

**HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM IN THE  
CZECH REPUBLIC AND THE PLACE OF  
PRIVATE-OWNED UNIVERSITIES IN THIS  
SYSTEM: THE CASE STUDY OF COLLEGE OF  
ECONOMICS AND MANAGEMENT (VSEM)**

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**Abstract:** The article brings a concise overview of the higher education system in the Czech Republic providing the breakdown of the organization of studies, awarded degrees and types of programmes. Further, it concentrates on the distinction between public and private higher education institutions and provides the case study of the College of Economics and Management in Prague, one of the leading private-owned universities in the Czech Republic.

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**Introduction: Higher education system in the Czech Republic**

Higher education system in the Czech Republic largely resembles the education systems in the majority of the EU countries. Higher education institutions constitute the highest level of education in the Czech Republic offering Bachelor, Master and Doctoral programmes and Life-Long Learning (LLF).

Studies in the Czech Republic are usually divided into semesters, trimesters, years or blocks. Each semester, trimester or block consists of teaching period, an examination period and a vacation period. The length of the academic year is 12 months and it is up to the Rector (or Chancellor) of the respective high education establishment to decide on the date when the academic year begins.

Centre for Higher Education Studies (CSVS, 2010) defines three types of higher education institutions in the Czech Republic: public, state and private. The public and private higher education institutions fall under the responsibility of the Czech Ministry of Educations, Youth and Sports. On the other hand, state institutions (such as the Police Academy of the Czech Republic) fall under the responsibility of the Czech Ministry of Defense as well as the Ministry of Interior.

According to the Czech Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, in 2010 there were 46 private Universities and Colleges and 26 state Universities in the Czech Republic (MSMT, 2010).

Every University and College is required to hold an accreditation from the respective authority (most frequently the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports). Higher education is then executed in accordance with these accreditations (accredited degree programmes) and in accord with the approved curriculum and study mode. The study mode can vary from on-site, distance or combined. There are certain conditions for the admission to the superior level of programmes: for instance, the entrance to the Bachelor programmes is pre-conditioned by the successful completion of a secondary education, and in order to be accepted to the Master programmes, one has to provide a Bachelor diploma.

In the Czech Republic, the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) is used at the majority of higher educational establishments and institutions. European Credit Transfer and

Accumulation System is a standard for comparing the study attainment and performance of students of higher education across the European Union and other collaborating European countries (EUROPA, 2010). ECTS credits are awarded for successfully completed examinations. In principle, one academic year corresponds to 60 ECTS-credits that are equivalent to 1500–1800 hours of study in all EU countries irrespective of standard or qualification type and is used to facilitate transfer and progression throughout the EU. In the future, the ECTS will be complemented by the European credit transfer system for vocational education and training (ECVET) in accordance with the Maastricht Communiqué issued by the ministers of 32 European countries responsible for vocational training on the 14th of December 2004.

A Bachelor degree programme typically lasts from 3 to 4 years (180-240 ECTS credits) and focuses on providing basic practical qualifications necessary for entering a Master degree programme or leaving for starting a professional life. Usually, the requirements for obtaining a Bachelor degree include writing and defending Bachelor thesis and sitting the state examinations.

A Master degree programme typically lasts from 1 to 3 years (60-180 ECTS credits). Although it is usually based on previous successful completion of a Bachelor programme in the related field, in some areas this requirement does not prevail. The studies in this type of higher education programmes is as a rule completed by writing and defending the Master thesis and sitting the state examinations. In such fields as medicine, veterinary medicine and hygiene, studies are completed by passing an advanced Master state examination that includes the presentation and defense of an advanced Master thesis. The studies in a Master programme lead to several types of academic degrees:

Ing. – Engineer (awarded in the area of Economics, technical sciences and technology, agriculture and forestry, military studies);0

- Ing. Arch.- Engineer Architect (awarded in the field of Architecture);0
- MUDr.- Doctor of Medicine (awarded in the field of medicine);0
- MDDr.- Doctor of Dental Medicine (awarded in the field of dental medicine);
- MVDr. – Doctor of Veterinary Medicine (awarded in the field of veterinary medicine and hygiene);
- MgA. – Master of Fine Arts (awarded in the area of fine arts);
- Mgr. – Master (awarded in the other areas of study).

