invested and in terms of time and potential of students and their supervisors. In the long run, the number of graduates should be maintained at the current (approximately 2,000 graduates per year in full-time and part-time degree programmes); however, the number of admitted candidates selected based on clearly defined qualitative criteria will be reduced, they will be provided with quality support and facilities, they will focus more intensively on their studies and their dissertation research, and as a result, their success rate will increase and the average time needed for successful study will shorten. This means that the aim is to strengthen the motivation and efforts of all key actors in doctoral degree programmes to increase the success rate and quality, especially of students themselves, of their supervisors, and of individual levels of the higher education institution management. The proposed measures will increase the responsibility of higher education institutions for the success rate and quality of their doctoral study systems that will be balanced by an increased autonomy public fund management.

A better support for doctoral students, both in terms of finance and in terms of professional guidance and support services, will make Czech higher education a more attractive destination for those interested in scientific careers and in international competition, and will support its position at least in the Central European context. One of the values is the openness of doctoral degree programmes both for foreign applicants and for the horizontal mobility of applicants between individual higher education institutions, which will help weaken academic inbreeding and increase the internationalization of the entire system.

³ An “unsuccessful student” is defined here as any person who has started at least one doctoral degree programme but has not properly completed any under Section 55 of the Higher Education Act regardless of the factual reasons for its termination and study results. Therefore, students who terminate their studies at their own discretion are not distinguished from those whose studies are terminated due to a failure to fulfil their study obligation – a similar distinction cannot be reliably made based on administrative data

PhD graduation rates

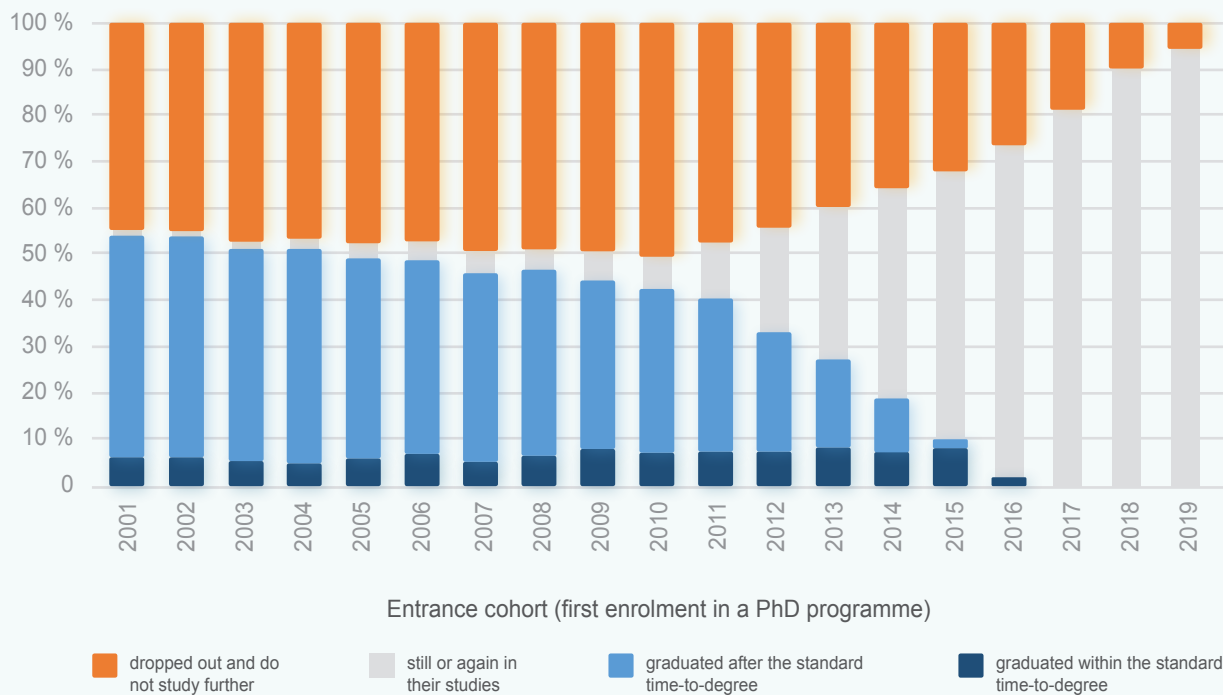


Chart 5: The graduation rate of students in doctoral degree programmes as of 31 December 2019 for individual entrance cohorts. Data source: Student register.

Each column shows whether persons who entered their first doctoral degree programme in the relevant year completed at least one (not necessarily the first) degree programme successfully by the end of 2019, and if not, whether they continue their studies now or not. Only a very small portion of students complete their doctoral degree programme within the standard time limit and some enrol in a programme study repeatedly. Therefore, it can be expected that a substantial portion of students who entered their first doctoral studies in 2011 or later will successfully complete their studies only in the future and the success rate of this cohort will be around 45–50%, similarly to the past. The aim of the Strategic Plan is to increase the success rate and at the same time reduce the number of enrolled students so that the annual number of graduates is maintained.

The following operational objectives are assigned to this priority objective:

- A.** To provide students in full-time doctoral degree programmes with sufficient financial conditions for quality study;
- B.** To offer excellent candidates who are interested in doctoral degree programmes above-standard motivating financial conditions;
- C.** To strengthen the quality, openness and internationalization of doctoral degree programmes;
- D.** To improve the conditions for successful study, including support for reconciling study and family life, and to strengthen the social integration of doctoral students.

OPERATIONAL OBJECTIVES AND MEASURES:

3.A TO PROVIDE STUDENTS IN FULL-TIME DOCTORAL DEGREE PROGRAMMES WITH SUFFICIENT FINANCIAL CONDITIONS FOR QUALITY STUDY

Full-time student allowances must enable students to make study and dissertation research their real priority without having to obtain funds from other work, whether within or outside their higher education institution. Student allowances must cover students' living expenses and enable them to start a family. A sufficient amount of the student allowance is also a pre-requisite for the demand from the higher education institution or the state with respect to time and efforts dedicated to the degree programme and with respect to a higher quality of dissertation research. The review of the funding mechanism for doctoral degree programmes will strengthen the autonomy of higher education institutions and support them in making strategic decisions about how many applicants should be admitted to a degree programme and what the amount of student allowance offered to them should be. One of the results of this change should be a slight increase in the selectivity nature of doctoral studies and at the same time, an increase in study success and the shortening of study time so that the annual total number of graduates does not significantly drop below the current level.



Regulation: The MEYS will propose an amendment to the Higher Education Act. This amendment will authorize the Ministry to set the minimum amount of doctoral student allowance. The minimum amount of the student allowance will be determined after discussions with higher education authorities, but will be significantly higher than the average monthly value of the contribution to the doctoral student allowance paid under indicator C in 2020. The long-term goal is to link the minimum amount to an appropriate reference value, such as to a relative amount compared to the average salary or the median salary for selected jobs. This amount will include all student allowances provided by a higher education institution under Section 91 (4) of the Higher Education Act⁴; higher education institutions will be able to use several different sources of funding for student allowances. However, the form must be maintained: student allowances cannot be replaced by remuneration for work. The minimum amount of student allowances in combined and distance learning will not be determined.



Funding [SB]: The MEYS will transfer the entire volume of the existing indicator C (student allowances for students in DDP) or a part of it into budget line I, in which case the remaining portion of indicator C would include only funds for students supported in a national competition where applicable (see below). This transfer will be divided between individual institutions according to a key reflecting the level of indicator C for each education institution in the past, or the number of successful doctoral graduates, and this mechanism will be determined before the introduction of a minimum student allowance as stated below and will be consulted with higher education institutions' representatives. In the years to come, funds for student allowances will no longer be provided separately; this will enhance the autonomy of higher education institution when deciding on how many students they will accept and what amounts of student allowances (above the set minimum) they will provide.

⁴ A precise definition of different types of student allowances that will be taken into account when assessing the minimum amount may be the subject of negotiations when the regulation is being prepared.



Regulation: The MEYS defines a minimum time allowance reserved for full-time DDP students for the fulfilment of their study obligations and the implementation of dissertation research, while this measure may also apply to students who study in foreign languages. Other activities at a higher education institutions, incl. participation in research and professional activities that are not directly related to study and student's dissertation research, or in teaching⁵ and administrative activities, may be required only under an employment relationship and beyond the above obligation and must not condition the student allowance payment.⁶ The MEYS will propose an update to the Government Regulation on Accreditation Standard that will exclude activities other than actual training and the implementation of dissertation research from the study obligations of students in doctoral degree programmes.



Regulation: The MEYS will initiate negotiations with the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs and other relevant partners on social security for DDP students, especially with respect to the entitlement to maternity allowance and the variability of parental allowance.



Transitional measures: The measures described above will apply only to students newly enrolled in degree programmes who have already been admitted to the new system. Higher education institutions are recommended to compensate the lower amount of student allowances for existing senior students from their other sources (budget line I, Long-term conceptual development of the research organization (LCDRO), the Arts Fund, specific higher education research – access to funds from internal grant agencies may be limited to senior students only during the transitional period), but the student allowance will be compensated only to active students who comply with the increased demands on results and time dedicated to study and dissertation research, in other words to students who study under similar conditions as newly admitted students.

3.B OFFER EXCELLENT MOTIVATIONAL FINANCIAL CONDITIONS TO EXCELLENT CANDIDATES FOR DOCTORAL STUDIES

Complementary to the general increase of the student allowance, it is necessary to strive to support excellence and stimulate competition between individual institutions for talented people interested in research careers. A targeted support of excellent doctoral students, which will be attractive even in international comparison, will strengthen the ability of Czech science to compete for young talents with the corporate sector and foreign workplaces, at least in the Central European context. The pre-requisite for this is a method of selecting supported doctoral students that on the one hand is transparent and fair and contains a strong element of independent external evaluation, while being administratively and procedurally as demanding as possible for applicants, higher education institutions and public administration. The national system of excellent doctoral students support for higher education institutions will bring not only financial motivation, but also a significant factor of reputation – the share of supported students can be considered as one of the indicators of the higher education institution's attractiveness for young talents.

⁵ An exception to this rule may be provided for a transitional period for degree programmes where the involvement of DDP students in teaching is part of their study obligations according to the currently valid accreditation.

⁶ Based on international best practice, the time dedicated to study and dissertation research should be set so that DDP students dedicate an average of 32 hours per week to them. Self-teaching is not part of the study obligations.



Funding [SB]: The MEYS will open a discussion with HEI representatives regarding the possibilities of creating a national competition for applicants or students in DDP, which would bring successful applicants a significant increase in student allowances compared to student allowances provided by the higher education institutions. This competition should be highly selective and have a strong international element. Applications for support should be submitted in English and their evaluation should be provided by expert panels including foreign experts. The parameters of the competition, including the date of its launch and the method of securing organizational expenses, will be subject to further discussions. A condition for organizing such competition is sufficient available resources at the national level.

3.C STRENGTHEN THE QUALITY, OPENNESS AND INTERNATIONALIZATION OF DOCTORAL DEGREE PROGRAMMES

Doctoral studies are primarily a preparation for research and academic careers, and therefore, their focus lies in the development of professional knowledge and skills directly related to the implementation of research and development. However, the development of more general skills and integration into the professional community at the national and international level is also crucial for the successful employment of graduates. Quality science is global in nature, and therefore, doctoral degree programme must stretch over national borders.



