

Issue topic: International perspectives on social education

POSITION PAPER

Position paper

What are the prospects for the position of social educator in the Czech educational system?

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Will a social educator ever be considered a valid member of the teaching staff at every school? In the Czech Republic this position is being debated, while many universities have been training social educators for years and their graduates number in the thousands. In addition, hundreds of schools have been able to verify this position and determine how social educators manage to provide teachers with information regarding pupils' backgrounds, and help them choose the appropriate approach for each of them. Social educators should create links between the school and the outside social environment, including facilitating communication with parents. We are attempting to determine how much is needed and precisely what this means. Will it be enough for a legislative change, and how far are we in this discussion?

Over the last year we have seen several important initiatives to strengthen the hitherto relatively unstable position of social educators within the Czech educational system. Increasingly visible efforts to anchor social educators through legislation, i.e. by including this position in the list of recognized educational staff¹, can be well demonstrated in several examples. Let us mention those with the most significant potential impact.

Just before the end of 2018, the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports adopted the Action Plan for Inclusive Education 2019-2020.² This is a short-term strategic document pointing out the basic directions for supporting the implementation of joint learning (inclusion). Besides the list of two strategic paths with tasks (towards the support of teachers and schools, and with an emphasis on correctly working with data in planning and evaluation), it also contains selected priority measures. The first of these three tasks is to support and verify the role of the school social educator. The text of the Action Plan also suggests a vision to include a social educator among the school teaching staff at consultancy centres. This would greatly help their functioning given the much-needed link to related counselling or assistance services, which the school alone cannot guarantee. The document also includes an indicative calculation of the annual costs of involving social educators in schools with a significant percentage of Roma pupils.

The role of social educators, albeit within a narrower context, was also on the list of the Government Council for Roma Minority Affairs in spring 2019. At their February meeting under the chairmanship of the Czech Prime Minister, current members prepared a proposal for the Government of the Czech Republic to secure, prepare and implement systemic measures in order to allow “effective access to tolerance and respect in schools, so as to establish and develop a safe and healthy climate within the school environment”. The legislative anchoring of the position of social educator was again identified as one of seven critical measures for improving the education of Roma.³ Four months later, the topic was also brought up at the meeting by members of the working sub-group for Roma education (at the Czech Government Office).⁴ A proposal was made that social educators should ensure binding cooperation with the family. The representative of the Ministry of Education who was present outlined

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- 1 Act No. 563/2004 Coll., On Pedagogical Staff and on Amendments to Certain Acts, currently grants nine other positions in addition to teaching activities.
 - 2 For further details see [link](#).
 - 3 For further details see [link](#).
 - 4 For further details see [link](#).

the further direction being considered by his office when, with regard to the serious complications involved in the introduction of the new position into law, he recommended assigning the activities requested to an already defined educational worker.

Last but not least, the Research, Development and Education Operational Programme managed by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports⁵ entered into this discussion very vigorously. Where some might see conceptual or other practical obstacles complicating the discussion with experts and the introduction of the post of social educator into the law mentioned above, the OP RDE has for several years offered a relatively easy way for a social educator to gain a place at their school, thanks to simplified funding projects. Since 2016, all well-known templates have included personnel support, which in practice means that kindergartens, primary and secondary schools and other school facilities can also obtain finances to cover the work of a social educator,⁶ who can work at the school for up to 24 months. It is interesting from our point of view that the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, hand-in-hand with calls for templates, also defines the particular profile of the social educator and his/her job description at school.

Let us therefore take a look not only at the probable profile of a new type of educator, addressing the challenges of the 21st century, but also at whether such persons will be at all available to schools in the expected quality.

In the Czech Republic, 12 faculties of nine universities educate social educators in their study programmes (see Table 1). Moreover, just as schools and faculties differ, these programmes and their graduates also differ in their profile. When accrediting the study programme, its authors adhere to the general requirements prescribed by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports,⁷ though sufficient space remains for modification. Moreover, the Ministry of Education sets requirements only, and above all, for programmes relating to the performance of the regulated professions of educational staff, among which social educators, as we know, are not yet included.

