

Country Report

Civic and social science learning in the Czech Republic: Current state, challenges and prospects

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Highlights:

- Civic learning has undergone important changes since 1989.
- In 2004, innovative Framework educational programmes were legislatively introduced.
- Teacher training is significantly competency-oriented.

Purpose: Taking the form of a report, the presented text aims to map the curricular changes in civic education and social science learning in basic and upper secondary schools after 1989. It seeks to identify the key features of undergraduate teacher training at universities, with an emphasis on field-specific didactics, and to provide a brief overview of school textbooks, methodological portals, journals and professional organisations. Additionally, it aims to outline prospects and future challenges.

Approach: The research design is based on the use of descriptive method and on the analysis of documents – laws, ministerial decrees, curriculum, educational programmes, a list of textbooks endorsed by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, educational portals and specialist journals.

Findings: The article outlines the most significant changes in the approach to civic education and social science learning during the democratisation of society following the fall of communism. It characterises the school curriculum, undergraduate teacher training in the Czech Republic and innovations aimed at developing professional competencies. It also discusses field-specific didactics and its position, methodological support and professional communication among teachers within the professional community (textbooks, portals, associations, etc.).

Research limitations: The limitations primarily lie in the deliberate focus solely on the educational field and its curricular framework, rather than on individual aspects of the educational process (such as teaching methods and forms, field-specific extracurricular learning, evaluation of the impact of teacher qualification on lesson quality, the out-of-school context of civic learning in society, etc.). This approach is motivated by the aim to ensure maximum consistency in the text. Another limiting factor is the fact that while current challenges for the field are outlined, answers to these issues are contingent on the implementation of relevant empirical research, which is still largely lacking in the Czech Republic.

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INTRODUCTION

Civic and social science learning [*občanské a společenskovední vzdělávání*] is one of the areas of school education in the Czech Republic that are constantly evolving and changing in response to societal changes. Perhaps the most significant transformation occurred immediately after 1989, when the democratisation process necessitated a swift departure from the overarching concept, as well as the heavily ideologically biased content and interpretative framework, of this educational field [*vzdělávací obor*]. It became essential to completely replace outdated school textbooks, initiate systematic retraining for teachers who had completed their undergraduate teacher training [*pregraduální příprava učitelů*] before 1989 and create a new structure for university-level teacher training. Particularly in the first five years of the new regime, the development of civic and social science learning relied heavily on the enthusiasm and initiative of individual university departments, non-profit organisations, institutions specialising in the professional development of teachers and, last but not least, the teachers themselves in both basic and upper secondary schools [*základní a střední školy*].

This article examines all the major changes that have shaped the Czech school system between 1989 and 2024. Over this 35-year period, numerous conceptual transformations occurred, each with varying durations of influence. This process remains ongoing, with significant revisions to national curriculum documents for basic schools currently in progress. Revisions to the upper secondary school curriculum are set to follow in the subsequent phase. It is clear that there is a continued need to innovate and update educational content [*vzdělávací obsah*]. Initially, the focus was primarily on concepts such as democracy, freedom, democratic values, the free market and market economy. In the second half of the 1990s, issues concerning minorities and ethnic groups (particularly the Roma population) residing in the Czech Republic became a focal point. Leading up to the country's accession to the European Union in 2004, emphasis shifted to the “European dimension of education” and fostering a sense of European identity. Over time, new topics were integrated into civic and social science learning – media education, financial literacy, environmental education and ethics education. The migration crisis of 2015–2016 brought issues of interculturalism, cultural identity, and the challenges and opportunities associated with migration to the forefront. Today, attention has turned towards developing critical thinking, strengthening resilience against misinformation and addressing issues related to the use of artificial intelligence.

The primary aim of this text is to describe the curricular changes in civic education [*občanská výchova*] and social science learning in basic and upper secondary schools within the context of the democratisation process after 1989. It also seeks to identify the main features of undergraduate teacher training at universities, with a specific focus on field-specific didactics [*oborová didaktika*] and its position in the system of individual components of study. Additionally, the article provides a concise overview of the most widely used school textbooks and introduces various methodological portals, journals and professional organisations. Lastly, it aims to outline prospects and future challenges where evidence-based implementation supported by empirical research could contribute to the further development of the field.

1 CONCEPTUAL CHANGES IN THE CONCEPT OF CIVIC STUDIES AND EDUCATION AFTER 1989

In the Czech school system, civic education has a long-standing tradition as a school subject, dating back practically to the establishment of independent Czechoslovakia. It was introduced as a compulsory subject in basic schools as early as 1923, with its content defined by the “Small Education

Act” of 1922. However, the creation of this subject did not resolve all content-related issues, and like the country as a whole, the subject underwent dramatic transformations over time. This text focuses specifically on the period following the fall of the communist regime in Czechoslovakia after 1989.¹

The reforms undertaken in the school system as a whole, and in civic studies/education [*občanská nauka/výchova*]² specifically, following the revolutionary events of 1989, aimed primarily at removing all ideologically charged content, which had previously been heavily infused with a political worldview. Another significant feature of the school system before 1989 was the strong legislative centralisation. Therefore, soon after the onset of democratic transformation in the former Czechoslovakia, conceptual work began on changing both the relevant laws³ and the subject’s content. The establishment of a democratic regime also led to an increase in the number of basic schools and an even more significant rise in the number of gymnasias [*gymnázia*] (including multi-year gymnasias [*víceletá gymnázia*]) and secondary technical schools [*střední odborné školy*] (practically more than doubling). This rapid quantitative increase in the number of upper secondary schools was partly due to the introduction of private and church-run schools, as well as schools offering alternative teaching methods. Legislative adjustments were also made to the length of compulsory education [*povinná školní docházka*]. In 1990, the requirement for basic school education was shortened to nine years, with the final year being optional, allowing pupils to transition to upper secondary school after Year 8. Since September 1996, pupils in the Czech Republic have been required to complete nine years of compulsory education.

