

Why do we need a new education strategy?

Czech society has changed considerably during the last decade. We have witnessed a change of lifestyle, family patterns, the way of thinking of both adults and children; the economic crisis is feeding our fear about jobs and future in general. All this influences significantly the way parents, children and young people endorse the education and training. It is high time to re-think the process and to formulate a clear and distinct vision of how the Czech education system should look like in the perspective of at least one generation, if it is to cope with these changes. Also its contribution to quality of life, democracy and competitiveness of the Czech Republic has to be taken into account. Last but not least, it is most needed to carry out an effective public discussion on how to turn this vision into reality.

Our education system does have many strengths. However, it also has too many weak points, on which experts and the public share common view for many years. These primarily include instability of the political environment, limited by the election cycle, determining both the functioning the political bodies and political support for the necessary reform steps. An unclear division of roles between the state, regional administrations and municipalities/communities is a crucial bottleneck as well. Therefore, in addition to the vision, it is the strategic governance that the Czech education system needs to work well.

The emerging educational policy strategy of the Czech Republic for 2020 should primarily serve as a fundamental and binding guideline for the state, regional administrations and municipalities/communities, outlining how to govern the education system; it shall neither define what and how to teach, nor how to revise framework education programmes (RVP) or set educational standards. Strategy shall, on the other hand, emphasize what children and young people cannot effectively learn (besides family environment of course) elsewhere than at school – not only knowledge and skills, but also civic and social attitudes. School education generally is person's most important and closest contact with public institutions as such; therefore, the school must not only educate young people, but also shape their self-confidence and trust in other people, institutions and democratic society.

Even in the Czech Republic, the learning no more takes place only at school. The time when the school used to be the main source of knowledge and understanding of the world is gone. Young people themselves often admit that for them, the school is primarily a place where they meet with their peers and that they spend greater part of the day with the Internet and television than at school. Much of the current school pupils will be working in professions that do not exist today, and even adults are beginning to realize that much of what they use in real life has not been learnt at school. These are trends that are accelerating; we need to cope with them if we really care for the future of our children.

- Therefore, we believe that we shall strive for such education system where:
- Education is a value itself,
- Education is a top-ranked issue of both public and private interest,
- A quality education is accessible to everyone, it works effectively, fairly and gives everyone the same chance,

- Pupils and students know what is expected of them at each level of education, and what they can expect from education system themselves,
- Pupils and students like to learn and are motivated for lifelong learning; the teachers are guiding pupils and students through the learning process, helping them to achieve maximum possible results and develop together with them.

We want to make this vision come true by following several strategic directions, which are outlined in detail in a discussion paper; based on that, we want to lead a public debate in following months. Through the strategy we especially intend to strengthen the relevance and prestige of the school education, eliminate weaknesses of our educational system, formulate verifiable standards as a prerequisite for quality assurance, transform the role of teachers as guarantees of quality education, and improve the governance of our education system together with its capacity building.