

Student Support Systems in Higher Education

Support for university students in the Czech Republic can be divided into three categories:

- 1. Informational**
- 2. Financial**
- 3. Conceptual and strategic**

1. Informational support

In this area, the main goal is to provide information needed for university studies in the most accessible and comprehensible way. The Czech Republic is characterized by a high level of autonomy of higher education institutions, which means that many specific processes are dependent on individual higher education institutions. In this context, the ministry guarantees access to information about choice of school, study programs or rights of students.

For these purposes, a number of online portals can be used, e.g., the [website](#) of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, where you can find a specific section focused on university studies. In this section, news from the university area are regularly published. Under the administration of the ministry, a [Register of Universities](#) is also available, facilitating choice of study. Similarly, the [Studyin.cz portal](#) can be used, which contains both a list of higher education institutions and a user-friendly map. The website provides among others basic information about universities and contacts.

The ministry also pays attention to link between degrees – i.e. the interlinking of university studies with the labour market and, on the other hand, with previous levels of education (secondary education). For that reason, it is actively involved in various student fairs, e.g. the [Gaudeamus](#) fair with a long tradition and great attendance (held continuously in various places in the Czech Republic and Slovakia). Here, the Ministry organizes lectures for students and teachers with the aim of providing and sharing the necessary information so that it reaches students both from the ministry and from the position of secondary school teachers.

2. Financial support

Financial support is mainly directed to universities, e.g. for specific programs that aim at various directions of improving conditions for students. Targeting of programs is derived from strategic, long-term and conceptual intentions and plans. The subject of support are mainly internal projects and measures of universities that are of systemic nature. For example, [Program for Support of Strategic Management of Universities](#), in which public universities are provided with a contribution to fulfil the goals of the presented strategic plans of the university (see the next chapter – conceptual and strategic support). The subject of support are mainly internal projects and measures of universities that have a systemic nature. The new operational [program Jan Amos Komenský](#) was launched, in which first calls were issued in 2022. The general goal is creation and development of an open educational system that responds to changing external environment and that provides relevant educational content in a lifelong perspective. In 2022, [National Recovery Plan](#) became an important source of financial support, by which national states respond to the revival and modernization of the economy in the post-pandemic period. The implementation is therefore expected to continue in 2023. In the area of higher education, science and research, the ministry coordinates the following components: "Adaptation of capacity and focus of school programs" and "Excellent research and development in priority areas of public interest in health care".

The calls of the [Centralized Development Program for Public Universities](#) are also announced every year. Within this program, the priority topic for 2023 is the implementation and further development of effective study and psychological counselling system, incl. mental health care. The target groups are students and employees of universities and applicants for studies, participants in lifelong learning courses, etc. This activity also includes career-counselling services. The aim of this support is to contribute to increasing quality and availability of these services, to propose standards for the provision of these services, including their provision online, and to ensure greater awareness of these services in the target groups.

Other priority topics include support of student activities within the framework of studies (e.g. activities focused on integration), development of methods for evaluating quality of the educational activities of academic staff or strengthening

of ethical principles in the environment of universities, including measures against discrimination and sexual harassment; increasing the relevance of awareness of gender thematic areas among students and employees and university management.

In addition, within the framework of individual financial instruments, flexible adjustments have been made in 2022 (within possible limits) so that their use in 2023 corresponds to the current and acute needs caused by, for example, the war in Ukraine. Thus, for example, a [call for applications aimed at supporting Ukrainian students](#) was announced.

Various scholarships are also awarded, e.g., a social scholarship supported by the ministry, or a merit scholarship, the awarding of which is coordinated by the internal regulations of the given university.

3. Conceptual and strategic support

Student support and quality of education are of course also part of the ministry's long-term plans and strategic documents. The general document is the [Strategic Plan of the Ministry for Higher Education for the Period from 2021](#) and related annual Plan for the implementation of this strategy. Another relevant document is [Strategy for the Internationalization of Higher Education for the period from 2021](#). The documents define a number of goals; among the main ones in the discussed area is the Goal of developing competencies relevant for life in the 21st century and the Goal of improving the availability and relevance of flexible forms of education. The planned reform of doctoral studies is also essential.

The long-term plans thus include the development of not only the technical and infrastructural background, but also the support of study conditions in the form of the establishment of an institution of ombudsmen, support of topics of equality, ethics, fight against gender stereotypes or sexual violence and support of psychological health of all members of the academic community. Development of flexible forms of education is also important. It can lead to increase of accessibility of education to all regardless of conditions.