Holders of a Master degree are entitled to take an advanced Master (rigorous) state examination in the same area of study and defend an advanced Master's (rigorous) thesis (similar to MPhil.).

In addition to that, students in the Czech Republic can enroll in a doctoral degree programme which typically lasts from 3 to 4 years. Doctoral studies are completed by the state doctoral examination and the public presentation and defense of the doctoral thesis (doctoral dissertation) that is required to be based on original results and would often include original publications in scientific journals. Graduates of the doctoral programmes are awarded the academic degrees of either Ph.D. (Doctor) or Th.D. (Doctor of Theology).

## **Private Universities in the Czech Republic: the case of the College of Economics and Management**

It has to be admitted that private-owned Universities and Colleges have a fairly short history in the Czech Republic. While the first and most known public University, the Charles University in Prague, was established in 1348, the first private high education establishments were opened after the fall of Communist regime in 1989. In the beginning, private Universities and Colleges served as the “last resort” for the students rejected by public education establishments. Nevertheless, their increasing reputation brings a vast pool of applicants every year. Studies at public Universities and Colleges in the Czech Republic are currently free of charge (students only pay for their meals, accommodation and some textbooks), although there are some plans for the introduction of mild tuition fees by the 2012 (MSMT, 2010). On the other hand, private-owned Universities and Colleges are for-profit establishments which collect fees from their students. The fees are mild relative to the Western European or the U.S. schools and most first-rate private colleges have a well-developed system of scholarships and loans so that no student is ruined by their studies. It has to be stressed that the Czech employment market does not differentiate between graduates of private and public colleges: every graduate has the same opportunity of employment regardless of which school she or he received her or his diploma from.

Whether the private University or College offers five-year Master study courses, or only enables achievement of a Bachelor degree, is partial evidence of the quality of the school. The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports' Accreditation Committee ensures that the study programmes are prepared and executed with excellence in all private schools.

College of Economics and Management (Vysoká škola ekonomie a managementu, VŠEM) is one of the Czech leading private-owned Universities. It offers higher education study programmes promoting the acquisition of inter-field knowledge and skills enabling its graduates to work within the environment of companies and organizations in the globalized and knowledge-oriented economics (VŠEM, 2009).

VŠEM offers its study programmes to all applicants from the Czech Republic. In the past, VŠEM used to be located in the North-Western Czech town called Usti nad Labem (the former legal site of VŠEM). Because of a very low interest of applicants to study in Usti nad Labem, VŠEM moved to a new campus building located in Prague 5 (Nárožní 2600/9a, 158 00 Praha 5); all administrative, tuition and consultation premises (as well as the new legal site) are now located in the new building.

VŠEM is located in Nárožní Street 2600/9a, Prague 5, Czech Republic (for more information one can consult its website at [www.vsem.cz](http://www.vsem.cz)). It was granted the state permission to operate as a private college in April 2008. The main mission and objective of VŠEM is to be an independent higher education institution offering internationally competitive programmes. VŠEM provides long-term educational programmes realized by means of the part-time and the fulltime study modes.

In October 2002, VŠEM commenced a part-time Bachelor study programme entitled “Economics and Management” with study majors in Business Economics and Taxes and Tax Policy. This accreditation was renewed twice: in 2005 for both majors (valid till 2010) and in 2010 just for the study major “Business Economics” (valid till 2014). On the contrary, the study major called “Taxes and Tax Policy” was not reaccredited, given the lack of interest amongst applicants.

In March 2006 VŠEM obtained an accreditation for its follow-up Master’s study programme “Economics and Management”. The full-time Bachelor’s study programme was accredited in May 2007. Two more accreditations followed in July 2007: a Bachelor’s study programme called “Communication and Human Resources” (both full-time and part-time study modes) and a follow-up Master’s programme called “Corporate Management” (part-time study mode).