Regulation: The MEYS will propose an amendment to Section 58 of the Higher Education Act that will cancel the obligation of higher education institutions to set fees for study in doctoral degree programmes provided in a foreign language. This will reflect the markedly individual nature of doctoral degree programme and remove the barrier between domestic and foreign (foreign-language) students. The aim of this measure is to strengthen the internationalization of Czech research and development from the earliest stages of researchers' careers and to emphasize that every dissertation project must be strongly anchored in an international context.



Information support: The MEYS will conduct surveys among DDP students and DDP graduates at regular intervals, considering the implementation of longitudinal data collection via a panel. The surveys will provide information needed both for an optimal setting of the parameters of the measures and for the evaluation of their impact. Survey results and anonymous data will also be provided to higher education institutions.



Expected measures at the at HEI level: Strengthen external and international elements in the evaluation of learning outcomes and research of DDP students. Higher education institutions should address foreign experts who are not employees of a given institutions to serve as readers for dissertations and members of commissions for their dissertation defence. The aim is to strengthen the relevance of dissertation research and to ensure independent external examination of the results of students' work and increase the pressure on the quality of their preparation.



Funding [ESIF]: The MEYS will support pilot verification of the principles described above.



Expected measures at the at HEI level: To define requirements for the international mobility of doctoral students and, in fields where this is possible, for professional internships of doctoral students in enterprises and other relevant organizations. To enable students caring for close relatives and to enable them to fulfil these responsibilities in a way that is accessible to them and to enable them to complete their studies properly.



Expected measures at the at HEI level: An internal regulation stipulates the qualification requirements for the supervisor, the supervisor's standard defining his/her tasks, the scope of responsibilities and compliance with this standard, and the maximum possible number of doctoral students under each supervisor in order

to ensure adequate professional support for doctoral students. The success rate of supervised doctoral students, their creative results and employment after graduation should be taken into account during the evaluation of employees who are supervisors, and during habilitation and appointment procedures.⁷



Expected measures at the at HEI level: To accept a set of articles accepted for publication in major peer-reviewed journals, possibly accompanied by a summary theoretical introduction setting individual publication outputs into a broader context, as a legitimate form of dissertation. This procedure is in accordance with good practice proven abroad and also in the Czech Republic in many fields.



Expected measures at the at HEI level: To moderate the transition of DDP graduates to subsequent careers. To actively integrate students into expert networks, including international ones, inform them about career opportunities in academia and in professional positions outside it, and provide them with support services when preparing applications for grant schemes and selection procedures, no later than during the last two years of doctoral studies.

3.D IMPROVE THE CONDITIONS FOR SUCCESSFUL STUDY, INCLUDING SUPPORT FOR RECONCILING STUDY AND FAMILY LIFE, AND STRENGTHEN THE SOCIAL INTEGRATION OF DOCTORAL STUDENTS

Increasing doctoral student allowances will help improve their academic success, but its effect will be only limited unless accompanied with other measures and support services that strengthen the social and academic integration of doctoral students, better define their position within the higher education institution and allow them to better align their study duties with care for close persons, especially descendants. Persons leaving academic careers at an early stage due to the care of young children, or other close persons, mean a significant loss of talent and unused potential in terms of research and development in the Czech Republic.



Financing [SB or ESIF]: The MEYS will support the development of support services for DDP students, the centralization of these services at the level of the faculty or HEI (“doctoral schools”), and mutual cooperation between departments that provide these services. These services may include both administrative and research support (research services provided by libraries, assistance with foreign mobility, support during the preparation of project applications, and subsequent project management, including financial management, etc.), and career services, psychological support and mentoring at a personal level. The development of faculty and university workplaces should aim especially at increasing the quality and availability of services, improving the social integration of doctoral students (among other things through the organization of student conferences and other events), strengthening interdisciplinary cooperation, and creating facilities for the development of competencies common to doctoral students across disciplines relevant to education and their future application in the research and non-research sectors.



Expected measures at the at HEI level: Describe the rights and obligations of students in DDPs within the limits set by legislation, and create internal mechanisms for the protection of doctoral students and a fair solution to possible disputes with supervisors and other superiors that they may have. The position of supervisors towards DDP students is very strong and carries with it the risk of abuse, which must be systematically prevented, for example by creating the position of an ombudsman for doctoral studies. Defining the position of doctoral students is also important for strengthening their identity that is now often halfway between students and university staff. The starting point in this respect may especially be *The European Charter for Researchers and the Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers*, which stipulate, among other things, that “all researchers pursuing the research profession should be recognized as members of the pro-

⁷ The quality of cooperation between a doctoral student and his/her supervisor is a crucial factor for the quality of the doctoral study and must be supported by adequate internal mechanisms. It is therefore necessary, on the one hand, to define what is expected from supervisors and motivate them to work with doctoral students, and, on the other hand, to provide them with adequate resources and support, including methodological guidance.

fessional groups and should be treated accordingly. This should be the case at the beginning of their career, in particular at postgraduate level, and then at all levels, regardless of their classification at national level (e.g. a staff member, a postgraduate student, a doctoral fellow, an official).⁸



Information support: The MEYS will continue to conduct questionnaire and other surveys among DDP students and graduates in order to provide comparable information on their conditions, background, and employment. The MEYS will provide empirical data for evaluating the impacts of the measures that have been taken and will be involved in further policy-making based on data both at the national level and at individual higher education institutions.



Expected measures at the HEI level: To actively help the reconciliation between DDPs and work at the beginning of academic careers and family life. To support childcare services (kindergartens, children's groups) and to adjust career rules and internal grant schemes so that parenthood can be a normal part of the life of doctoral students.



Expected measures at the HEI level: To provide students in DDPs with an adequate working space, including social facilities, and access to the necessary instrumentation and other equipment so that they can carry out their study and research activities on the premises of the higher education institution or a partner research organizations. To strive for a comfortable and stimulating environment that will support the natural integration of doctoral students into the life of the academic community and the research team.

8 Commission Recommendation of 11 March 2005 on the European Charter for Researchers and on a Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers.

IV. STRENGTHEN STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT AND THE EFFECTIVE USE OF CAPACITIES IN RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT AT HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

THE DEFINITION OF THE OBJECTIVE:

Higher education institutions in the Czech Republic are, alongside the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic, one of the highest performing segments in fundamental research, and increasingly, in applied research as well. Unlike the Academy of Sciences, institutions and other types of research organisations, higher education institutions carry out research and development (R&D) in close ties with educational activities, resulting in a whole range of specifics. Both teaching and research are mutually inseparable at higher education institutions, and the degree of their interconnection itself serves as an indicator of a university's level of quality. Higher education institutions are, at the same time, the only institutions where the future generation of both researchers and specialists for many other positions are systematically prepared and trained. Unlike other research organizations, higher education institutions cannot narrowly specialize only in disciplines in which they achieve excellent results, as they must systematically develop and cultivate a wide spectrum of disciplines instead. The specific nature of university research also affects the way it is evaluated and funded.

University research conducted by academic staff and their teams not only contributes to learning about the world around us, but it also serves as an example for university students, who learn a scientific approach to problem solving through observation and by taking part in a scientific work process. It is taking a scientific approach to the world around us that defines a university environment regardless of whether it is used in particular degree programmes for training excellent future scientists and innovators, or thousands of specialists for various sectors of our economy. The scientific view of the world is a tool of rational progress, and the task of higher education institutions is to pass this approach on to as large a proportion of the population as possible and develop it further.

The scientific way of working is a transferable competence (also referred to as a 'general competence' in the Qualifications Framework for Higher Education dictionary terms), the acquisition of which is an essential prerequisite for adopting particular methods of scientific work and gaining field-specific skills. As with other transferable competencies, the scientific way of working also needs to be developed using specific examples and applied in practical settings; it is not possible to acquire this merely through theoretical studies. This is the reason why research, as well as other creative activities, must be conducted at higher education institutions in close ties with education, allowing the academic staff to use examples of their own research activities during lessons, whether it is done passively with demonstrations of their scientific work, or actively by involving students in research, in particular in doctoral degree programmes.

In the past, higher education institutions were successful at acquiring financial resources to fund R&D projects, which brought about a number of both positive and negative impacts. On the one hand, the competitive environment created pressure to ensure a good level of quality, and enabled the state to steer the principal direction of research through calls for proposals, keeping in line with national priorities. On the other hand, the very high proportion of earmarked (project) financial resources limits the possibilities of strategic management at both the HEI and individual department levels, and makes research teams unstable. As a consequence, HEI management has very limited wiggle room when planning and monitoring long-term research goals that do not bring either short-term or medium-term benefits. Higher education institutions and academic staff are overwhelmed with project preparations and reporting.

Higher education institutions are currently using foreign resources for funding their research activities only to a limited extent. The issue here is predominantly the insufficient rate of joining EU framework programmes for research, development and innovation – currently Horizon 2020, the EU framework programme for research and innovation

(2014–2020). The reason for this state of affairs is a combination of at least two factors. First and foremost, there is a low degree of motivation to participate at all, which is due to the fact that, among other things, national sources of funding are in many cases less competitive than EU framework programmes, which must be competed for in pan-European competitions. For Czech institutions, this translates into placing considerably higher demands on the preparation of good-quality projects while having a much lower chance to succeed. We could consider the low degree of internationalization of the Czech HEI environment to be the second reason; this includes the low ability of higher education institutions in the Czech Republic to provide a highly competitive environment on an international level where top careers in science could be developed. The barriers here include our predominantly Czech-language environment, an unsatisfactory administration and support system needed for the development of research activities and limited options for foreign specialists to develop their careers.

The goal of the measures described below is to change this situation, i.e. to improve the internationalization of research conducted at higher education institutions by participating in international projects and increasing the number of foreign specialists working here, strengthen the strategic role of university leaders and make their management more effective. The development of the quality and internationalization of research, and linking it more closely with educational activities, will also lead to improvements in the quality and relevance of teaching.