The first official directive addressing the content of school subjects was the *Methodological Guidance for Basic and Upper Secondary Schools* issued on 5 December 1989. This guidance urged schools and teachers to discontinue teaching subjects in the spirit of the former state’s Marxist-Leninist ideology. Instead, they were encouraged to focus on explaining key concepts such as democracy, dialogue and tolerance. Simultaneously, grading of civic studies was abolished (Hubálek, 2017b).

The content of civic studies for basic schools (i.e., targeted at Years 6 to 8) was first formally regulated with the issuance of a curriculum on 24 May 1990. This curriculum was developed by a team of authors from the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (MŠMT), scientific institutions of the Academy of Sciences, the Ministry of Justice, the Institute for Health Education, the Research Institute for Pedagogy, basic school teachers and academic staff from faculties of arts and education. The subject’s mission was defined as primarily educational, emphasising topics such as democracy, humans in society, humane values, political power, and human and civil rights. Beyond these core areas, the curriculum integrated topics drawn from ethics and morality, psychology, hygiene, and even the equal status of Czechs and Slovaks within the shared state.⁴ In a way, the

¹ In a second part of this country report (forthcoming in JSSE), Tomáš Kasper and Dana Kasperová will focus on Civic Learning in interwar Czechoslovakia and the communist period until 1989.

² After 1989, the subject was still officially referred to as “*občanská nauka*” (civic studies). However, the decree issued by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports on 26 April 1991 renamed it “*občanská výchova*” (civic education), with the change taking effect from September 1991. By 2004, the subject was also referred to as “*výchova k občanství*” (citizenship education). Currently, legislation allows individual schools to name the subject as they see fit, based on how it is defined within their own school educational programme [*školní vzdělávací program*].

³ Key legislation in this context includes Act No. 564/1990 Coll., Act No. 171/1990 Coll. and Act No. 272/1996 Coll.

⁴ After 1989, the topic of equal rights for Czechs and Slovaks in a common state began to resonate strongly and became a political issue. The Slovak political representation in particular wanted a change in the existing system and after the 1992 elections and a series of negotiations between the winning parties, an agreement was reached on the division of the Czechoslovak federation. This fact was gradually reflected in the curriculum, which both republics began to adapt to their own

document, published by Státní pedagogické nakladatelství (literally “State Pedagogical Publishing House”), temporarily served as a replacement for textbooks, which were widely removed from schools due to excessive political indoctrination. Additionally, the curriculum addressed methods and forms of educational practice and the teacher’s role as a model of civic engagement for pupils. However, both the authors and the broader professional community acknowledged that this document was intended as a provisional measure. At the same time, regional educational authorities actively worked to fill the information gap concerning the academic foundation of civic education. For example, in November 1990, the Regional Institute for Pedagogy in Ostrava organised a lecture by American professor Diane Ravitch (1990) from Columbia University on democracy and approaches to teaching it in schools.

Practically immediately, a team led by professor Petr Piřha (1991)⁵ decided to develop a more detailed curriculum for civic education, which was further supplemented by the publication of a handbook entitled *Úvod do výchovy k občanství* (Introduction to Citizenship Education). In this handbook, the authors outlined not only the subject’s concept and didactic aspects but also its academic components, i.e., national history, state studies (law), economics, philosophy, ethics, anthropology, political science, religious studies and ecology (Piřha, 1992). To support schools, publishers began releasing textbooks and readers⁶ designed to help both pupils and teachers navigate the new and fundamentally different approach to the subject. For the sake of interest, it can be mentioned that the 1994 civic education textbook was co-authored by the then President Václav Havel and that the author of the first methodological texts for civic education, Petr Piřha, served as Minister of Education from 1992 to 1994. These facts show that civic education was given special attention at the time, even at the political level.

The post-revolutionary initiatives mentioned above were soon followed by more systematic efforts under the leadership of the MŠMT. In August 1995, the Ministry issued the Standard for Basic Education and, in the following year, released three educational programmes: Basic School, National School and Civic School. These programmes reflected the content of the subject Civic Education to varying degrees. Simultaneously with the publication of the Standard and the programmes, new regulations came into effect allowing each basic school to freely choose which educational programme it would adopt for teaching its pupils. Approximately two-thirds of schools opted for the Basic School educational programme.

For civic education, it is significant that all three educational programmes mandated its inclusion as a compulsory subject, albeit with varying weekly time allocations. In the Civic School and National School programmes, the subject was allocated two lessons per week, whereas in the Basic School programme, it was one lesson per week. Regardless of the educational programme, the subject Civic Education was designated exclusively for pupils at the second stage of basic schools, specifically for Years 5 to 8. After the introduction of Year 9, it was taught to pupils in Years 6 to 9.

A shared characteristic of all the documents mentioned above was the multidisciplinary approach to civic education. The subject integrated contents from various social science disciplines, which were adjusted or slightly modified over time. This approach was partly inspired by the

needs in the field of citizenship education. An interesting challenge of the subject in the Czech Republic and Slovakia was, for example, the topic of national identity.

⁵ Namely *Občanská výchova: učební osnovy pro 6. až 9. ročník základní školy a příslušné ročníky osmiletého gymnázia* [Civic Education: Curriculum for Years 6–9 of Basic School and the Corresponding Years of Eight-Year Gymnasium].

⁶ For example, Fischerová, 1994; Selucký, 1993; Bílý, 1993, etc.

necessity to familiarise pupils with the new value framework of the Czech Republic and to guide them towards these values through the fulfilment of affective objectives, connected with people's everyday life (Píthá, 1992).

Since its establishment, the Czech Republic has strived to join international organisations such as the Council of Europe and the European Union. These efforts also influenced reforms in the school system. In 1999, the Czech government issued the Concept of Education and Development of the Education System in the Czech Republic, which anticipated the creation of a comprehensive strategic document. This was published in 2001 as the National Programme for the Development of Education in the Czech Republic (commonly referred to as the White Paper). The White Paper served as the foundation for significant curriculum reform in the Czech Republic, which took place in 2004. That same year saw the enactment of Act No. 561/2004 Coll., on preschool, primary, secondary, higher professional and other education (commonly known as the Education Act), which, with some amendments, remains in force in the Czech Republic to this day.