A follow-up Master’s study programme called “Competitive Environment and Management” (part-time study mode) was granted accreditation in October 2008. The full-time study mode of this programme was consequently accredited in April 2009. Finally, in December 2009 a Bachelor’s study programme called “Marketing” was accredited (both full-time and part-time study modes). Furthermore, VŠEM provides various programmes of lifelong and professional learning

### **Study programmes and organization of study at the College of Economics and Management (VŠEM)**

#### **Study programmes offered by VŠEM**

The College of Economics and Management (VŠEM) offers Bachelor’s (Bc.) and Master’s (Ing./MBA) study programmes, lifelong learning programmes, and professional learning programmes:

- Bachelor Study Programmes. Depending on the study mode, the programmes are designated both for fresh high school graduates (the full-time study mode P1) and for lower and middle management (the part-time study mode K1). Those who have successfully completed the programme gain knowledge and acquire necessary skills for mastering all important areas of Business Economics. The graduates receive an insight into corporate management, its internal and external environment. They are also able to work either as freelancers or to find employment as the lower and middle level management.
- Master Study Programmes. The study programme (Economics and Management – Ing. P2) is designated both for the fresh graduates from the Bachelor’s study programmes and for middle and higher management who have successfully completed at least a Bachelor’s study programme, either focused on Economics (Economics and Management – Ing., K2) or any other kind of Bachelor’s study programme (MBA, K1). Those who have successfully completed the study programme gain knowledge and acquire necessary skills for analysis and strategic decision-making in companies and organizations set in the globalized and knowledge-based economies. These skills and knowledge might help the managers to apply a successful development strategy they can further effectively

support, in connection to innovation efficiency, quality of human resources, use of information and communication technology.

- Lifelong Learning. The Lifelong Learning Programmes (LLP) take the module structure of studies where each module includes professionally related study subjects that complete high school education and possibly upgrade the qualifications of university graduates (individual applicants, organizations, governmental and public authorities).
- Professional Learning. The Professional Learning Programmes are composed on the basis of the demand by organizations in private and public sector in the area of economics and management.
- Preparation Courses and Consultations. Preparation Courses are intended for applicants and students wishing to grasp the basic knowledge in relevant VŠEM study subjects before they start the studies.

### **International cooperation and accreditations at VŠEM**

In addition to offering a variety of study programmes, the College of Economics and Management intensively engages into international cooperation and holds prestigious international accreditations from ACBSP and ECBE.

- ACBSP Accreditation. Association of Collegiate Business Schools and Programs which was founded in 1988 in the USA associates institutions providing Business Economics education. It is an international accreditation institution and it cooperates with other prominent international accreditation institutions, such as Latin America Council on Management Education (CLADEA) or European Council for Business Education (ECBE).
- ECBE Accreditation. European Council for Business Education (ECBE) is an international accreditation institution for collegiate and university study programmes focused on business economics. It is a member of International Federation for Business Education (IFBE) associating accreditation institutions of the individual continents.

Since the academic year 2008/2009, VŠEM cooperates with more than 40 universities in the framework of Erasmus Programme. VŠEM successfully realizes student and academic staff exchanges with its international partner Universities. Closer collaboration was in terms of creating a joint degree programme was established with a partner University from France (ESC Saint Etienne). In addition to that, a consortium was established with Furchtwangen University (Germany), student exchanges with Chinese universities are on the way and delivering English taught modules to the VŠEM students is conducted in cooperation with the University of Glamorgan (United Kingdom). In connection with the Erasmus programme, VŠEM introduced selected English taught courses which are offered not only to exchange students from partner universities but also to local VŠEM students. It is planned to widen the offer of course taught in English in the years to come.

VŠEM has several partner universities, most of them within the Erasmus program (European-wide student and faculty exchange program). VŠEM has signed a bilateral agreement with these universities that enables them to exchange students, academics and administrators.