5 The Operational Programme Research, Development and Education (OP RDE) is a multiannual thematic programme under the auspices of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, within which it is possible to draw funds (over CZK 80 billion) in the 2014-2020 programming period. www.opvvv.msmt.cz

6 See e.g. the currently valid initiative for secondary schools: <https://opvvv.msmt.cz/download/file3238.pdf>

7 General requirements for the degree programmes whose graduates obtain professional qualifications for regulated professions, performance of teaching staff, dated October 5, 2017 č. j. [MSMT-21271/2017-5](https://www.msmt.cz/MSMT-21271/2017-5).

Table 1

Social education at universities in the Czech Republic in the academic year 2018/2019

University	Faculty	Bachelor degree (Bc.)	Master degree (Mgr.)
Tomas Bata University in Zlin	Faculty of Humanities	Soc. ped. – Bc. (P i K)	Soc. ped. – Mgr. (P i K)
Charles University in Prague	Faculty of Arts	–	Soc. ped. – Mgr. (P i K)
	Hussite Theological Faculty	Soc. ped. – Bc. (P)	–
University in Hradec Králové	Faculty of Education	Social education focusing in educational work in ethopedy institutions – Bc. (P i K)	Soc. ped. – Mgr. (P i K)
University of South Bohemia in České Budějovice	Faculty of Education	Soc. ped. – Bc. (K)	–
Masaryk University in Brno	Faculty of Arts	Social education and counselling – Bc. (P)	Social education and counselling – Mgr. (P)
	Faculty of Education	Social education and leisure time – Bc. (P)	Social education and leisure time – Mgr. (P)
Palacký University in Olomouc	Sts Cyril and Methodius Faculty of Theology – current programme	Soc. ped. – Bc. (K)	Soc. ped. – Mgr. (K)
	Faculty of Education + Sts Cyril and Methodius	Soc. ped. – Bc. (P i K)	Soc. ped. – Mgr. (P i K)
	Faculty of Theology – newly designed (2019+)	Soc. ped. – Bc. – Leisure time education (P i K) – Prevention of socio-pathological events (P i K)	Soc. ped. – Mgr. – Designing and management – Educational counselling (P)
University of Ostrava	Faculty of Education	Soc. ped. – Bc. (P i K)	Soc. ped. – Mgr. (P i K)
Jan Evangelista Purkyně University in Ústí nad Labem	Faculty of Education	Soc. ped. – Bc. (P i K)	Soc. ped. – Mgr. (P i K)
Humanitas University in Sosnowiec (European foreign university)	Faculty of Social Studies Vsetín	Soc. ped. – Bc. (P i K)	–

Note: P = full-time form of study; K = combined form of study.

Upon a close look at the offer, prospective students can find not only that the offer is relatively well-structured, but also that study programmes are offered in both bachelor and master degree programmes with full-time and part-time study. Very often the programme is not limited to the scope of social education alone. In addition to special education, it blends into education, leisure time education, and counselling, along with planning, management, and even theology.

Being aware of all the risks that this strongly generalizing approach entails, it is possible to analyse the available curricula of individual fields to arrive at approximately nine general categories of subjects taught. The most significant part of the taught material (one-third) belongs to a group which for the sake of simplicity can be referred to as educational-psychological propaedeutics. Within this category there are guarantors, across universities, of disciplines including general education, educational psychology, didactics, and developmental psychology. In approximately the same proportion, study plans consist of subjects with a social-educational basis, such as social education itself, as well as issues of social pathology, social work, social prevention – pathological phenomena, social and legal protection of the child, and others. These two areas form the logical figurative backbone of the field. The 10% share of study is occupied by blocks devoted to practice and leisure time, which surprisingly, however, range very widely between the different faculty offers (proportion of 2 - 18%). On the other end of the frequency spectrum of the subjects taught are management and planning, special education, medical propaedeutics, some theological issues and, of course, required preparation of the final thesis.