Since then, Czech schools have been operating in the educational area according to the Framework Educational Programmes [*rámcové vzdělávací programy*] (FEPs), which are public documents (not only for teachers, but also for the public, including parents and pupils) defining both the compulsory and optional parts of the curriculum according to the individual levels of education from pre-primary to higher professional. FEPs also provide a framework for admission to upper secondary schools, a framework for school-leaving and final examinations in upper secondary schools, and a framework for the inspection and evaluation activities of the Czech School Inspectorate; provide parameters for teaching; and influence the contents of textbooks, the focus and content of further education of teaching staff and the content of study programmes at universities.

Based on the relevant FEP, each school (pre-primary, primary, secondary and upper secondary) is obliged to create its own School Educational Programme that defines the mandatory subject-matter contents for the school. Theoretically, each school may educate pupils according to a slightly different concept (for example, it may teach the same subject matter in different years or it may use the available lessons to reinforce certain subjects, usually mathematics, ICT or foreign languages). The FEP also sets a minimum time allocation for individual subjects, which schools respect. For example, at the second stage of basic schools, this is one lesson of citizenship education in Years 6 to 9 per week (in gymnasia, civic and social science fundamentals are compulsory in Years 1 and 2 and optional in Years 3 and 4. The minimum time allocation is not set for this subject alone but is shared with history, geography, physics, chemistry, biology and geology, amounting to a total of 36 lessons over four years).

However, the common denominator is the expected outcomes that all pupils must achieve in Years 5 and 9 of basic school or at the end of upper secondary school. The mandatory content of education also includes key competencies [*klíčové kompetence*] and cross-curricular topics [*průřezová témata*], but it is up to the schools to decide how they will implement these competencies and cross-curricular topics. Schools can choose to integrate topics into existing subjects (such as integrating the cross-curricular topic Education of a Democratic Citizen into the subject Citizenship Education), implement the topic through project-based learning or create a separate subject using the available time allocation.

Table 1. Schematic structure of the Framework Educational Programme for Basic Education⁷

Educational areas [vzdělávací oblasti]	Examples of school subjects	Key competencies	Cross-curricular topics	Complementary educational fields
Language and Communication through Language	Czech Language, foreign languages	learning	<i>Personal and Social Education</i>	drama education
Mathematics	Mathematics	problem-solving	<i>Education of a Democratic Citizen</i>	<i>ethics education</i>
ICT	ICT	communication	<i>Education for Thinking in European and Global Contexts</i>	film/audiovisual education
Humans and Their World (only at the first stage of basic school)	Understanding the World, Primary Natural Sciences, National History and Geography	<i>social and personal</i>	<i>Multicultural Education</i>	dance and movement education
<i>Humans and Society</i>	<i>History, Citizenship Education</i>	<i>civic</i>	Media Education	
Humans and Nature	Geography, Physics, Chemistry, Natural Sciences	work		
Arts and Culture	Music, Art	digital		
Humans and Health	Health Education, Physical Education			
Humans and the World of Work	Humans and the World of Work			

A compulsory component of the Framework Educational Programme for Basic Education is the educational areas that combine selected school subjects. For example, the educational area Humans and Society integrates the subjects History and Citizenship Education (and partly also social geography, although this is usually formally assigned to the subject Geography). Citizenship Education itself is divided thematically into five educational contents, which are further specified by various types of subject matter. These educational contents are titled: Humans in Society; Humans as Individuals; Humans, the State and the Economy; Humans, the State and the Law; and International Relations and the Global World. They integrate fundamental knowledge from psychology, sociology, economics, law and political science. According to the Framework Educational Programme for Basic Education, the general aim of the subject is

to create qualities related to pupils' orientation in social reality and their integration into various social relationships and relations. ... It develops civic and legal awareness in pupils,

⁷Note: Italics in the table indicate the areas of the Framework Educational Programme for Basic Education that are very closely or directly related to the subject Citizenship Education. Therefore, it is also visually possible to perceive that it should be given a more important role.

strengthens individuals' sense of personal and civic responsibility, and motivates pupils to actively participate in the life of a democratic society. (RVP ZV, 2021)

This section of the Framework Educational Programme for Basic Education is also binding on the lower levels of gymnasium, which correspond to Years 6–9 of basic school.

Structurally, the Framework Educational Programme for Gymnasia (or other types of upper secondary schools such as secondary technical schools) is designed similarly. In this case as well, the national framework level is specified by each school in its own School Educational Programme, the implementation of which, as well as the allocation of a specific number of lessons to individual subjects, is the responsibility of the school management. This programme reflects both the compulsory and non-compulsory components of the Framework Educational Programme. The compulsory parts of the Framework Educational Programme for schools again include key competencies (with the distinction that, unlike in the Framework Educational Programme for Basic Education, the digital and work competencies are not included; instead, the competency for entrepreneurship is used), cross-curricular topics (here, unlike in the Framework Educational Programme for Basic Education, the topic Education of a Democratic Citizen is absent and is replaced by Environmental Education) and educational areas. Another difference is the absence of complementary educational fields (see Table 2, where the areas with the greatest thematic overlap with the subject Civic and Social Science Fundamentals are again in *italics*).

Table 2. Schematic structure of the Framework Educational Programme for Gymnasia

Educational areas	Examples of school subjects	Key competencies	Cross-curricular topics
Language and Communication through Language	Czech Language, foreign languages	Learning	<i>Personal and Social Education</i>
Mathematics and Its Application	Mathematics	problem-solving	Environmental Education
Humans and Nature	Physics, Chemistry, Biology, Geography, Geology	Communication	<i>Education for Thinking in European and Global Contexts</i>
<i>Humans and Society</i>	<i>Civic and Social Science Fundamentals, History</i>	<i>social and personal</i>	<i>Multicultural Education</i>
Humans and the World of Work	Humans and the World of Work	<i>civic</i>	Media Education
Arts and Culture	Music, Art	Entrepreneurship	
Humans and Health	Health Education, Physical Education		
ICT	ICT		

For our purposes, the key educational area is Humans and Society, which integrates the contents of History and Civic and Social Science Fundamentals (as well as part of social geography, which is otherwise, as a whole, assigned to a different educational area). The Civic and Social Science Fundamentals work with the following educational contents: Humans as Individuals (psychology), Humans in Society (sociology), Humans in the State (political science), Humans and the Law (law),

International Relations and the Global World (political science), and Introduction to Philosophy and Religious Studies (philosophy, ethics, religious studies).