The number of ERC grants won by principal investigators situated in the Czech Republic

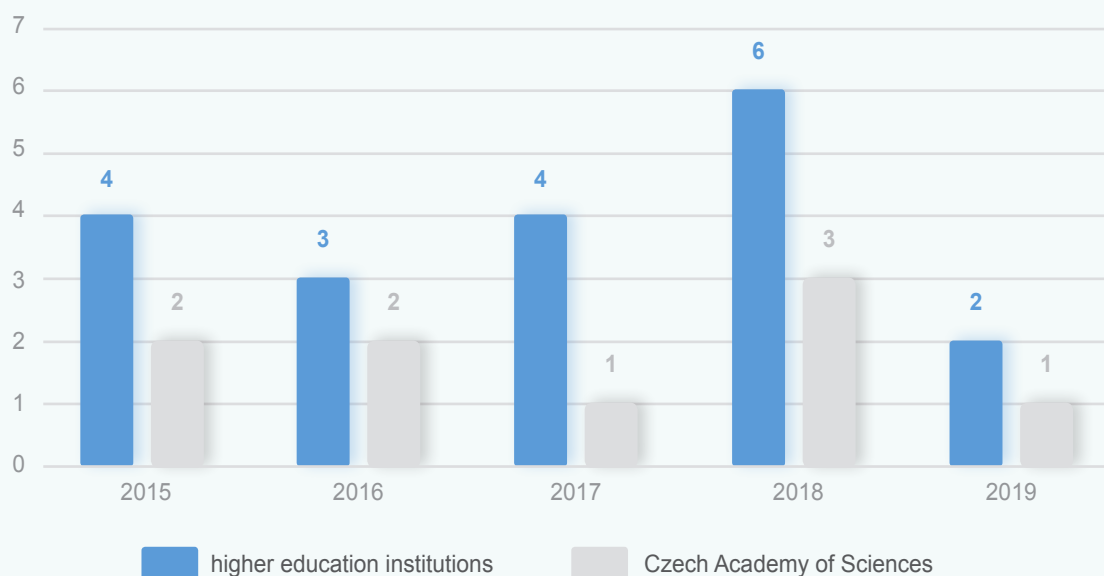


Chart 6: The number of grants awarded by the European Research Council (ERC), whose principal investigator works in the Czech Republic, as per the date of project approval, 2015–2019. Data source: ERC.

Even though higher education institutions have consistently been more successful in the ERC than the Academy of Sciences institutions, the number of projects awarded per year can be counted in ones and twos, making the Czech Republic significantly far behind West European countries.

The following operational objectives are assigned to this priority objective:

- A.** Finalize the complex transformation of the environment and setting up processes;
- B.** Ensure the development of infrastructure services;
- C.** Support the excellence and societal relevance of research;

- D. Develop international collaboration;
- E. Work with strategic partners when implementing R&D policies.

OPERATIONAL OBJECTIVES AND MEASURES:

4.A FINALIZE THE COMPLEX TRANSFORMATION OF THE ENVIRONMENT AND SETTING UP PROCESSES

Implementing the *Methodology for Evaluating Research Organizations and Evaluating Completed Purpose-tied Research, Development and Innovation Support Programmes* ('Methodology 2017+') in the HEI segment represents a change with the potential to substantially transform the operation and management of a number of institutions. The change is the next logical step within a long-term process that shifts the focus from merely producing individual results to monitoring the quality of research organization as a whole. It is the emphasis on the evaluation of higher education institutions as a whole, and their ability to set up effective internal processes and strategically manage their own development, that creates an opportunity to gradually increase the proportion of institutional support for funding research and development at higher education institutions as opposed to purpose-tied support. The aim is to stabilize funding, make it more predictable and reduce the administrative load associated with it, which higher education institutions are burdened with.



Evaluation: The MEYS is to conduct evaluations in compliance with Methodology 2017+ in 2020/21 and 2025/26. The 2025 evaluation will take into consideration previous experience and new knowledge on the basis of which the Methodology will be further updated so that the validity of evaluation is strengthened and simultaneously, the administrative burden associated with it reduced. The possibilities of the synergic use of data coming from various sources will be considered; this will include self-evaluation reports needed for making external evaluations of quality conducted by the NAB, or other evaluations and university annual reports.



Information support: The MEYS will use outcomes from HEI evaluations conducted in compliance with Methodology 2017+ for funding, as well as creating a strategy for supporting R&D&I development in universities and implementing follow-up measures.



Expected measures at the HEI level: Implementing those recommendations that have emerged as a result of the work done by international evaluation panels as part of Methodology 2017+ evaluations and factoring them in when reviewing internal processes, strategically distributing resources within an institution and other policies that are subject to evaluation. Reflecting strategic decisions on the direction of a higher education institution and preferred research topics in institutional policies, incl.:

- the organization of doctoral degree programmes and regulations governing the mobility of doctoral degree students and academic staff, including the provision of adequate advisory and administration support;
- a system facilitating the career growth of academic and research staff, and providing care for the development of talent in young academic staff, ensuring their support, balancing family and work lives, as well as sufficient remuneration to motivate them;
- tools for the internal monitoring and evaluation of research teams and individuals, systemic stimulative measures and tools for supporting good-quality research;
- support for international cooperation and international collaboration projects, including related services for academic and research staff;
- systemic stimulative measures and tools for supporting good-quality research, keeping and supporting excellent researchers;
- rules for the formation and support of new teams and expanding the scope of an institution's activities into new areas and disciplines;

- the sustainability of research centres and synergies developing large research infrastructures as part of internal strategies for managing research activities;
- updating the strategy for using institutional support for the LCDRO, which should reflect future developmental goals rather than the past outcomes of individual parts;
- fulfilling internal and national strategies in human resources, intellectual property protection and the transfer of research findings into practice, the priorities of oriented research and development, data management, the 'Open Science 2.0' strategy, the 'Open Access' strategy, etc.;
- tools for supporting interdisciplinary cooperation and joint projects with more parts.



Funding [SB]: The MEYS will work towards increasing the proportion of institutional support in the LCDRO at the expense of smaller, administratively burdensome project grant titles. In line with the Innovation Strategy (and complementarily as part of proposals to reduce the bureaucracy present in the funding of research, experimental development and innovation), it will aim to increase the proportion of institutional support of the LCDRO in funding research organizations so that the proportion of institutional support continually increases in relation to purpose-tied support given to programmes or grant schemes in the Czech Republic, while the MEYS will try to ensure that this increase will not adversely affect other expenditures from the state budget on research, experimental development and innovation.



Funding [SB]: The MEYS will support the simplification of the use of funding for specific university research by moving these funds under the LCDRO. This move will lead to a reduction of the administrative burden and will reinforce the autonomy of higher education institutions in their financial management, which they will be able to use for fulfilling their strategies more flexibly.



Expected measures at the at HEI level: Strengthening the administration and support system needed for fostering research and development, including increasing the number of employed experts on international grant schemes, intellectual property protection, knowledge transfer, human resources and other key areas. As for small higher education institutions, searching for ways of sharing these capacities so that they are effectively utilized and do not become a burdensome and needless drain on HEI budgets.

4.B ENSURE THE DEVELOPMENT OF INFRASTRUCTURE SERVICES

The centralized and systematic provision of some support services at the national level is a step towards improving their quality, as well as increasing their economy and economies of scale. Due to the need to prepare independent expert documents for the strategic management of the research, development and innovation system in the Czech Republic and to evaluate the way it is implemented, i.e. the benefits and impacts of national strategic and conceptual documents adopted in these areas on the Czech economy and society, it is necessary to systematically build and use the capacities of strategic intelligence to adopt informed political decisions on the funding of research, development and innovation from the Czech Republic's public resources. In the upcoming period, the MEYS will thus place more emphasis on the development of strategic intelligence and will more intensely engage HEI officials in the relevant activities, as higher education institutions are the most important part of the public research sector in the Czech Republic.



Funding [SB, ESIF]: The MEYS will help strengthen the capacities of the strategic management of the research, development and innovation system in the Czech Republic for an evidence-based policy at a national level. The capacities for strategic intelligence in this sector will be built systematically and used when making conceptual decisions and evaluating the way they have been implemented, i.e. the benefits and impacts of the National Research, Development and Innovation Policy of the Czech Republic on the Czech economy and society. One of the tasks of these capacities will be 'technology foresight' and 'technology assessment', with respect to the need of the Czech Republic to follow the latest science and technology trends, and foresee the potential socioeconomic effects of introducing new technologies into practice.



Funding [SB, ESIF]: The MEYS will work towards providing long-term support of the systematic and lasting availability of the most up-to-date information on the findings of global science in the Czech Republic and will ensure that the continuity of the main activities of CzechELib, the National Centre for Electronic Information Resources, is maintained, including the funding model currently in place. This way will secure centralized purchases of key electronic information resources, quotation databases and bibliometric tools, as well as the operation of a complex system for the acquisition and administration of electronic information resources and the production of supporting analyses and statistics for member institutions and the decision makers in research, development and innovation. Thanks to the concentration of know-how and bargaining power in the National Centre and international consortiums, more advantageous conditions under which new findings by home authors can be published will be negotiated, in connection with the transition to open access to the scientific information and data model. The MEYS will work towards creating a unified environment where scientific findings can be searched, stored and shared effectively, which will allow their transfer to further scientific and commercial use to become more effective. As a tool for this, a new generation central platform will be introduced, where all kinds of information resources can be searched and managed, which will be shared among information centres and libraries in all academic and research organizations, as well as libraries operating nationwide, and in the field of scientific data supporting the implementation of the European Open Science Cloud (EOSC) initiative using the national e-infrastructure, e-INFRA CZ.



Funding [SB]: The MEYS will involve university representatives via their officials in activities concerning the conception, implementation and management of a 'shared activities project',⁹ which will run from 2021 and whose objective is to strengthen the use of strategic intelligence during the process of creating a research, development and innovation policy in the Czech Republic and to increase strategic information and advisory support.

4.C SUPPORT THE EXCELLENCE AND SOCIETAL RELEVANCE OF RESEARCH

The Czech Republic's ongoing unfulfilled ambition, in terms of the effective use of funding for research, development and innovation from public resources, is creating considerably more links between excellence in research and the application sphere, which would lead to the development of products and services that have high added value and high potential in market application. Simultaneously, the Czech Republic will reflect Czech socioeconomic needs much more in the future, and in effect those of European society, when defining the assignment of research projects that are to be funded from public resources. In the upcoming period, the MEYS will therefore not only focus on supporting 'blue sky research' or 'frontier research', which push the boundaries of human knowledge beyond the horizons of current knowledge, but also strongly support research plans for ground-breaking technologies ('Key Enabling Technologies', or 'Future Emerging Technologies'), which have a high application potential; and when identifying priority areas, elements of the 'top-down' approach will be largely reflected in the support tools of.

A prerequisite for excellence and relevance in research is also engaging in the fight against unethical practice, especially in the area of publication. Predatory and other publications created only to increase the number of proven outcomes, as well as practices that distort the findings of bibliometric analyses, do not benefit society, do not develop knowledge and accessibility thereof, and damage the academic environment. The prevention and uncovering of such practice requires the joint effort of those involved both at the national level and at higher education institutions and their constituents.



Funding [SB]: The MEYS will support excellent research, carried out by interconnected teams, focused on problems currently faced by society in the Czech Republic, as well as on a global scale.

⁹ 'Shared activities projects' are a new type of research and development support that is the subject of the currently debated amendment of Act No. 130/2002 Sb., on Support of Research, Experimental Development and Innovation from Public Funds and amending some related acts (the Act on Support of Research, Experimental Development and Innovation), as amended.



Funding [SB]: The MEYS will propose a new purpose-tied support programme, which will help strengthen the cooperation among excellent research centres, industries and competence centres dealing with the most advanced technologies that have been identified as a priority in the National Research and Innovation Strategy for Smart Specialization (RIS3). This support should be in synergy with the support of large research infrastructures, and should concurrently complement the ‘National Competence Centres’ programme within the purview of the TA of the Czech Republic, as well as programmes supporting the ‘proof of concept’ phase.