VŠEM also tries to allocate part of its efforts on charity work and spreading education in the less-developed countries of the world. Together with the humanitarian organization People in Need (Člověk v tísni), VŠEM runs a development project called “VŠEM in Africa”. The main objective of the project is to help to make quality education easily accessible for children in Ethiopia. It is due to the lack of schooling that many Ethiopians do not have even the very basic knowledge and skills that are commonly acquired at basic school by children in developed countries. According to the United Nations, Ethiopia is one of the most underdeveloped countries in the world. Unfortunately, the extreme degree of illiteracy (60% according to the World Bank - with the average rate in Africa being at 38%) makes the whole situation even worse. Therefore, VŠEM has decided to sponsor the construction of the elementary school for about 160 Ethiopian children, located in Dara Malo region. Four more schools are going to be built in Africa within the long-term project of VŠEM and People in Need.

#### **Tuition fees and scholarships at VŠEM**

The study fees at VŠEM differ according to the study programme and the study mode. Tuition fees include a complete set of study materials and a selection of administrative services based on the individual preference. Students obtain the CERGE-EI library card, as well as the ISIC VŠEM student's card. They are given access to VŠEM information resources and can purchase the products from VŠEM e-shop with up to 50% discount.

Within the project STUDY AT VŠEM!, the College of Economics and Management awards various kinds of scholarships every year. These scholarships apply to all study programmes of the given academic year. The conditions of the scholarship award are subjected to the Scholarship Regulations of VŠEM as well as the directives of the Rector.

The academic scholarship may be awarded to students of both full-time and part-time study mode. The scholarship is awarded to students achieving outstanding study results, the details are defined in the Study and Examination Directive of VŠEM. The best students, research projects, seminar papers, Bachelor and diploma theses are selected every year. The financial support can make up to 100% of the study fees.

The objective of the sports scholarship is to enable talented individuals to combine their sports career with studies. For such cases, there is a possibility of individual study plan together with a scholarship amounting to 100% of the study fees. VŠEM, in cooperation with the Czech Olympic Committee (COV), may also award the Olympic scholarship, which is designated for participants of the Olympic Games. Special scholarships are then designated for students handicapped physically and for single mothers. The social and accommodation scholarships will be awarded to students fulfilling the

conditions prescribed. Corporate scholarships are intended for a group of students who are employed within one company or organization.

### **Science and Research at the College of Economics and Management (VŠEM)**

Furthermore, the College of Economics and Management heavily engages into research. In order to facilitate research projects, a research institute, the Centre for Economic Studies of the College of Economics and Management (CES VŠEM) was created. The scientific focus of the research institute reflects the educational activities of VŠEM – this fact is also considered in the publishing and information activities of CES VŠEM. Research is targeted especially at the competitiveness of the Czech economy in international comparison (within the EU-27) and on the identification of related economic (particularly structural) and political implications for the support of economic convergence and transition to knowledge-based economy (within the goals of Lisbon strategy).

In its research work, VŠEM liaises with the many research institutions in the Czech Republic: for instance with the National Observatory of Employment and Training (NOET) and Faculty of Economics and Administration of Masaryk University Brno. CES VŠEM publishes a number of its scientific outputs (The Competitiveness Yearbook, Working Papers, bulletins etc.). These texts are designated for both external experts and as study materials for VŠEM students.

Moreover, the students are encouraged to take part in the research activities of CES VŠEM. Business case studies developed in this way offer an excellent opportunity to put theory into daily practice.

### **Conclusions**

The Czech Republic can boast an advanced higher education system offering the whole range of study programmes and fields of specialization. Education in the Czech Republic is highly competitive and ensured by the harmonization with the rules and directives imposed by the European Union.

Private Universities and Colleges constitute almost 2/3 of all high education establishments in the country. Although being for-profit organizations, they offer a high-quality education alongside with public and state schools.

The College of Economics and Management (Vysoká škola ekonomie a managementu - VŠEM) which was used as an example of a typical private University, is one of the leading private education institutions in the Czech Republic. It offers higher education study programmes promoting the acquisition of inter-field knowledge and skills enabling its graduates to work within the environment of companies and organizations in the globalized and knowledge-oriented economics. In addition, the College can boast its broad international ties and cooperation, accreditations, scholarship programmes, humanitarian activities and top-notch research.

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