Furthermore, it can be stated that the level of contents in the area of civic learning in upper secondary schools varies significantly. While gymnasia (described in detail above) focus on giving pupils a thorough introduction to various social sciences, other types of upper secondary schools tend to deepen the subject matter covered in basic schools (by other types of upper secondary schools we mean mainly secondary technical schools and secondary vocational schools). This difference is not only due to the varying conceptions of the Framework Educational Programme but also because of the number of lessons allocated to the subject. At gymnasia, this subject is typically taught for at least 2 lessons per week, and in the final year (or two years), students have the option to choose a social science seminar, which also has a 2-lesson per week allocation. In other types of upper secondary schools, the subject is generally taught only in two years with an allocation of 1 to 2 lessons per week. The school-leaving examination [*maturita*] in secondary schools has two levels – state (“common”) level and school (“profile”) level. The state examination consists of two compulsory examinations – one in Czech language and literature and the other (chosen by the pupil) in a foreign language (English, German, French, Spanish or Russian) or mathematics. Both examinations take the form of a written didactic test, which is marked verbally (pass/fail) and is accompanied by a pass percentage. The profile (school) examination consists of 3–5 subjects chosen by the pupil from the school’s offer. Pupils must choose Czech language and literature as one of the subjects and again a foreign language if they have chosen it for the state examination. For example, if a pupil has chosen Czech and English for the state school-leaving examination, they must also take examinations in these subjects at the school level. The remaining subjects are freely chosen by pupils (Center for Educational Achievement Assessment, 2025). None of the types of upper secondary schools have a compulsory school-leaving examination in Civic and Social Science Fundamentals, but students at gymnasia often choose this examination voluntarily, especially if they are applying to universities with a humanities focus. Higher education institutions may take school-leaving examination results into account, but they generally do not grant bonus points for a school-leaving examination in social sciences. Admission to higher education institutions is, therefore, primarily determined by success in admission tests.

As mentioned above, the most significant curricular change in the Czech Republic occurred in 2004. Since then, also thanks to educational and field-specific research, there has been a clear need to update the entire concept. Formally, this was initiated by the government with the publication of the Strategy for Educational Policy in the Czech Republic until 2030+ in 2020. This strategy has two key goals:

- 1) Focus education more on the acquisition of competencies needed for active civic, professional and personal life;
- 2) Reduce inequalities in access to quality education and enable the maximum development of the potential of children, pupils and students (MŠMT, 2020).

During the first implementation period (2020–2023), one of the objectives was to revise the Framework Educational Programme for Basic Education. This was first addressed in 2021 with a “small revision of the Framework Educational Programme for Basic Education”, which primarily focused on enhancing digital competencies and ICT education in basic schools. For the subject Citizenship Education, this revision led to several reductions in the subject-matter contents in order to eliminate some duplications (as mentioned above, some topics could have been repeated across

different areas when fulfilling key competencies or cross-curricular topics, see Table 1). However, reducing subject-matter contents was not an ideal approach for the subject itself, partly because it resulted in a general reduction in the number of lessons allocated for Citizenship Education (from 2 lessons per week to 1 lesson per week). These changes were mandated for implementation in basic schools starting on 1 September 2023 for the first stage and 1 September 2024 for the second stage of basic school.

Currently, “major revisions” are being made to the Framework Educational Programme for Basic Education (since 2023) in the Czech Republic. The final version of the Framework Educational Programme for Basic Education was to be completed by the end of 2024, and the mandatory implementation of the new concept in Years 1 and 6 of basic schools is scheduled to begin on 1 September 2027. This change to the key curricular document for basic education is very significant, altering the overall concept in many aspects. For example, the focus will shift towards a competency-based approach to teaching, with no mandatory subject-matter contents outlined in the curriculum, teaching will be oriented towards connecting with pupils’ everyday life and experiences, educational contents will no longer be conceived as a “list” of topics in a specific subject but will focus on its key elements, and the allocation of lessons to individual subjects will be increased, allowing schools more flexibility in deciding how many lessons to allocate to a given subject. Furthermore, literacy (reading/writing and mathematical) will be newly defined for basic school pupils, and a level of mastery of the subject matter will be set in three stages: beginning – on the way – achieved (National Institute of Education, 2024). Individual schools will then determine in their educational programmes in which years pupils will reach specific levels, while ensuring that all pupils reach the “achieved” level during compulsory education.

For Citizenship Education, both the content and the concept will undergo the following changes. Only three thematic areas will be established: Me in Society, Responsible Citizen, and Me and the World of Finance, which will integrate a total of 15 expected learning outcomes:

1. Characterises the social roles he/she has in his/her life and assesses what belonging to family, school, culture, religion, gender, community, nation and state means to him/her.
2. Justifies his/her value system and how he/she applies it in different life situations.
3. Recognises and critically addresses prejudice and stereotypes in communication and behaviour.
4. Evaluates what or who influences him/her and his/her decision-making in the physical and digital environment.
5. Evaluates the merits, pitfalls and impacts of democratic and autocratic forms of government using examples from citizens’ lives.
6. Examines the conduct and results of elections in the Czech Republic, citizens’ decision-making in elections and their involvement in public political affairs.
7. Works with examples of specific legal texts such as the Constitution of the Czech Republic, laws and various types of agreements.
8. Recognises violations of rights, laws and agreements using examples of different life situations and suggests ways to resolve the situations.
9. Examines the actions of state and local governments in dealing with citizens’ life situations and in solving local challenges and problems.
10. Critically assesses events in his/her region, the Czech Republic and the world.
11. Evaluates, using examples from citizens’ lives, the manifestations of economic and political integration in Europe and its advantages and disadvantages.