Funding [SB]: In programmes arranged by the MEYS, preference will be given to concentrating purpose-tied support into a small number of high-budget, multi-year grant titles at the expense of small projects. Concentrating capacities into large projects and reducing the number of grant titles will lead to a reduction of the administrative burden, make the support system more transparent, improve flexibility and create space for creating closer links between projects and the development strategy of researching higher education institutions. Directing support towards a smaller number of projects will concurrently lead to an increase in selectivity, which will therefore boost competition and increase the pressure on the quality of submitted applications. Funding small projects from national resources should be limited only to those disciplines where such support is justified, especially in (interdisciplinary) projects that prove to be greatly innovative in disciplines that have so far been only very slightly explored.



Funding [SB]: The MEYS will promote the use of open access to research and development findings, funded from public resources in compliance with the *Czech Republic National Strategy of Open Access to Scientific Information*.



Expected measures at the at HEI level: Giving more consideration to societal needs at the national and global levels, defined by partners from both private and public spheres, when identifying research priorities and allocating funds within an institution. Supporting cooperation with the application sphere and the transfer of knowledge into practice through setting one’s own internal policies.



Expected measures at the at HEI level: Ensuring that research and teaching are linked so that all research departments at schools carry out educational activities.

4.D DEVELOP INTERNATIONAL COLLABORATION

Excellent research is very often done at an international level and is often based on, among other things, the transfer of knowledge between countries and individual research organizations. Integrating higher education institutions into international structures, which include EU framework programmes for research and innovation, is therefore an inevitable part of the journey towards reaching a better level of quality and relevance of research, development and innovation in the Czech Republic. A prerequisite for this is the development of a high-quality information and advisory support system, which would provide higher education institutions with not only information on existing or newly planned calls in the 9th EU framework programme for research and innovation, Horizon Europe (2021–2027), and other international grant schemes (e.g. COST, EUREKA, JPIs, etc.), but it will also simultaneously provide highly specialized consultancy on financial, legal and other issues that arise during the preparation and presentation of proposals, or alternatively, the execution of supported international research, development and innovation projects. In the upcoming period, the MEYS will intensively work on improving the efficiency of infrastructure activities that support international cooperation in research, development and innovation, and will also engage representatives of HEI officials, who are major players in this field.



Funding [SB]: The MEYS will support a ‘shared activities’ project focused on expanding the integration of the research and innovation system in the Czech Republic within the European research space and deepening intensive international cooperation between research organizations and companies in the Czech Republic in research, development and innovation. The project will secure a high-quality information and advisory support system for research organizations, including higher education institutions, providing not only information on existing or newly planned calls in the 9th EU framework programme for research and innovation, Horizon Europe (2021–2027), and other international grant schemes (e.g. COST, EUREKA, JPIs, etc.), but also a support system offering specialized consultancy on financial, legal and other specific issues concerning the preparation and presentation of proposals, or alternatively, the execution of supported international research, development and innovation projects.



Expected measures at the at HEI level: Supporting the international mobility of both academic and non-academic staff in terms of organization, and creating adequate advisory and supporting administrative capacities for this purpose. Providing special support to staff members whose mobility expenses have increased due to caring for a close person.



Expected measures at the at HEI level: Increasing the proportion of academic and non-academic staff who had either studied abroad or gained significant specialist experience abroad, and removing both formal and informal barriers to their recruitment and integration into the life of the academic community.



Regulation: The MEYS will enhance the internationalization of large research infrastructures operated by higher education institutions through engaging the Czech Republic in transnational legal entities which control international research infrastructure activities, in particular the legal persons of the European Research Infrastructure Consortium (ERIC).



Funding [SB]: The MEYS will engage the Czech Republic in international programmes and initiatives concerning research, development and innovation which require the direct financial involvement of participating countries. Priority will be given to involving the Czech Republic in the tools of 'partnership' in the EU framework programme for research and innovation, Horizon Europe (2021–2027).



Expected measures at the at HEI level: Bidding for funds provided from international resources, particularly the EU framework programme for research and innovation, Horizon Europe (2021–2027). Supporting researchers when submitting applications and providing them with adequate support needed for their preparation, including allowing for adequate time capacities. Forming international research consortiums, especially by building on existing collaboration.

4.E WORK WITH STRATEGIC PARTNERS WHEN IMPLEMENTING R&D POLICIES

With respect to the role higher education institutions play in the public research sector in the Czech Republic, the involvement of university officials in the preparations of systemic tools that support research, development and innovation is an essential part of leading a strategic dialogue with all relevant stakeholders. An expert survey on higher education institutions, which are the end users of the system in which research, development and innovation are funded from public resources in the Czech Republic, must therefore be an integral part of specialist inputs that are present during those processes that form the research, development and innovation policies in the Czech Republic. The MEYS will continue in the established trend in the upcoming period as well, in respect of engaging representatives of HEI officials and individual higher education institutions with various specialized advisory bodies in the MEYS, and running less official discussion platforms to hold strategic debates on a wide spectrum of topics related to the funding of research, development and innovation from public resources in the Czech Republic.



Information support: The MEYS will continue to engage HEI representatives through their officials in the activities of the Large Research Infrastructures Council, including their working bodies set up within, as a specialist advisory platform for forming a concept for large research infrastructures.



Information support: The MEYS will engage HEI representatives in specialized advisory bodies, which will be set up to implement grant titles that fund research, development and innovation from public resources with the aim to secure a high-quality peer-review evaluation.



Information support: The MEYS will engage HEI representatives in advisory bodies, which will be set up to provide specialized consultancy related to the execution of the Czech Republic's membership in international research and development organizations.



Information support: The MEYS will create opportunities for holding debates on the direction of large research infrastructure policies ('National Days of Large Research Infrastructure in the Czech Republic') and engaging the Czech Republic in the European research space ('Czech Days for European Research – CZEDER'). HEI representatives will also join these debates.



Information support: The MEYS will engage university representatives through their officials in those activities that focus on the interventions of the future Jan Amos Komenský Operational Programme (JAK OP), on all relevant platforms run by preparatory and management bodies.

V. BUILD CAPACITIES FOR THE STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT OF HIGHER EDUCATION

THE DEFINITION OF THE OBJECTIVE:

The Czech higher education system builds on the strong autonomy of universities. In this system, the state does not intervene in their management on a number of issues, leaving the decision-making to their elected and appointed bodies. However, such broad autonomy does not mean a loss of responsibility. On the contrary – autonomous public higher education institutions financed from the state budget must be extremely responsible for the quality of their activities and the added value they bring to society. The implementation of this autonomy therefore places high demands on the ability of higher education institutions to determine their long-term direction in a qualified and competent manner and to make decisions about their strategic priorities. These cannot be a simple sum of the interests of individual members of the academic community, but must reflect the regional, national and global context and the development of societal needs, and therefore require adequate analytical and conceptual background, effective processes and actionable bodies.

The objective in this area is to strengthen the responsibility of public higher education institutions to meet the needs of society, and to increase their strategic management competencies. Thus, it is necessary that key decision-making positions at higher education institutions and faculties in transparent and open competitions should be filled by competent personalities with a vision, who would also have the conditions to move their institutions forward. This means, inter alia, strengthening professional support capacities for strategic management and reducing the administrative and operational burden on managers.

Public and private higher education institutions should meet the objective formulated above, taking into account their legal and other specifics.

Share of foreign staff at higher education institutions

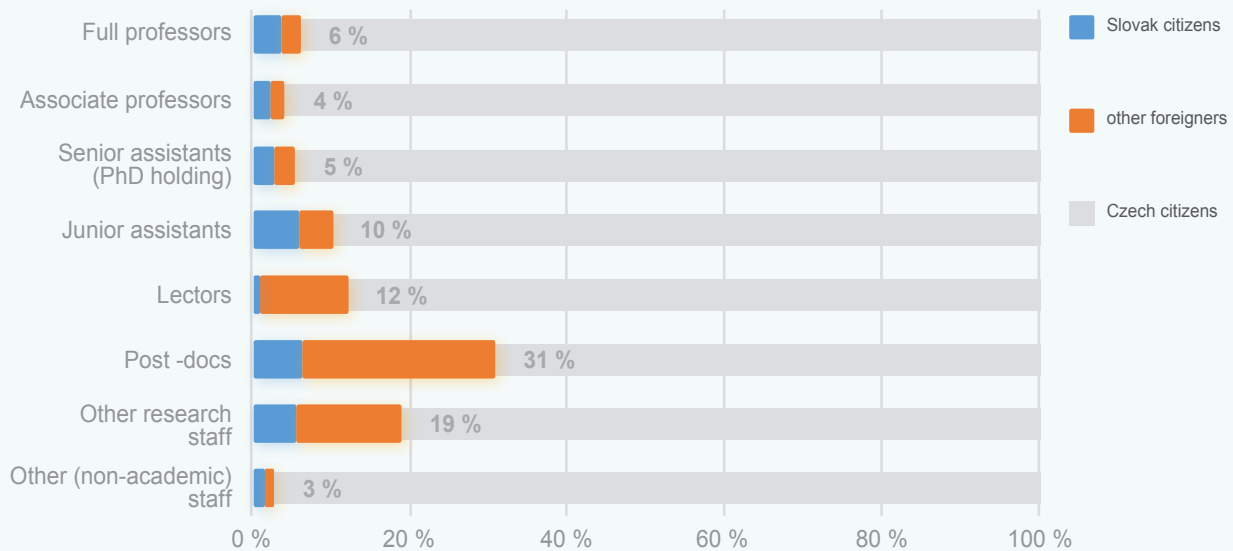


Chart 7: The proportion of foreign university staff as of 31 December 2018. Data source: Annual reports of higher education institutions.

The low number of professors, associate professors, and assistant professors from abroad indicates the relatively high secludedness of the higher education system. On the other hand, the positions of postdoctoral students and research fellows (including the laboratory technicians and others) are strongly internationalized, although most of these employees do not participate in the teaching and management of higher education institutions.

The following operational objectives are assigned to this priority objective:

- A.** Create a financial tool for the implementation of key strategic priorities at the HEI level;
- B.** Strengthen strategic management at higher education institutions;
- C.** Encourage cooperation and the exchange of experience between higher education institutions as well as capacity building for strategic management at the national level;
- D.** Strengthen strategic human resource management at higher education institutions;
- E.** Open discussions on legislative changes.

OPERATIONAL OBJECTIVES AND MEASURES:

5.A CREATE A FINANCIAL TOOL FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF KEY STRATEGIC PRIORITIES AT THE HEI LEVEL

The support for the implementation of strategic management has so far been implemented through the Institutional Programme for Public Higher Education Institutions, which was a kind of contract financing for higher education institutions. This Programme has contributed to the implementation of numerous innovative projects, but its resources were often fragmented into a large number of sub-activities, the impact of which did not always extend beyond one faculty or department and was not coordinated between the units involved. In addition, the limited horizon of the implementation of institutional plans did not provide schools with sufficient flexibility and continuity necessary to implement larger conceptual changes and, at the same time, did not allow them to strengthen the aspects of contract funding that would link the evaluation of institutional plans more closely with the impacts of supported mea-

tures. The aim is to transform this programme into a new Programme to support the strategic management of higher education institutions, which will more than today strengthen the importance of strategic decisions at the level of management of the higher education institution as a whole, supporting diversification of higher education institutions according to their specific mission. To achieve that, the MEYS will follow from the following principles:



Funding [SB]: Support from the Programme will be provided for four or five years so as to enable the implementation of more complex and long-term activities, provide schools with greater flexibility in their implementation and at the same time ensure greater stability and predictability of the volume of funds. The resources from the Programme will be sent in the form of a contribution, so it will be possible to transfer them between years.



