

## Some similarities and differences between British and Czech educational systems

1. One of the biggest differences between British and Czech education is in the examination system. In Britain students take state examinations in about nine or ten GCSE (General Certificate of Secondary Education) subjects at the age of sixteen, and about three 'A' level subjects at eighteen. These examinations are public, which means that they are generally the same for all students and marked independently by licensed examining authorities, not the schools. This also means that the results are more objective. One significant advantage of this for British students is that they do not need to take separate university entrance examinations – unlike their Czech counterparts – because most British universities (except Oxford or Cambridge) offer places according to 'A' Level grades alone.
2. University 'undergraduate' courses in Britain usually last for three years and are for bachelor degrees only. This is seen as the main university diploma and students graduate only after passing intensive 'Final' examinations. These typically involve 25–30 hours of written examinations spread over a two to three week period, and the submission of a long dissertation or project. Only a relatively small number of more able or interested students go on to study for masters (or higher, 'postgraduate') degrees. These last for one or two years and are much more specialised and intensive than in the Czech system.
3. Some experts on school education say that the similar Czech two-tier system will boost the number of graduates and, therefore, more graduates will mean more qualified work force, promotion of employability and mobility within EU countries. Bachelor graduates will be able to start their career after three years of study. However, some Czechs are known to be obsessed with degrees and will not be able to stop until a fancy title is put before their name.
4. One large disadvantage for British university students is the cost of their studies. Tuition fees are not paid for by the government anymore. Apart from that, there are no free grants to cover living expenses. Most students therefore have to work in part-time jobs, take out costly loans, or rely on their parents for support. Many people consider this both unfair and discriminatory against students from the families with lower incomes.
5. On the other hand, it is also argued that university graduates have a much greater chance of earning bigger salaries later on, and that it is therefore fair for them to repay loans, especially those loans which only have to be paid once the graduate is in full-time employment.
6. Several Czech politicians speak in favour of imposing tuition fees at universities, too. They argue that 'for some young people university studies are just a way of avoiding work for another few years'. They argue that reasonable tuition fees would make students more responsible and allow universities to grow. Students unable to pay would qualify for student loans from banks or other creditors. The government would guarantee the loans and students would be required to repay them after graduation, but not until their earnings reached the national average.
7. One criticism of such plans is that they would tend to discourage students from poorer families from going to university, because Czech students, like their British counterparts, have to pay for their own living expenses. Furthermore, the idea of imposing tuition fees seems to be universally unpopular among rich and poor students alike, who regard it as unfair and somewhat anti-educational.
8. New Czech Education Minister considers unfair the fact that 'the happier students, who have passed their university entrance exams successfully, can study for free, notwithstanding, at the expense of the taxpayers' money of the parents whose children were not so lucky at the entrance examinations.
9. Another criticism is that adding tuition fees into the budget of state-run higher educational institutions in the Czech Republic would make only a marginal difference to their financial situations. So, how to cut the Gordian knot of Czech higher education?

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