12. Creates a proposal for a socially beneficial action and actively participates in one.
13. Uses basic economic concepts that are currently being discussed in the public sphere.
14. Makes decisions in model situations to address life needs with respect to family and personal budgets.
15. Explains pricing in a market economy from the perspective of the buyer and seller (National Institute of Education, 2024).

In comparison to the previous state of the Framework Educational Programme for Basic Education (2023), it is evident that there has been a significant thematic reduction. However, the proposed document also introduces the creation of a new educational field, *Humans, Their Personalities and the World of Work*, which integrates part of the original content of Citizenship Education (for more information on the original and currently still valid concept of citizenship education, see the text between Table 1 and Table 2). This mainly concerns the area of personal, social and ethical development of pupils. Additionally, this field now also includes career development, as well as polytechnic and practical education (National Institute of Education, 2024).

Naturally, similar conceptually-focused adjustments are anticipated for the Framework Educational Programmes for upper secondary schools as well, but at this time, no further detailed information on such revisions is available.

2 UNDERGRADUATE TRAINING OF CIVIC EDUCATION AND SOCIAL SCIENCES TEACHERS

Basic and upper secondary school teachers are required by current legislation to have completed a Master's degree. Most teachers graduate directly from a teacher training programme, usually in a combination of two specialisations (qualifications), such as civic education – history, civic education – Czech language. Some teachers graduate with only one specialisation, which mostly applies to fields with higher lesson allocation and arts-education fields (for example, Czech language, foreign language, art, music). Graduates of non-teaching study programmes (for example, philosophy, history, economics) can also enter the teaching profession, provided the teacher's qualification is based on additional pedagogical studies with a state examination of teaching competence, which they must complete within three years of entering the profession. In school practice, a teacher may also teach subjects of a different specialisation (qualification) than the one in which they graduated, but the teaching competence is essential. However, a high level of teacher qualifications clearly contributes to the professional reputation of schools.

Higher education institutions are largely autonomous, but study programmes are subject to an accreditation process. In the case of institutional accreditation, granted for a limited period by the National Accreditation Bureau for Higher Education, study programmes are accredited by the Internal Evaluation Board of the higher education institution concerned, while in the case of programme accreditation, they are accredited directly by the National Accreditation Bureau for Higher Education.

In the Czech Republic, higher education for future teachers of social science subjects at secondary level⁸ is provided at nine universities, typically in faculties of education and arts. In some cases, studies for basic and upper secondary schools are separated, with teacher training for basic schools

⁸ Secondary education in the Czech Republic comprises both lower gymnasias and the second stage of basic schools (pupils aged 11–15) and upper secondary schools (pupils aged 15–19).

taking place in the faculty of education of the respective university and teacher training for upper secondary schools in the faculty of arts (for example, Masaryk University, the University of Ostrava), or, although teacher training for basic and upper secondary schools is separated, it is exclusively offered by the faculty of education (for example, the University of South Bohemia in České Budějovice, the Technical University of Liberec).⁹ Other universities provide study programmes focused on teacher training for both basic and upper secondary schools (for example, the Faculty of Education at Charles University, the Faculty of Education at Palacký University Olomouc). There is also a model where teacher training is conducted in the faculty of education, but the field of study is guaranteed by the faculty of arts (for example, the University of Hradec Králové).

In all cases, teacher training is a five-year Master's programme, usually structured into a Bachelor's level and a follow-up Master's level. While the follow-up Master's programme always includes field-specific, field-specific didactic and educational-psychological training, including practice, students at the Bachelor's level may study either purely a certain field (for example, humanities, social sciences, philosophy) or a study programme focused on education (for example, civic education focused on education, social sciences focused on education). In connection with the current reform of teacher education at universities in the Czech Republic (2024), the accreditation of a five-year unstructured Master's programme (i.e. not structured into a Bachelor's level and a follow-up Master's level) for teacher training for the second stage of basic schools and/or upper secondary schools is also allowed, with the condition that the study programme is professionally, rather than academically, focused, with a higher lesson allocation for reflected educational practice ("clinical year"). Currently, there is also much discussion about the possibility of accrediting a more broadly conceived study programme, integrating the main social science disciplines (social sciences, history and social geography), with an emphasis on an interdisciplinary approach that transcends the boundaries of traditional school subjects.

In terms of the structure of study plans and the percentage or credit allocation of individual components of the study, all teacher training programmes at Czech universities are subject to approval by the regulator (i.e., the MŠMT), which oversees compliance with the Framework Requirements for Study Programmes (MŠMT, 2024). These requirements specify the proportion allocated to teacher propaedeutics (pedagogy, psychology, special and social pedagogy), field, field-specific didactics and reflected educational practice, while also granting universities some flexibility to incorporate additional disciplines, such as foreign languages or sports, depending on their specific focus.

Table 3. Total credit allocation for individual components of teacher training (MŠMT 2024)¹⁰

Teacher training for the second stage of basic schools	Number of credits	Teacher training for upper secondary schools	Number of credits
Teacher propaedeutics (pedagogy, psychology, special pedagogy, etc.)	35–45	Teacher propaedeutics (pedagogy, psychology, special pedagogy, etc.)	30–36
Field-specific didactics	30–35	Field-specific didactics	30–35
Reflected educational practice	24–30	Reflected educational practice	24–30

⁹ At the Technical University of Liberec, teacher training is provided by the Faculty of Science, Humanities and Education.

¹⁰ The remaining credits up to a total of 300 for the entire study (5 years) are allocated to the field(s) and the flexible part of the study (thesis preparation, university foundation courses, foreign language, ICT, sports, etc.).

In the Czech Republic, there is no centrally established framework for defining the content and internal proportionality of the field component of teacher training in higher education, i.e., social science learning itself (content standard), nor a unified graduate profile. These aspects are entirely within the competence of individual universities and largely depend on traditions (for example, a traditionally greater emphasis on philosophy in faculties of arts) and the staffing structure of individual departments. Evaluation committees and working groups can comment on the content during accreditation (Internal Evaluation Board of the respective university, National Accreditation Bureau), but they often approach this issue very differently and tend to focus on general accreditation standards (age structure, academic qualifications, creative work, scientific grants, internationalisation, etc.) when evaluating and deciding on the awarding of accreditation.