Funding [SB]: The support from the Programme will be allocated on the basis of a list of planned key measures marked directly in the text of the strategic plans of the higher education institutions, thus ensuring a strong link between the funded activities and development priorities at the national and institutional levels. The contribution of the planned activities to the fulfilment of the national and institutional priorities will also be one of the main evaluation criteria for applications. The subject of support will be the “expected measures at the HEI level” contained in this document, but also other activities of HEI aimed at meeting the objectives of SZ2021+. Higher education institutions will be motivated to concentrate a significant part of the resources from the Programme on a limited number of priorities, thanks to which projects will be implemented with a long-term development overlap affecting all or most units of the higher education institution. The aim of this measure is to support cooperation and coordination of HEI constituent parts in the implementation of reforms and, at the same time, strengthen the Rector’s responsibility for the preparation and implementation of institutional plans and thus for the strategic development of the higher education institution.



Funding [SB]: As a separate pillar, the Programme will include resources to support the internationalization of higher education institutions, which are currently provided as indicator D of budget line IV.



Expected measures at the at HEI level: From Programme resources, to ensure an independent evaluation of the implementation of the Strategic Plan of the higher education institution, which will evaluate the achievement of the set objectives, and especially the impact of the activities on the quality of HEI activities. The evaluator will be selected by the higher education institution itself; however, it is recommended that an external vendor be selected who is independent of the HEI management. The recipient of the evaluation report will be the higher education institution.



Expected measures at the at HEI level: Create a fund from its own resources to support innovations at the level of individual degree programmes and units, which will contribute in an administratively simple way to the modernization of teaching, improvement of support services and implementation of initiatives from students or individual HEI staff. The current internal competition for this type of activity, which was part of the Institutional Programme, will not be included in the Programme for the Support of Strategic Management of Higher Education Institutionsl.

5.B STRENGTHEN STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT AT HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

Regardless of the degree of internal heterogeneity, each higher education institution is a single institution with a single highest level of management and leadership, which determines the direction and strategy of the higher education institution. Promoting and fulfilling a well-prepared strategic direction by the whole higher education institution and its units is a necessary prerequisite for the success of the higher education institution in fulfilling its roles in terms of international comparison. The chosen strategic direction must correspond to the use of the main tools of the HEI management, especially funding and internal regulations. The internal mechanisms for allocating the HEI’s budget to the individual units are an important tool for fulfilling the strategic goals of the higher education institution.



Funding [SB]: The MEYS will financially support the development of professional non-academic apparatuses as support for decision-makers so that Rectors, Vice-rectors, Deans, Vice-deans, heads of departments, guarantors of degree programmes, members of scientific councils and internal evaluation councils and others can focus on the issues that are their primary mission under the Higher Education Act, and are thus burdened as little as possible with administrative and operational duties. The aim is to make these positions more attractive to successful academicians and to strengthen their ability to address issues important to the conceptual development of the institutions.



Funding [SB, ESIF]: The MEYS will support capacity building for *evidence-based policies* at higher education institutions, including the acquisition or development of technical solutions for performing data analyses and the management and development of professional capacities for these activities. Higher education institutions and public administration currently have extensive data sets that have great potential for raising awareness of decisions, targeting measures and evaluating their impacts, but which are not always fully processed or used.



Funding [SB]: The MEYS will support joint HEI projects aimed at transferring good practices from abroad, e.g. through evaluations by international organizations, implementation of workshops, or involvement of foreign experts in strategic debates. These projects do not have to focus closely solely on the strategic management at the highest level, but also on the effective organization and innovation of various aspects of HEI activities.



Expected measures at the at HEI level: Develop internal capacities for the creation of analyses, preparation, discussion, implementation and evaluation of strategies, and for discussion of measures and their communication both inside the academic community and outside, towards the general public and strategic partners. Look for ways to take advantage of innovative technological tools, including artificial intelligence, in institutional management and strategic planning.



Expected measures at the at HEI level: Develop internal mechanisms for the allocation of funds and remuneration of academic staff members, which will not flatly copy the criteria applied by the MEYS for HEI funding, but will take into account the mission and the strategy of the higher education institution and support the institution's development in its priority areas. The allocation of funds within the institution on the basis of prospective priorities is an integral part of the strategic management of the institution and one of the primary tasks of its management.



Expected measures at the at HEI level: Cultivate the role of Academic Senates, strengthen the professional capacities of their facilities and increase their attractiveness for all academic staff members and students. If the Academic Senates are to carry out their role effectively, it is imperative that they be filled with personalities who have the ambition to open their institutions to the world and move them forward, who devote sufficient time and attention to their function, and have sufficient resources to make decisions, including having access to relevant analyses and assessments. The Academic Senate of a quality higher education institution or faculty must have the ambition to contribute constructively to the creation and implementation of the long-term strategy of the higher education institution as a whole. Well-functioning Academic Senates are an effective platform for the exchange of information and facilitating coordination between different levels of management, as well as the initiators of the exchange of experience and horizontal cooperation between the units.



Expected measures at the at HEI level: Involve the Boards of Trustees in discussions on budget allocation mechanisms within the higher education institution, with emphasis placed on general principles (support for quality and strategic priorities), rather than in discussions on specific budget items approved by the Academic Senate. Involve the Board of Trustees in the process of creating conceptual documents from the initial phase of their preparation, including the formulation of basic theses and priority objectives. Provide the Boards of Trustees with administrative background and legal counselling that will make it possible to streamline the approval of marginal operations (for example, easements) and create more space for a conceptual discussion to be held on the direction of the higher education institution. The task of the Board of Trustees in strategic issues should be, above all, to provide the higher education institution and its management with external views and feedback, and to place its goals in a broader social context. This role of the Board of Trustees should also be taken into account when nominating members of the Boards of Trustees for appointment by the MEYS.



Expected measures at the at HEI level: Develop cooperation and strengthen the coordination of measures between the various units of the higher education institution. Support the transfer of good practice between faculties and other units. Build a common identity and create opportunities for holding meetings between the staff members and students across the higher education institution. Cultivate an internal democratic debate on the strategic direction of the higher education institution and on the desirable measures that should be taken at the institutional level.

5.C ENCOURAGE COOPERATION AND THE EXCHANGE OF EXPERIENCE BETWEEN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS AS WELL AS CAPACITY BUILDING FOR STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL

A condition for quality management of higher education as a whole is the development of a knowledge base leading to good availability of information on the problems and strengths of higher education institutions, as well as on domestic and foreign best practices. Acquiring and disseminating this knowledge is not only a task for the public administration, but to a large extent the higher education institutions themselves must also participate in it and share their know-how through joint projects, conferences, workshops and informal contacts.



Expected measures at the at HEI level: Anchor the Czech Rectors' Conference or its service organization as a legal entity and, inter alia, to simplify the creation of its support apparatus and enable it to become a beneficiary of targeted support in relevant programmes. A model for this could be, for instance, the German Rectors' Conference or other similar foreign organizations. Under the auspices of this legal entity, other platforms for HEI cooperation may also operate, such as a working group of legal experts, associations of similarly focused faculties, and the like. Along with that, it is recommended to intensify the cooperation of higher education institutions through their working groups.



Funding [SB]: Within its grant titles, the MEYS will support the restructuring and initial development of the capacities of the Czech Rectors' Conference (including administrative and expert ones) to strengthen its role in strategic management and to be able to provide support services to higher education institutions and implement projects aimed at developing their cooperation, exchanges of experience (e.g. by organizing workshops, conferences and other educational activities), the transfer of good practices from abroad, the creation of expert networks and the joint creation of opinions and analyses.



Regulation: The MEYS will propose the inclusion of the Czech Rectors' Conference and the Council of Higher Education Institutions in the Legislative Rules of the Government as comment points, which would enable them to better monitor the legislative process, duly inform higher education institutions in time about planned changes in regulations and represent their interests.



Information support: The MEYS will continue to perceive the Council of Higher Education Institutions and its Student Chamber as important partners in the creation and approval of key documents and measures. The MEYS will include university staff and students in the relevant working and evaluation bodies in matters that concern them.



Funding [SB]: The MEYS will continue to develop the Centralized Development Programme as a tool to support cooperation between higher education institutions to solve specific problems. The development character of the Programme and the emphasis placed on cooperation among higher education institutions will be strengthened. The implementation of projects from this Programme will obligatorily include meetings at the working level so that the outputs of the projects are the result of joint work of the participating schools and build on their best practice. Furthermore, the possibility to open the programme to projects with a solution period longer than one year will be examined.



Regulation: The MEYS will actively implement its statutory role in the strategic management of higher education institutions, including discussing strategic plans of universities and the use of representatives of the MEYS in HEI Boards of Trustees to improve the information transfer and good practice.



Funding [SB]: The MEYS will develop departmental research and the knowledge base for the management of higher education, for instance, through a "project of shared activities", in cooperation with the TA CR, or through a Departmental Information System. The MEYS will thus improve the availability of empirical knowl-

edge and support the publication of comparable, relevant and reliable data, which will enable deeper analyses, benchmarking and the subsequent use in strategic management at the national and institutional levels.

5.D STRENGTHEN STRATEGIC HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT AT HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

A key prerequisite for the success of the strategic management of higher education institutions is to attract, correctly select and retain academic and non-academic staff with the necessary competencies, and their ability to further develop, cultivate and create a supportive environment for their productive employment. In doing so, it is important to reflect the diverse profiles of the staff expertise and value their expertise not only in educational and creative activities, but also in other activities necessary for the operation and development of the higher education institution, including quality assurance, organizational and management activities, coordination of international cooperation and third role activities (transfer of knowledge, popularization of research results, external communication and the like).

Therefore, the career structures of higher education institution must reflect the values of openness, transparency, cooperation and focus on their contribution to society, create conditions for long-term professional growth of academic and non-academic staff members, and prevent productive staff from leaving. The leaving of competent staff from HEI careers due to the need to care for family members occurs disproportionately, especially in women, who, sometimes perceive the environment, especially in some scientific disciplines, as misogynistic and discriminatory. The evaluation of women's results can also be burdened by unconscious bias in many cases. Well-established personnel processes must prevent these factors.



Funding [SB, ESIF]: The MEYS will support activities aimed at increasing the expertise of academic and non-academic staff, creating preconditions for their career growth and developing systems of further education and lifelong learning. Within this framework, the education of managers and the development of their managerial and strategic competencies will also be supported, e.g. in the form of coaching, peer support and the sharing of experience. When defining the conditions for grant programmes, the MEYS will support the involvement of doctoral students in relevant activities.