The framework of the development of competences relevant for life in the 21st century also includes a comprehensive perception of life situation of students and support of such steps that will enable improvement of balancing of study, personal and work life. Great emphasis is placed on personal development, i.e. on independent creative activities, continuous cooperation of the academic sphere and practice, or the development of internationalization in the form of international cooperation and bilateral mobility (e.g. [Erasmus+](#) projects or [Student Regime](#)), in which [Czech National Agency for International Education and Research](#) plays a vital role that manages 20 programs and networks.

As part of the foreseen reform of doctoral degree of study, not only the aforementioned, but also other supporting steps are planned, such as for example introduction of a standard for full-time scholarship and a standard period of study or creation of supervisor standards, i.e. steps that further help the development of students' talents and individuality.

An important element of conceptual work is cooperation, i.e. planning and creating strategies in cooperation with universities and other relevant institutions (e.g. NAÚ), but also with other institutions focused on individual areas (e.g. NKC gender and science, which recently published e.g. a [handbook](#) summarizing the legal aspects of gender-based violence in universities). For the correct setting of the individual steps, it is also important to participate in international research (e.g. the regular European [Eurostudent](#) survey focused on the attitudes and living conditions of university students, the actual results of which can be expected in the coming months) or [the Doktorandi 2021 survey](#), which investigated students' views on doctoral studies.

Participation in international research (e.g. the regular European Eurostudent survey focused on the attitudes and living conditions of university students, the current results of which can be expected in the coming months) or the Doktorandi 2021 survey, which ascertained students' views on doctoral studies, are also important conditions for setting the individual steps correctly.

An integral part of the strategic work is also the appreciation of good practices, where we can mention, for example, regularly awarded prizes of the Minister of Education, Youth and Sports [for excellent educational activities](#) at the university or [for excellent students and graduates](#).

Resumo CZ:

O Ministério dispõe de diversos portais com informação para os estudantes do ensino superior. Destacam-se, da informação recebida, o plano estratégico do Ministério do Ensino Superior 2021 e Plano de implementação desta estratégica e a Estratégia para a Internacionalização o ES para o período de 2021. Os documentos refletem um conjunto de objetivos, e em particular o desenvolvimento de competências relevantes para a vida no séc. XXI e o objetivo de melhorar a disponibilização e relevância de formas flexíveis de educação. Estes planos a longo prazo, incluem o apoio aos estudos, a existência de um Ombudsmen, apoio a matérias como a igualdade, ética, combate à violência sexual, a discriminação de géneros e estereótipos, apoio psicológico e mental a toda a comunidade académica.

No quadro das competências relevantes para o séc. 21, inclui uma perspetiva extensa da situação de vida dos estudantes ao nível dos estudos, vida pessoal e de trabalho. Há uma enorme ênfase no desenvolvimento pessoal, atividades criativas independentes, cooperação continua entre a esfera académica e a pessoal (*work life balance*)

O apoio financeiro é direcionado para as universidades para programas que são desenvolvidos para melhorar as condições para os estudantes, e que são desenvolvidos pelas IES a longo prazo e com natureza sistémica. É o caso do Programa para o Apoio à Gestão estratégica das Universidades, através do qual as IES recebem uma contribuição para o alcance dos objetivos da estratégica interna, através de apoio a projetos internos. O novo programa operacional Jan Amosd Komensky foi lançado em 2022, e o objetivo principal consiste na criação e desenvolvimento de um sistema educacional aberto que responda aos desafios externos e que preste resposta numa perspetiva de aprendizagem ao longo da vida.

As candidaturas para os programas centralizados desenvolvimento das universidades públicas são anuais, e o tópico para 2023 foi a implementação e desenvolvimento de um sistema efetivo de apoio e aconselhamento aos estudos e psicológico, envolvendo as questões de saúde mental. Os grupos-alvo são estudantes e trabalhadores das universidades e candidatos ao ensino superior, participantes em programas de ALV, etc. Esta atividades incluiu, ainda, serviços de apoio a carreiras. O objetivo é aumentar e melhorar a qualidade dos serviços prestados pelas Universidades, propor uma padronização na oferta desses serviços, incluindo online, e garantir maior e melhor consciência da relevância desses serviços. Outro aspeto que foi incluído, foi o apoio a atividades de estudo, de integração, de desenvolvimento de métodos de avaliação da qualidade das atividades de aprendizagem do pessoal docente e reforçar os princípios éticos, incluindo medidas de combate à discriminação e abuso sexual e as questões de género.