When describing the current form of the field component of teacher training for social science subjects at Czech universities, two main conceptual approaches can be identified. Some universities approach undergraduate training for social sciences teachers at the secondary education level as a multidisciplinary summary of the fundamentals of individual humanities and social sciences. These typically include philosophy and ethics, religious studies, history, sociology, political science, economics and law. Other universities focus more deeply on the curriculum of basic and upper secondary schools (for example, Framework Educational Programmes, MŠMT, 2021; Pedagogical Research Institute in Prague, 2007), with the compulsory and elective courses in their study plans corresponding to the key thematic components of the Framework Educational Programme, such as Humans in Society, Humans and Economy, Humans and the State, Education for Democracy, Globalisation and International Cooperation (for example, the Faculty of Education, Palacký University Olomouc). A common approach combines both models, where the fundamentals of the humanities and social sciences form the backbone of the study plan, supplemented by other areas such as global education, multicultural education, media education, financial literacy, environmental issues, etc.

Cooperation both within the Czech Republic and internationally is highly significant for university departments focused on teacher training in social science learning. While international cooperation reflects long-standing contacts between individual departments, with the more intensive connections among a larger number of departments usually occurring in various research and development projects, cooperation efforts at national level have been more successful. For nearly twenty-five years, regular professional meetings and symposia have been organised for members of the departments of civic education and social sciences (the main coordinator being the Department of Social Sciences at the Faculty of Education, Palacký University Olomouc). In 2022, the Platform for Departments of Social Sciences was created, initiated by representatives of the Faculty of Education at Charles University and the Faculty of Education at Masaryk University.

3 FIELD-SPECIFIC DIDACTICS OF CIVIC EDUCATION AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

Field-specific didactics undoubtedly holds a key position among the various components of teacher training. In the Czech context, the concept of field-specific didactics, as formulated by Tomáš Janík (2009) following the earlier model of educational content knowledge by Schulman, is generally accepted. In addition to Schulman's concept, the theory of didactic reconstruction, which is based on the relationship between pupils' everyday experience and the current state of the academic discipline, has also been developing (for more details, see Kuthan et al., 2018, pp. 20–22). A significant pillar of modern field-specific didactics is Korthagen's concept of theory and practice in teacher education (see Slavík et al., 2012).

The state of and prospects for the field-specific didactics of social sciences were summarised by Antonín Staněk (2015). Among the main issues of this discipline, the author identified terminological inconsistency, the search for its basic concept going beyond a simple summary of the fundamentals of individual social sciences, the need for greater balance between the educational and study components, and a certain deficit in the existence of high-quality, methodologically sound empirical research. Due to the interdisciplinary nature of the didactics of social sciences, comprehensive monographs have been published on the didactics of individual subjects that make up the civic and social science fundamentals, such as the didactics of philosophy (Kuthan et al., 2018) and the didactics of ethics (Hubálek, 2017a). Stimulating considerations in the process of shaping modern didactics of social sciences have been brought by partial studies dedicated to the development of *civic literacy* and *civic engagement* in the school environment (Fapšo, 2023; Protivínský & Dokulilová, 2012).

Unlike other field-specific didactics (primarily the didactics of natural sciences – mathematics, physics, chemistry – but also, for example, Czech language and literature or history), the didactics of social sciences in the Czech Republic does not have a strong institutional foundation. This is especially reflected in the absence of a doctoral level of education (no Czech university offers a doctoral programme in this field). Naturally, this has significant consequences for the development of scientific knowledge and the career opportunities for academic staff involved in the field of the didactics of social sciences. This is also evident in the fact that the Czech field-specific didactics of social sciences relies heavily on general didactics, that there are few synthetically conceived professional publications discussing the didactics of social sciences comprehensively in both diachronic and synchronic perspectives, and that there is no field-specific journal published in the Czech Republic indexed in the Web of Science or SCOPUS databases. Some universities (for example, the Faculty of Education at Palacký University Olomouc) allow field-specific didactic profiling and field-specific didactic focus in dissertations within their Pedagogy doctoral programme. This can be seen as a potential step towards the gradual emancipation of the field-specific didactics of social sciences as an independent discipline, developed at the doctoral level of higher education.

Although the position of the didactics of social sciences in the Czech Republic is influenced by a weaker level of scientific discourse, virtually all university departments respond very quickly to innovations in undergraduate teacher training. A notable current trend in teacher training at Czech universities is a strong focus on competencies (Kuthan et al., 2018), for the implementation of which in teacher training a *competency framework* [*kompetenční rámec*] has been created. The competencies of teacher education graduates are most thoroughly described in the educational-psychological domain, i.e. at the level of planning, leading and reflecting on lessons, creating a safe learning environment, evaluating and providing feedback, professional cooperation, self-concept, teacher work ethics and mental health (MŠMT, 2023b). A general definition is available at the level of the fields taught and their delivery to pupils, but it has not yet been applied to specific fields. This broadly conceived competency framework for the fields taught is certainly a very good starting point for creating field-specific frameworks for civic education and social sciences, the development of which will be a challenge for the coming years.

One of the contributions of the newly constructed competency framework is a three-stage concept that assumes the lifelong growth of a teacher in the basic triad of *university graduate* – *novice teacher* – *experienced teacher* (see Diagram 1).

**Table 3. Competency framework of a graduate in university teacher training
– Field Taught area, general definition (MŠMT, 2023b, pp. 22–26; modified)**

Competency framework of a graduate in university teacher training – <i>Field Taught</i> area	
Understands and further develops in the field taught	Possesses the knowledge and skills of the field taught to effectively plan and implement instruction.
	Has a positive attitude towards the field taught and is interested in its development and future.
	Understands how (scientific) knowledge is created in the field taught, and uses and critically evaluates reliable sources of information.
	Can use modern technologies in the field taught.
	Is familiar with the relationship between the field taught and the curriculum at different levels of education.
Didactically conveys the content of the field taught to pupils in accordance with their educational needs	Conveys (didactically transforms) educational content to pupils at the appropriate level of education in a clear and factually correct manner.
	Effectively creates opportunities for learning and uses appropriate teaching methods and resources (teaching tasks, model situations and examples, and information resources, including digital resources).
	Conveys to pupils the connections between the field theory, real phenomena and life practice, including current events.
	Conveys the field taught as open and evolving, interconnected with other fields (not as a closed and isolated body of knowledge).