While in the case of the pedagogical-psychological and socio-pedagogical base, the offer across individual faculties is relatively balanced, in other areas students have a significant degree of freedom of choice. For example, leisure time is supported up to eight times more in the relevant study plans of Palacký University in Olomouc or Tomas Bata University in Zlín than in the case of Charles University or Jan Evangelista Purkyně University in Ústí nad Labem. If we stay with this simplistic view, then Charles University and partly also Palacký University in Olomouc are the only two universities in the Czech Republic that also view social education through the prism of theology. Perhaps most interesting, however, is the view of the proportion of practice. Here, Jan Evangelista Purkyně University in Ústí nad Labem is a clear trendsetter. Far more space in the curriculum is devoted to practice here than at any other university included in this comparison, and it even exceeds the usual ratio of study programmes in the Czech Republic (for a more detailed overview of the representation of subjects see [analytical appendix to the study](#)).

For successful completion of the study of social education, the student must complete the state final examinations. The overall (different) conceptions of the monitored programmes can again be clearly seen in the structure of the state examinations. State examiners are primarily focused on knowledge in social education, often supplemented by applied psychology, social work or educational and professional counselling. However, depending on the focus of their alma mater, candidates for an academic degree must also pass examinations in leisure education, re-socialization and re-education, and even security services and management must pass these examinations. In light of the information given below, the minimal emphasis on the field of law, or the possibly expected but almost indistinct link to special education, may be striking. Should we understand special education as a competitive field? According to representatives of primary and secondary schools, where social educators are already active, certainly not. It is easy to see that the study programmes are implemented on the diverse models of various faculties, which again confirms a lack of anchoring of the conception of the field itself. Efforts to establish the idea and the relatedness of educational outcomes can certainly be expected in the future, depending on how the position of social educator holds its own in relation to other pedagogical positions in the law (and at school).

Since 2016 at the latest, graduates of the social education disciplines have had an ideal opportunity to work in schools across the Czech Republic. In June of the same year,⁸ the Ministry of Education

8 In June 2016, the OP RDE opened the receipt of applications for the Template I initiative for nursery and primary schools, and school facilities for leisure education, with a total allocation of CZK 4.5 billion. In December of the same year, an initiative for templates for secondary and tertiary professional schools was announced in the amount of CZK 1 billion. In February 2018, a follow-up initiative for Templates II (CZK 6 billion allocation) was announced, under which kindergartens, primary schools and school facilities can implement projects lasting until August 2021. In December 2018, the Initiative for Templates for Secondary

announced the receipt of applications from schools and school facilities for the support of simplified projects from the Operational Programme Research, Development and Education. As a result of the challenges, kindergartens and primary and secondary schools, as well as educational institutions for leisure education, have had two options since then to strengthen their teaching team through the addition of a social educator. More than 250 projects (schools) have been implemented within the framework of successive initiatives. The total budget of projects implemented, or already completed, to support the activities of social educators in schools is over 60 million CZK.

Although only a minimal number of applicants (less than half a percent of the total number of templates supported) chose the template “Social educator - personal support” compared to the others, this step is undoubtedly significant as a possible precedent. Since this position is already recorded from the systemic point of view (we still have to wait for the outcome and impact assessment of projects), the content of the activity of this expert as seen by the Ministry of Education is also described and thus codified in the accompanying documents.

Social educators are intended for pupils with a risk of school failure. These are pupils with low educational motivation, long-term and repeated school failure, and disciplinary offences, which may be the result of inconsistent parental guidance, probably related to the fact that most of them are from a socio-culturally disadvantaged environment. The primary task of the social educator is therefore to provide teachers with information concerning the background of the pupils and their problems, which in turn helps them to choose an appropriate approach to the pupils. It is also intended to establish links between the school and other entities (municipalities, police, prosecutors and health care facilities), including the provision of mediation between the school, parents, and institutions mentioned above. At the same time, the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports requires that social educators acquire a professional qualification in the fields of social education or social work.⁹ From the attached concrete list of activities under this template, the problems that today's schools and teachers have with pupils and parents can be well deduced.