Funding [SB, ESIF]: The MEYS will support setting up a system for preventing the loss of talents resulting from academic staff leaving due to the need to care for family members. Career support systems must be transparent and information on the available services and benefits must be easily accessible not only to their current beneficiaries, but also to potential future beneficiaries. Appropriate support instruments may include part-time work, dismissals, the creation of opportunities to keep in touch with colleagues and the development of the field during maternity and parental leave, financial compensation for increased costs related to conference activities and international mobility of carers and adequate setting of internal grant schemes. ESIF funds will support the preparation of these systems and their implementation, including informing university staff members about the opportunities offered, and pilot verification of these principles.



Information support: The MEYS will provide higher education institutions with professional support and counselling on strategic human resources management through a “shared activities project”.



Expected measures at the at HEI level: Expand the capacities of human resource care and support services for the staff, including guidance on further training and education, international mobility and information on the provision of services for caring for parents.



Expected measures at the at HEI level: Prevent unconscious bias (“cognitive bias”) in the evaluation of employees and their results through the methodological support of evaluators. People setting evaluation criteria in the area of personnel and in the field of internal grant schemes, project applications, habilitation procedures, procedures for appointing full professorships and others, as well as people carrying out evaluations themselves, inform about the mechanisms and risks of such cognitive bias and help them choose such evaluation mechanisms which reduce this risk.



Expected measures at the at HEI level: Prevent academic “inbreeding” and fill all permanent positions on the basis of open competitions published in a manner that is also available to potential applicants outside the announcing higher education institution. In the case of higher education institutions that claim a label of research-oriented universities, all competitions should be published internationally (e.g. through the Euraxess platform) and held in English or another relevant internationally used language. Support for faculties in

the publication and administration of open competitions, including their promotion on international platforms, can be centralized at the level of the Rectorate or inter-university unit. It is recommended anchoring barriers against inbreeding in internal regulations, for example by the mandatory posting of doctoral graduates wishing to pursue a career in higher education in post-doctoral positions abroad. For the employment of senior staff from abroad, it is recommended to use the institute of Extraordinary Professor or the internal system of positions. To support the horizontal mobility of academic and non-academic staff during their careers between several institutions in terms of broadening their horizons, the involvement of the higher education institution in the global scientific community and the transfer of good practice.



Expected measures at the at HEI level: Establish a term of office for managers of lower organizational units (departments, institutes and others). Ensure continuous generational changes of managers at the middle management level, motivate them to educate their successors and support the managerial ambitions of successful employees of the middle and younger generations. Create a system of identification and preparation of potential future managers and develop their managerial competencies.



Expected measures at the at HEI level: When electing Rectors and Deans, support the candidacy of people not only from the internal, but also from the external environment of the higher education institution, including from abroad. Publish information on the competition in advance on relevant platforms and provide informational support to those interested on the form and conditions of the competition. Academic Senates should consider establishing selection boards to evaluate candidates for these positions, inter alia, on the basis of a thorough assessment of their HEI development concepts and their ability to implement them, and to provide recommendations to the senates for election. These boards may also include external and foreign members.



Expected measures at the at HEI level: Reward members of academic staff based on their current results and contribution to the quality of HEI activities (educational, creative and third role). Even under the current legislation, higher education institutions that choose to do so can create a system that is de facto close to that of Associate Professors and Professors, if they separate their career rules from state-awarded degrees and take them into account only where required by external regulations (especially accreditation). A legitimate alternative to evaluating the staff on the basis of quantitative criteria is the use of the principles of qualitative peer-review, where the evaluation can be carried out by a panel composed mainly of external experts from partner (also foreign) institutions or other units of the same higher education institution, typically based on a personal interview, supervisor's opinion, the results of student assessments of teaching and assessments of the main publications and other professional outputs for the past period. When evaluating the activities and results of employees, it is desirable to take into account any restrictions arising from their need to care for family members, e.g. in the case of requirements for longer stays abroad.



Expected measures at the at HEI level: Implement the principles on which the HR Award is based and strive to obtain this award. The evaluation process leading to this evaluation is viewed by the institutions that participated in it as very beneficial for the innovation of internal processes and regulations and the cultivation of the HEI environment. In the future, the holding of the HR Award may also be taken into account by the NAB in external evaluations of quality, or when assessing the internal quality assurance system, and will be taken into account in the evaluation of research organizations according to the Methodology 2017+.

5.E OPEN DISCUSSIONS ON LEGISLATIVE CHANGES

In the period from 2021, it will not be possible to avoid a broader debate on the model of HEI management, which may lead to a proposal for making legislative changes. This debate must be based on a thorough evaluation of the previous experience and an assessment of the extent to which the current management model contributes to the fulfilment of the task of the higher education institutions towards society, and identify those aspects that contribute positively to this and those for which systematic deficits can be observed. When proposing changes, it is desirable to take into account international experience and trends (to the extent that they are transferable to the Czech environment); it will be necessary to take into account the transformation expenses that necessarily are associated with any changes being made to the system. The output of this debate may be a proposal to change the methods of selection and election, appointment and dismissal of various HEI bodies or their members (Rector, Academic Senate, Board of Trustees, Dean, etc.) and the sharing of competencies between them. The primary questions for this debate are contained in Annex 2.

VI. REDUCE THE ADMINISTRATIVE BURDEN ON THE STAFF OF HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS SO THAT THEY CAN FULLY PURSUE THEIR MISSION

THE DEFINITION OF THE OBJECTIVE:

The aim is for higher education institutions to effectively and at the same time economically fulfil their mission towards society in their educational, creative and third roles. To this end, it is necessary that the academic staff members are able to devote themselves fully to these activities and are not diverted from them by the necessary administrative and operational agenda, and at the same time, that the technical staff of higher education institutions perform primarily the activities really necessary for the fulfilment of the mission of higher education institutions and provide the academic staff members with adequate qualified support. The problem is the strong level of bureaucratization of a number of management and control processes associated with the associated large administrative burden on the management of higher education institutions and their units, as well as on their ordinary employees. The bureaucratization is based on a large degree of mistrust between individual actors (state administration bodies and higher education institutions or within universities) and on the lack of professional readiness and personnel capacity of the administrative apparatuses of the higher education institutions and state administration bodies. A direct consequence of this is a large burden on academicians and managers with activities that are not directly related to their primary tasks, which negatively affects their motivation, reduces the attractiveness of higher education institutions as employers and can also cause burnout syndrome.

Reducing the administrative burden on academic staff must go along two lines – on the one hand by eliminating duplicate and unjustified requirements from the external environment and reforming public administration supervision mechanisms in the provision of public support (from the control of inputs and processes to the focus on outputs), and on the other hand, by developing a professional apparatus and streamlining processes within the higher education institutions themselves. To achieve this goal, it is necessary that the responsible staff on the part of the higher education institutions and of the public administration be sufficiently professionally prepared, effectively exchange information on the purposes and impacts of the measures, and that there is a transfer of good practices.

One of the tools for streamlining these processes is their ongoing digitization, both within the higher education institutions and in their communication with the public administration. It is unrealistic to expect the complete elimination of administrative burdens - the state cannot resign from its management and control function and higher education institutions will always be subject to regulation in the field of personal data protection, employment relations and other obligations required by relevant legislation. However, they need to modernize and expand their internal administrative systems, streamline their internal processes and strengthen their administrative apparatuses so that they are able to fulfil their obligations to the state and providers of funding.

Significant potential for reducing the administrative burden is seen in the simplification of management in the area of project and special-purpose funding. Higher education institutions have traditionally had a strong autonomous position and in recent years a number of measures have been implemented to further strengthen that autonomy, and strengthen the responsibility of higher education institutions for the quality of their activities – examples of such measures include the introduction of internal quality evaluation systems, the creation of model institutional accreditation, stabilization of the contribution to the activity, and an introduction of evaluation according to Methodology 2017+. The logical follow-up step will be the transfer of responsibility in the area of securing inputs and processes for the implementation of projects to higher education institutions, and the focus of the control by the public administration especially on the quality of the results.

The following operational objectives are assigned to this priority objective:

- A. Simplify the transfer of information to the public administration and improve the availability and circulation of information through the ongoing digitization of agendas;

- B. Simplify project funding and evaluations;
- C. Support the development of professional apparatuses providing support services for academic staff members and the running of schools;
- D. Ensure the exchange of experience and information between the public administration and higher education institutions and support the transfer of good practice from abroad;
- E. Increase the legal certainty of higher education institutions.

OPERATIONAL OBJECTIVES AND MEASURES:

6.A SIMPLIFY THE TRANSFER OF INFORMATION TO THE PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION AND IMPROVE THE AVAILABILITY AND CIRCULATION OF INFORMATION THROUGH THE ONGOING DIGITIZATION OF AGENDAS

The aim is that, where possible, higher education institutions pass on all information to the public administration only once. Therefore, the public administration must build functional structured databases, through which its individual bodies are able to effectively exchange information in machine-readable form. However, such a solution needs to be applied appropriately, as in some cases creating and maintaining these databases can create more administrative burdens than savings.

Furthermore, the MEYS will strive to request from higher education institutions only those data that are really relevant for the management, control and monitoring of the development of the higher education system and individual institutions. In the case of data that require comparability between universities, it will seek to harmonize and clarify definitions.



Information support: The MEYS will ensure the modernization, integration and extension of the existing and the creation of new information systems so as to simplify the transfer of information between individual departments and state administration bodies and thus reduce duplicate transfers of similar information by universities. For existing databases, attention will also be paid to their interconnection, e.g. within the Departmental Information System, and the revision of their user interfaces and processed outputs in order to improve data sharing both within the state administration and at the university level. Where relevant, public access to data from these systems will also be expanded.



Expected measures at the HEI level: Systematize the collection and analysis of information on HEI activities and their quality at the Rectorate level. The availability of quality data and their analysis are necessary prerequisites for strategic management and quality assurance. Well-set up databases can also be used to effectively pass information to the public administration. Higher education institutions are encouraged to continue developing information systems and digitizing agendas. Even now, some higher education institutions use automated processes, for instance, to connect data from foreign publication databases (Web of Science) with the university information system and IS R&D&I so as to minimize the need for human labour in transmitting this information. Another example of good practice is the creation of an application in the information system for internal accreditation of degree programmes, which automatically enters into the forms data on their staffing, information on the courses and in the case of existing programmes, also data on their history (numbers of applicants, students, success rate, student assessment and the like).



Information support: The MEYS will set up a joint working group in cooperation with the NAB in order to improve the transfer of information between the two actors and, where possible, to eliminate duplicate reporting by the applicants. Furthermore, the MEYS, in cooperation with the NAB, will initiate negotiations with the relevant recognition bodies issuing opinions for granting the accreditation of degree programmes that directly meet the professional prerequisites for the regulated profession, with the aim of unifying the procedures, streamlining the processes and reducing the administrative burden for higher education institutions. The NAB will take further measures to reduce the administrative burden within the accreditation process.



Regulation: In discussions with higher education institutions, the MEYS will re-evaluate the structure of annual reports of higher education institutions so that they better fulfil their purpose – to inform the public about the development of the institution and its activities, thus strengthening the responsibility of the higher education institution to its surroundings, and pass on information to the ministry under other reporting channels. Higher education institutions will be allowed to integrate some other periodic reports into the annual report in order to reduce duplication. The text will focus more on the evaluation of the relevant year and the measures taken during it, i.e. the current practice of copying entire extensive passages from previous reports each year should be eliminated. In the table section, the definitions will be made more accurate so that the data can be clearly interpreted and compared between individual higher education institutions, while, where relevant, the definitions will be unified with other reports.