4 COOPERATION OF CIVIC EDUCATION AND SOCIAL STUDIES TEACHERS WITH OTHER INSTITUTIONS; PROFESSIONAL ORGANISATIONS, PROFESSIONAL JOURNALS

Higher education represents the first, “preparatory” phase of the professionalisation of the teaching profession. After completing this phase, graduates enter the adaptation phase as novice teachers and, after a certain period with acquired practice and experience, become experienced teachers. Intense cooperation in further education and the sharing of best practices with other institutions are important in all phases, whether it concerns state-guaranteed institutions (for example, the National Pedagogical Institute, faculties of education and other faculties offering numerous courses and workshops in lifelong learning), professional associations (the most significant for social sciences teachers being the Association of Civic Education and Social Sciences Teachers) or non-profit organisations (for example, the Centre for Democratic Learning, People in Need, Fakescape, One World in Schools, Open Society, Amnesty International, Arpok, Eurocentres, etc.). The Association of Civic Education and Social Sciences Teachers was established in 2014 on the initiative of active teachers, and its main goal is to create a common platform for innovation in the teaching of these subjects, to create methodological support and to intensify communication in the professional community (obcankari.cz). Teachers of social science subjects can regularly participate in summer schools organised by the aforementioned teacher association and the Department of Social Sciences of the Faculty of Education, Palacký University Olomouc.

A major shortcoming is that there is currently no journal dedicated exclusively to the group of civic education and social sciences teachers working in basic and upper secondary schools that

would provide didactic and methodological inspiration related to these subjects, legislative and curriculum changes, evidence-based knowledge from both Czech and international field-specific didactic research, and space for discussion, polemics and exchange of experience. From 2001 until 2008, there was a quarterly journal titled *Společenskovední předměty: čtvrtletník pro pedagogy základních a středních škol* (Social Studies Subjects. Quarterly for Primary and Secondary School Teachers), which ceased without replacement in that year. The Faculty of Education at Masaryk University regularly publishes the journal *Komenský: odborný časopis pro učitele základní školy* (Comenius: A Journal for Basic School Teachers), dedicated to the full spectrum of school subjects. The journal *CIVILIA – odborná revue pro didaktiku společenských věd* (CIVILIA – A Professional Periodical for the Didactics of Social Sciences), published by the Department of Social Sciences of the Faculty of Education, Palacký University Olomouc, is intended more for field-specific didactics specialists, but with relation to school practice.

5 TEXTBOOKS, METHODOLOGICAL SUPPORT FOR CIVIC EDUCATION AND SOCIAL SCIENCES TEACHERS

Textbooks can be defined as fundamental curricular documents and primary educational media (Knecht & Janík et al., 2008; Maňák & Klapko, 2006; Průcha, 1998). They are the main didactically developed carriers of educational content for both pupils and teachers. The MŠMT grants textbooks an MEYS endorsement within the approval process (usually for six years, with the option to apply for an extension); the list of textbooks with a valid endorsement is regularly updated (MŠMT, 2021, 2024). The endorsement serves as a state guarantee that the textbook complies with legislation and the applicable curriculum (framework educational programmes), and that it adheres to the main didactic principles. Schools may not use state funds to purchase textbooks unless they have a valid MŠMT endorsement. The selection of a particular set of textbooks is entirely within the competence of schools; subject committees composed of teachers of the subject in question usually cooperate with the school management.

While there is a relatively large selection of textbook series available for both basic and upper secondary schools in the Czech environment for other subjects (Czech language, foreign language, mathematics, etc.), only three series of textbooks for basic education and two series for upper secondary schools currently have a valid endorsement. Textbook authors are selected by the individual publishing houses from among academics, teachers and other specialists.

In basic schools and at the lower level of gymnasias, complete textbook series published by the publishing houses SPL – Práce, Fraus and Nová škola can be used. The textbooks by SPL – Práce are based on the earlier “Valenta’s series”, published almost twenty years ago. These textbooks feature a narrative-based teaching text built on interconnected didactic stories, supplemented with various teaching tasks and other educational activities. The Fraus textbooks represent a workbook-type textbook based on a constructivist approach, where learning is built on diverse activities using various didactic media (mind maps, diagrams, photographs, original illustrations, etc.). The Nová škola textbook series is similar in its concept, emphasising interdisciplinary connections and CLIL elements (a brief glossary of specialised terms in each chapter in English and German). In all three cases, the textbooks are supplemented with workbooks and teacher’s books.

**Figure 1. Most widely used textbooks for basic schools
(Fraus, Nová škola and SPL-Práce publishing houses)**



Upper secondary schools should use textbooks published by the publishing houses Computer Media and Didaktis. The concept of these two textbooks is different. While the Computer Media textbooks maintain the traditional approach to upper secondary education of this subject as the fundamentals of individual, largely isolated social science disciplines (psychology, sociology and media, philosophy, religious studies, economics, political science and international relations, law), the Didaktis series shows an effort to interconnect these disciplines more and take an interdisciplinary approach. Various areas of human life are viewed more comprehensively from different perspectives, with the knowledge from the individual social sciences gradually integrated throughout the four years of upper secondary education. This approach aligns more closely with the curriculum and reflects the thematic units of the framework educational programme (RVP G, Pedagogical Research Institute in Prague, 2007). The more modern approach of the Didaktis textbooks is also evident in the fact that it forms a three-part series for each year, consisting of a textbook, a workbook and a teacher's book.