Information support: The MEYS will support the deeper integration of higher education institutions as public authorities into public administration information systems, including the Departmental Information System, so that they can make more effective use of their potential for reducing administrative burdens. Higher education institutions will be given access to data relevant to their administrative and other processes, so that citizens do not have to be burdened by duplicate transfers of data already available to the public administration. This measure will lead to a reduction of the administrative burden when applying for university studies, when paying social student allowances and in other agendas. In addition, the integration of systems will lead to a reduction of duplicate data reporting by the higher education institutions.

6.B SIMPLIFY PROJECT FUNDING AND EVALUATIONS

The need to simplify and streamline the provision of support concerns both programmes for financing research projects and operational programmes under the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF), the centralized development programme, the investment programme entitled Development and Renewal of the Material and Technical Base of Public Higher Education Institutions and the like.

This goal is based on the principle of trust – it is important whether the projects achieve the set results and impacts, not what inputs were consumed on the project and how the process of achieving results was running. The aim is therefore to reduce the administrative burden during project submission and during its implementation (e.g. reducing the number of interim reports, removing requirements for timesheets, checking the eligibility of expenditures on a random sample, extending the scope of use of lump sums, etc.), increasing the flexibility of higher education institutions in dealing with resources while strengthening the evaluation of the quality of the results and their impacts.



Information support: The MEYS will cooperate with the Council for Research, Development and Innovation on the implementation of the National Initiative for Reducing the Bureaucratization of Science as one of the tools for implementing the Innovation Strategy of the Czech Republic. The MEYS will actively participate in the cooperation of representatives of relevant providers of various types of support, their beneficiaries and supervisory bodies in order to streamline administrative processes. The coordination of all these actors should aim at unifying the rules, requirements and accounting standards (eligibility rules for expenditures, including personnel costs, rules for approving project changes, rules for selecting suppliers, model tender documents, etc.) so as to be as clear as possible for the users, and creating data sharing channels to eliminate duplicate requests. In this way, the MEYS will also look for suitable ways to improve the support and preparation of project application evaluators so that they interpret the rules uniformly and correctly and focus on an evaluation of the material quality instead of checking formalities. This cooperation will provide an opportunity for higher education institutions and other beneficiaries to highlight the redundant requirements of providers, inconsistencies in the interpretation of regulations by different authorities and the undesirable side effects of the rules, ultimately allowing them to propose simplifications.



Regulation: The MEYS will simplify the requirements for the programmes it manages in terms of the principles described above. In its procedure, however, it will maintain compliance with the rule of law, including the European legislation.



Regulation: The MEYS, in coordination with the Council for Research, Development and Innovation and other R&D&I providers, will propose an amendment be made to the Higher Education Act to strengthen flexibility in project settlement and unify the rules for transferring unused funds with other relevant regulations.



Regulation: The MEYS will propose to the Council for Research, Development and Innovation the creation of a “qualified beneficiary” institute, which will help eliminate duplicate transmissions of identical information to applicants for targeted support. The qualified beneficiary will be the equivalent of a “qualified supplier” within the meaning of Title II of Act No. 134/2016 Coll., on Public Procurement, and this institute will thus transfer best practices from the field of public procurement to the field of research and development support. Through this tool, applicants will have to prove their eligibility for support once per specified period and will no longer be required to submit identical documents repeatedly. The MEYS applies the same principle to programmes under its responsibility. The MEYS will open a debate with the NAB on the use of an equivalent principle in assessing the “institutional environment” in applications for accreditation.



Regulation: The MEYS will, in cooperation with other providers of support for research and development, promote the use of a uniform electronic environment for submitting project applications within the IS R&D&I. The unified environment will result in greater clarity to applicants, savings on the part of providers and will help unify the requirements. The MEYS will cooperate with other support providers to create a uniform model legal act/decision for research projects and a uniform format for reporting the results of project solutions.



Information support: The MEYS, in cooperation with the Czech Rectors’ Conference, will look for ways to ensure a systematic collection of relevant findings of supervisory authorities and other opinions, especially in relation to drawing funds from the ESIF, and transferring them to higher education institutions. The aim of these activities is to ensure the transfer of experience and information of the beneficiaries about the current interpretation of regulations, and thus increase the legal certainty of the beneficiaries.

6.C SUPPORT THE DEVELOPMENT OF PROFESSIONAL APPARATUSES PROVIDING SUPPORT SERVICES FOR ACADEMIC STAFF MEMBERS AND THE RUNNING OF SCHOOLS

In order for the administrative apparatuses of higher education institutions to be able to effectively remove the administrative burden from academic staff members at all levels, it must have adequate capacity and sufficiently qualified staff.

Another important task is to find an effective model for integrating the administrative apparatus into the structure of each higher education institution. While it is advantageous to centralize some agendas, concentrate know-how and create separate centres at the Rectorate level, some other issues should be transferred to lower management levels – faculties, departments or institutes, so that administrators can be in close contact with academic staff members and respond flexibly to their needs.



Funding [SB, ESIF]: The MEYS will support the strengthening of administrative support for academic staff members and the streamlining of administrative processes, for example through personnel and process audits and the implementation of the recommendations arising therefrom. ESIF funds will support the improvement of qualifications and expertise of the administrative apparatuses so that its staff members are familiar with relevant regulations, processes, tools and methods, including project management methods and IT solutions, and can remove the burden from academic staff members or university managers.



Funding [SB]: The MEYS will support projects aimed at the transfer of good practices in the field of support services between educational institutions, emphasising the appropriate distribution of their organizational structure and capacity sharing, including increasing the expertise of administrative apparatuses. External services can be used to evaluate existing processes and obtain proposals for making changes. The output of these projects should also be recommendations for participating universities and other educational institutions.



Expected measures at the at HEI level: Where it proves appropriate, concentrate support services and administrative capacity in “shared service centres” at the Rectorate level (albeit with branches at faculties but under joint management), in order to avoid duplication of reporting and burdens arising from inconsistencies between faculty and university units. Independent performance of administrative activities at several levels (rectorate, faculty, centre, department) is a frequent cause of inefficiency of internal processes and a source of ineffective burden.



Expected measures at the at HEI level: To increase the efficiency of administrative and other processes through capacity sharing, or the creation of joint units and bodies between higher education institutions. Examples include setting up joint evaluation panels to evaluate research organizations, sharing pools of evaluators for internal quality assurance processes, or creating common administrative capacities to recognize foreign qualifications.

6.D ENSURE THE EXCHANGE OF EXPERIENCE AND INFORMATION BETWEEN THE PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION AND HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS AND SUPPORT THE TRANSFER OF GOOD PRACTICES FROM ABROAD

The aim is to ensure the cross-sectoral transfer of experience between staff at the working level, including the lowest levels of decision-making, to give public officials a better view of how their agenda affects higher education institutions and, conversely, to give university staff a better chance of understanding what national policy objectives are and what is the meaning of the requirements placed on them. The transfer of experience from abroad will be supported in a similar way.



Information support: The MEYS will support internships for public administration employees at higher education institutions and vice versa, in the “job shadowing” format. On the public administration side, various departments of the MEYS and other public support providers (The Czech Science Foundation, the Technology Agency of the Czech Republic, the Ministry of Industry and Trade, etc.) and, if possible, the Ministry of Finance, the Supreme Audit Office, locally competent tax offices and other bodies will be involved. Internships will first be carried out to a limited extent in a pilot verification format (involving the MEYS and NAB), which will allow the parameters of the programme to be further specified on the basis of experience and passed on for use to other public administration institutions.



Internal measures: The MEYS will actively send its employees on traineeships to relevant national and foreign institutions, thus stimulating the expansion of their horizons and the transfer of experience.



Funding [ESIF]: The MEYS will support the implementation of cooperation (incl. internships) of non-academic staff across higher education institutions and between units within one higher education institution and thus the transfer of know-how and good practices.



Information support: Before introducing new regulations or announcing grant calls and other funding instruments, the MEYS will hold working meetings with representatives of higher education institutions in order to reduce the administrative burden to the necessary minimum. The calls prepared in ESIF operational programmes will be prepared and discussed with potential applicants before their announcement in accordance with uniform methodological guidelines for the preparation of calls. As part of this process, higher education institutions have the opportunity to raise suggestions for reducing administrative burdens within the Monitoring Committee of the Operational Programme, the Programme Planning Committee and at working meetings of the Managing Authority with representatives of the Czech Rectors’ Conference.

6.E INCREASE THE LEGAL CERTAINTY OF HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

One of the sources of the administrative burden is the uncertainty and insufficient know-how of higher education institutions in respect of some issues, such as public procurement and personal data protection. As a result, those responsible tend to prioritize more complicated (administratively demanding) and, from their point of view, safer

solutions over simpler but uncertain approaches. The aim is therefore to strengthen the legal certainty of higher education institutions and to clarify the conditions for their activities.



Information support: The MEYS will support obtaining legal opinions of responsible public administration bodies on issues that higher education institutions identify as being problematic – for instance public procurement, public support, etc. The obtained opinions of the MEYS will be made available to all affected higher education institutions and their organizational units.



Information support: The MEYS will provide methodological assistance to higher education institutions in the implementation of new regulations and requirements (for example, the Single Digital Gateway).

CONCLUSION

I. THE PROCESS OF ESTABLISHING THE STRATEGIC PLAN

The SZ2021+ was prepared from April 2019 to June 2020 in close cooperation between the MEYS and higher education institutions, as well as a number of other partners and experts. The consultation process involved several phases and various forms of collecting suggestions and comments.

In April 2019, all Rectors and Deans of universities in the Czech Republic were approached with a call to identify the most pressing problems faced by Czech higher education. The questions were formulated as open and the representatives of the universities had the opportunity to raise any topic that they considered relevant. In this way, more than one hundred suggestions were collected, which were aggregated into twelve thematic areas.

At the same time, two working groups were set up and they participated in the preparation of the SZ2021+ from its inception. The members of the consultation group were nominated by the bodies representing the higher education institutions and the partners addressed: The Czech Rectors Conference, the Council of Higher Education Institutions and its Student Chamber, the University Trade Union, the National Accreditation Office, the Chamber of Commerce, the Confederation of Industry and Transport, the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs and the Ministry of Industry and Trade. This group held the stage in approving the priorities of the Strategic Plan and its interim versions.

The second group, which was informal, was set up directly by the ministry and was not of a representative nature. However, its individual members played a significant role in formulating measures in individual areas of their expertise.

In May 2019, Boston Consulting Group, s.r.o. as part of its *pro bono* activities, carried out an analysis of problems in the field of doctoral studies and, on the basis of foreign good practice, proposed measures to increase the effectiveness and quality of this type of study. These recommendations later became the basis for discussions on the relevant chapter of the SZ2021+.

In June 2019, following from the suggestions collected through an electronic survey and taking into account the opinion of the informal expert group, the consultation group selected six problematic areas, on the basis of which the SZ2021+ priority objectives described in this document were formulated. The selection of priorities took into account both their relevance in relation to societal needs (severity of the problem) and solvability from the technical and political points of view, i.e. the extent to which it is possible to propose effective measures to achieve the goals and enforce them politically.

In July and August 2019, the ministry, in close cooperation with the members of the expert group, prepared the first draft measures for individual areas. These later served as the basis for debates at thematic round tables. Six round tables, each for one of the goals of the SZ2021+, took place during September and October 2019 in four university cities in the Czech Republic (Prague, Olomouc, Plzeň, Pardubice) with the strong participation of HEI representatives and other partners.

The suggestions made during the discussions were an essential input for finalizing the draft measures. Based on them, a draft Strategic Plan was created, submitted in January 2020 for discussion to the higher education institutions' representation bodies. The comments received were used to finalize the document, especially at the individual measure level.

Thanks to the consultation process described here, SZ2021+ is probably the most thoroughly discussed strategic document for the field of higher education in the history of the Czech Republic.

II. IMPLEMENTATION AND EVALUATION OF THE STRATEGIC PLAN

The ministry's intention is to implement most of the measures contained in SZ2021+ in the first five years of its validity. Where a broader consensus of the professional community is required for successful implementation, a debate will be launched during this period. However, this does not mean that all topics should be developed at the same time. In order to successfully achieve the goals, it is necessary to concentrate strategic capacities at the national and institutional levels only on a limited number of priorities in which it will be possible to achieve real progress in a given time. The tool that determines the prioritization of the tasks and the schedule for their solution, always for one year in advance, is the Implementation Plan of the Strategic Plan, which may also include an update of SZ2021+ based on the amount of progress achieved.

Like the SZ2021+ preparation process, its implementation will be based on a collaborative approach and intensive communication between the ministry, higher education institutions and other partners. Experience to date has shown as good practice the existence of a continuously working consultation group, and in particular the establishment of smaller ad hoc teams on individual topics to which members are invited on the basis of their professional interest.

The implementation of SZ2021+ is supported by a number of tools, including financial ones. One of them is the *Jan Amos Komenský Operational Programme*, prepared in coordination with the Strategic Plan, which will take into account a number of its themes in the announced calls. Another important tool is the *Programme for Support of Strategic Management of Higher Education Institutions*, which is the successor to the *Institutional Programme for Public Higher Education Institutions* known from the previous period. The Programme provides public higher education institutions with specific financial support for, inter alia, the implementation of expected measures at the HEI level contained in the Strategic Plan, while the measures implemented from it must also be part of the Strategic Plan of the higher education institution concerned. Joint projects of higher education institutions and their cooperation and exchange of good practice are mainly supported by the *Centralized Development Programme*. Other important tools include investment programmes of the ministry 133 220 Development and Renewal of the Material and Technical Base of Public Higher Education Institutions, and 133 240 Development and Renewal of the Material and Technical Base of Medical and Pedagogical faculties of Public Higher Education Institutions, which provide higher education institutions with investment funds to ensure conditions for achieving all described priority objectives. Last but not least, the measures of a financial nature specified in SZ2021+ can also be ensured by adjusting the rules for calculating the contribution to the activities of higher education institutions or to the long-term conceptual development of a research organization and other tools.

The implementation of SZ2021+ will be subject to continuous evaluation throughout its validity period. This evaluation will focus primarily on the impacts of the measures taken in relation to the fulfilment of the set objectives and will be provided by an external entity independent from the ministry. The interim evaluation report is tentatively planned for 2024. Its results could thus be reflected in the setting up of the Programme for the Support of Strategic Management of Higher Education Institutions for the Period from 2026.

During the validity of the Strategic Plan, the implementation of several large surveys among students and graduates is expected, which will require the cooperation of higher education institutions. The following timetable is provisional and may change, in particular due to the international nature of some surveys, which will be carried out in a coordinated manner at the European level. However, higher education institutions are advised to take into account the following expected data collection when planning their own surveys at the institutional level in order to avoid overloading the target group with questionnaires and, as a result, a low response rate:

1. National survey "Ph.D. students": 2021 and 2026
2. An international survey of HEI students entitled "Eurostudent VIII": spring 2022 and then again 2025 and 2028
3. A national survey entitled "Graduate" and at the same time an international survey of graduates entitled "Eurograduate": autumn 2022 and then again 2026 and 2030

III. OTHER SIGNIFICANT THEMES IN HIGHER EDUCATION

SZ2021+ selects six strategic goals as a priority, which are discussed in detail at the level of specific measures. To make progress in these areas, strategic capacities at the national and institutional levels are prioritized. During the preparation of the document, however, a number of other areas were identified that are important for the quality, relevance, reach and effectiveness of HEI activities. The list below summarizes areas that have been identified as important by some of the partners (especially when interviewing university representatives at the beginning of the process), but did not receive sufficient support during the consultation with higher education actors to be included among the top priorities.

Measures will also be taken in these areas, especially in the area of financing (targeted support, etc.), so as to ensure the necessary support for all specific groups of students and to ensure all the basic activities of the higher education institutions. In the event that some of these themes are supported by strong public demand in the coming years and the MEYS has sufficient resources to ensure the implementation of other relevant measures, they can be processed into new chapters of SZ2021+ through the Implementation Plan of the Strategic Plan, or they may be added to the existing chapters. These important areas include:

- Inconsistency of the dispositions of applicants for higher education with the expectations of higher education institutions; the readiness of graduates from secondary schools for university studies; adapting the form of study to their needs; career guidance and counselling and information support for applicants when choosing degree programmes;
- Social, economic (including the need to work while studying to cover basic living costs), cultural, geographical, health and other barriers to accessing and succeeding in one's studies; support for students with special needs;
- The community dimension of higher education institutions; strengthening the shared identity of the higher education institution; social integration of students as prevention against drop-outs; development of the students' social capital;
- Support for particularly gifted students;
- The mental health of university students and staff members, including burnout syndrome;
- Enrolments only for the purpose of obtaining student benefits, the so-called "dead souls" among students;
- Adapting the capacities of higher education institutions to demographic changes and realities;
- Developing the entrepreneurship of students; support for start-up and spin-off projects;
- Sport and the development of the physical culture of students and staff as part of the mission of higher education institutions;
- The status of art education and art as creative activities in higher education;
- Valorisation of knowledge and its transfer into practice; technology transfer; the role of higher education institutions in promoting innovation;
- Making the results of creative activities available to the general public; the popularization of science;
- The use of the professional background of higher education institutions for solving social problems; the involvement of higher education institutions in the life of society and the support of civic activities of the staff members and students; volunteering;
- Universities of the third age and the active life of senior citizens as part of the HEI mission;
- The regional operation of higher education institutions and their potential for retaining qualified people in structurally disadvantaged regions;
- The contribution of higher education institutions to the adaptation to climate change and ecological aspects of their operation, incl. reducing their carbon footprint.

There was a lack of sufficient data and knowledge base for the solution of some of these areas at the time of preparation of SZ2021+, which would have enabled a sufficient definition of the problem, identification of critical points and proposals for relevant measures. An example is the issue of inequality in access to higher education and the barriers that cause it. For this purpose, the MEYS (for example in cooperation with the TA CR) will support the implementation of departmental research that will help fill in the gaps.

ANNEX 1: INITIAL THESIS FOR A DEBATE ON CREATING A PART-TIME STUDY PATHWAY

The following points present a proposal of the initial options for creating a part-time study mode at higher education institutions. These options stand for the basis for the debate, and can be further modified and developed or rejected on the basis of the outputs of the expert debate:

- a.** Transform the whole combined degree programme by extending its standard study time while maintaining the same learning outcomes. The total volume of direct teaching in combined studies should thus be closer to the on-site mode, but would be spread over a longer period of time by reducing the number of credits obtained in each semester. The maximum standard length of studies in degree programmes in the combined form could be up to twice that of the on-site mode. Students in combined studies would not be granted student status in the sense of social support.
- b.** To increase the flexibility of combined studies, both by charging fees after the standard length of study extended by two years, and by dismantling study plans so as to give students more freedom in deciding on the volume of study load in individual semesters and allow it to be spread over time. Students in combined studies would not be granted student status.
- c.** Create a part-time mode at the individual student level, who will be able to be included upon their own request, based on the rules set by the higher education institution. In such a case, students will be credited with the completed time only proportionally (e.g. 50%) and will be subject to more lenient rules for passing on to the next semester, but at the same time they will not be granted student status. This mode can be accessible to both on-site mode students and combined mode students, and can be applied to only part of the studies – for example, in case of extraordinary life events or for students in their last period of studies who have already fulfilled most study obligations and only need to complete their final thesis.
- d.** Revise the rules for charging fees for longer studies with respect to onsite mode and combined mode students so that the decisive indicator is not the number of calendar days since the beginning of the studies, but the number of courses for which the student was enrolled, expressed by their credit volume. This would give students great flexibility in spreading their study load and, at the same time, this would penalise those students who do not meet their study obligations and have to enrol in the same courses repeatedly. Student status would only be granted to those students who enrol in the minimum prescribed number of courses (for example, 15 ECTS per semester).

ANNEX 2: INITIAL QUESTIONS FOR A FUTURE DEBATE ON LEGISLATIVE CHANGES IN THE FIELD OF HIGHER EDUCATION MANAGEMENT

The following points represent a proposal for the starting points for a debate on making a possible change in the legislative framework in the field of higher education management. By formulating these questions, the MEYS anticipates neither answers to them nor follow-up measures:

- a. The influence of external actors (employers, the public sector, graduates and others) on the strategic direction of the higher education institution. How to strengthen the responsibility of schools towards societal needs while not subjecting them to short-term business or political interests? How to ensure that the particular interests of the higher education institution's internal actors in decision-making do not prevail over the responsibility towards society?
- b. The "inertia" of higher education institutions. How to weaken the resistance of the academic community to changes, and how to support the adaptation of innovation, while not removing important safeguards against an abuse of power? How to prevent the emergence of unsolvable deadlocks, when no level of management has the competence to enforce its priorities and as a result, the progressive development of the institution is blocked?
- c. Aggregation and representation of interests within higher education institutions. How well do Academic Senates play their role? How to strengthen their ability to act and increase their attractiveness for successful academic staff members? How to effectively ensure that students are informed about the activities of the Senates, perceive them as a credible and accessible platform for the representation of their interests, and ensure they will participate to a large extent in the election of their representatives? Is it right that all non-academic staff, including researchers, are excluded from the right to vote and to be elected to the Academic Senate?
- d. Defining the role of students in university management. How to ensure full representation of their interests in issues that concern them (especially related to educational activities) and, conversely, to weaken their share where the impacts of decisions far exceed the horizon of their operation at the higher education institution?
- e. The relationship between faculties and rectorates. To what extent does the current model allow for the strategic management of a higher education institution as a whole? How to strengthen the competencies of HEI management so that they can ensure the strategic management and direction of their universities?
- f. The relationship between managerial/professional and collegial/academic management. Which positions should be selected on a professional basis, i.e. on the basis of open competitions, and which should be democratically elected or appointed? How should competencies be divided between these two components of management?