**Figure 2. Most widely used textbooks for upper secondary schools
(Computer Media and Didaktis publishing houses)**



Given that citizenship education and civic and social science fundamentals are educational fields with a high need for constant updating and response to current social and political events, methodological portals and websites for civic education, which complement the basic didactic texts, represent important sources of methodological support for teachers. They are mostly run by universities, professional organisations and non-profit organisations focusing on democracy, globalisation and human rights. There is no state-created methodological portal specifically dedicated to civic education. Educational lessons and methodological suggestions do not have a state-prescribed structure; they are usually guided by a desire to respect didactic principles and to incorporate interdisciplinary connections and key competencies. Masaryk University and the Civic Education Centre operate the vychovakobcanstvi.cz portal, which includes lessons on various topics of civic education, a wealth of text and audiovisual materials, as well as concepts and research studies. The Association of Civic Education and Social Sciences Teachers regularly updates educational materials on the www.obcankari.cz portal. The Centre for Democratic Learning (www.cedu.cz) focuses on developing civic literacy and establishing and running school parliaments. Other sources include the One World in Schools website, which focuses on using films in teaching topics such as human rights, media education, globalisation and social issues (www.jsns.cz), the Variants programme by the People in Need organisation, providing lessons and materials in the field of intercultural education and global development education (www.clovekvtisni.cz/co-delame/vzdelavaci-program-varianty), and the Financial Education portal, which develops financial literacy among pupils (www.financnivzdelavani.cz). Lastly, teachers can also make use of methodological suggestions available on the rvp.cz portal.

6 DISCUSSION, PROSPECTS FOR CIVIC EDUCATION AND CHALLENGES FOR THE FUTURE

Following the description of the current state of civic education and social science education at the secondary and tertiary level, it is possible to identify both strong and weak points and formulate certain recommendations that should be focused on in the future. Among the most notable positives is undoubtedly the emphasis on a competency-based approach to civic education, focusing not only on civic knowledge but also on the development of skills, critical thinking, democratic values, civic attitudes and civic engagement. Another strong point is the consistent effort to address current societal challenges related to changes in society (sustainability, financial literacy, migration and multicultural coexistence issues, risks and opportunities associated with the use of artificial intelligence). Positives also include efforts to revise curriculum documents (2024), responding to the educational challenges of the 21st century.

Among the negatives, one can include a certain underestimation of the profession of civic education teacher by both the expert and lay public, which is probably related to the ideological burden of civic education in the period before 1989. Another weakness is the relatively low level of field-specific didactic research in social sciences at higher education institutions and the limited opportunity for career development for field-specific didactics specialists (the absence of doctoral studies in social science didactics, the practical impossibility of obtaining higher academic ranks such as professor). At the secondary education level, a negative is the relatively limited choice of textbooks and other educational materials (compared to other school subjects), the unclear content of civic education and the problematic inclusion of controversial topics in the curriculum.

The following is desirable for the further development of the field:

- Creation of a unified content standard for civic education and social sciences teacher training programmes at Czech universities, synergistically linking the fundamentals of field-

- specific knowledge of the humanities and social sciences while reflecting the revised curriculum for the secondary level of education;
- Greater emphasis on a transdisciplinary approach (for more details, see Janík et al., 2017);
 - Creation of a field-specific competency framework for graduate teachers of civic education and social sciences and its implementation in field-specific didactics syllabi;
 - Strengthening the scientific character of university teacher training in civic education and social sciences and the establishment of doctoral study programmes focused on the didactics of social sciences at Czech universities;
 - Support for research teams conducting field-specific didactic research in the field of civic education and social sciences and more intensive involvement in international research cooperation and representative international research dealing with civic and social science education;
 - Intensification of cooperation between social sciences departments at Czech universities in terms of the content and planning of the undergraduate training of social science subjects teachers and preparation of a doctoral study programme focused on field-specific didactics;
 - Creation of textbooks and other didactic materials for basic and upper secondary school pupils focused on the general development of field-specific competencies, reflecting the revised curriculum, current trends in civic education and updated information from the contemporary social, political and cultural world;
 - Creation of a field-specific didactic portal for civic education teachers in basic schools and social sciences teachers in upper secondary schools, which will update them on current field-specific didactic trends and results of field-specific didactic research (evidence-based platform);
 - Closer linking of curricular documents to avoid duplication of subject-matter content;
 - Creation of comparative studies reflecting the functioning of civic education in different countries, which would serve as a basis both for modernising the subject-matter content and for communicating didactic trends;
 - Greater methodological support from the professional community for both teachers and pupils in relation to critical points in citizenship education, the most frequently mentioned problem area being law;
 - Strengthening the prestige of the subject of citizenship education, which is often taught by unqualified teachers in educational practice, which is considered by the public to be one of the easier subjects and whose relevance to pupils' real life is not appreciated;
 - Emphasis on the practical applicability of the subject matter covered, which places great demands on the teacher because of the readiness to present these examples of practical applicability to pupils and to update them very frequently;
 - Emphasis also on topics that are not normally part of standard instruction ("taboo topics"), such as gender issues, euthanasia, abortion, negative social phenomena, etc.

CONCLUSION

Civic education and social science learning develop key civic competencies and critical thinking, shape pupils' personalities, foster democratic values and contribute to guiding the younger generation through the rapidly changing social landscape. According to strategic documents from the decision-making sphere (2030+ Strategy), these educational fields form a significant part of the Czech education system at secondary level. However, the burden of the pre-1989 era is still visible

in educational practice, given that these subjects were entirely discredited as tools of undemocratic propaganda and state ideology. Even today, citizenship education in basic schools in particular is often viewed as a secondary subject by a large portion of the public and the teaching community. In many schools, school management does not require teachers to have formal qualifications in civic education, and it is often assigned to class teachers or teachers of other subjects (such as Czech language, history, geography, etc.) to supplement their teaching workload.

It is clear that coordinated cooperation between all key education stakeholders will be needed, namely representatives of the MŠMT, the National Pedagogical Institute, departments of social sciences conducting teacher training programmes at universities, non-profit organisations and teachers in regional education. This cooperation should aim to explain to the broader public and other teachers the importance of civic and social science learning for a democratic society, as well as for the development of pupils as civically engaged individuals with a grounded system of values and attitudes. An essential prerequisite will, of course, be the implementation of relevant field-specific didactic research, greater involvement in international cooperation in the field of civic and social science education, and a well-thought-out popularisation of new findings in the field.

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