The scope of tasks for social educators is extensive, with one common denominator – it clearly reaches beyond the school plan. It includes, for example, protecting abused and traumatized children and strengthening the community character of the school, as well as educating teachers on social issues or coordinating and recruiting volunteers for tutoring, realizing social therapy with problem individuals, excursions, discussions, etc.¹⁰

The much-needed multidisciplinary and cross-border approach naturally places enormous demands on the training of the required experts, which must be matched not only by their remuneration but above all by the precondition of their availability, i.e. that they are present on the labour market in the first place.

According to available data,¹¹ about eight hundred graduates from both types of study programmes (BA and MA) graduate from the universities educating social educators. Among others, Tomas Bata University in Zlín (Faculty of Humanities) excels in this regard, and itself professionally trained 231 social educators in 2018. This number is insufficient, given the number of Czech kindergartens and primary and secondary schools, which number over ten thousand; of course, this assumes that a social

Schools and Vocational Universities (CZK 1 billion) was announced. The aforementioned initiatives are already closed for applications, but it is currently possible to use the Initiative for Inclusive Education for Socially Excluded Sites II (SVL II) to finance social educators. For further details see this [actual calls](#).

9 Annex 3 to Initiative No 02_16_022 Support for Schools in the Form of Simplified Reporting Projects - Templates for Kindergartens and Primary Schools, Operational Programme Research, Development and Education, Programming period 2014–2020. See [link](#).

10 Ibid.

11 The numbers of students and graduates in social education can be found in annual reports (various dating) of Tomas Bata University in Zlín, Charles University, the University of Hradec Kralove, Masaryk University, Palacký University in Olomouc, and Ostrava University.

educator should be a regular part of every full-time teaching staff. However, this is a topic for a separate study.

We have seen that the post of social educator resonates on the level of management of the education system, and has managed to establish itself in the form of study programmes at many universities. At the same time, there are significant financial incentives for schools to make space for them in their staffrooms. The role of the social educator in the school is proven, but its anchoring in the law, i.e. the provision of mandatory funding, is uncertain, which brings us back to the beginning.

One more general comment to conclude. In the case of social educators, two more general trends in the staffing of schools can be well observed. The first is the expected and long-announced lack of qualified specialists to take up the teaching and education process in Czech schools. In its estimates, the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports envisages that there will be a shortage of four and a half thousand teachers, possibly more, in regional education by 2027. We will have to adapt more and more often to a situation in which teachers as practitioners, and undergraduates with or without a minimum educational background, enter the classroom, and where the obtained qualifications will no longer be a determining factor for placement in the school. These points are contained in the forthcoming amendment to the Act on Educational Staff.¹² An analogous situation applies in the case of social educators who are undergoing experimental testing at hundreds of Czech schools within the framework of the templates, in which the original qualification requirements have been significantly reduced. Whereas in 2016 (in the templates), work as a social educator was conditional upon university education in fields focused on social education, or demonstration of professional qualifications by university education in areas focused on social work, in 2018 any university education at all was sufficient and, under certain conditions, higher vocational education was accepted for the applicants.

The second trend is a gradual abandonment of the principle of one teacher – one class.¹³ This is a paradigmatic change accompanying the introduction of joint learning. According to the authors of the Guidelines for Education Policy of the Czech Republic up to 2030+.¹⁴ in the next decade, we will have to place increasing emphasis on staffing schools and on the development of teachers' competences to educate heterogeneous groups of pupils. Insufficient systemic provision of joint training, especially in the area of personnel, jeopardizes the provision of equal access to education for all, i.e. one of the two main objectives of the forthcoming Strategy. The path to its fulfilment will be more comfortable with the help of so-called support professions, experts on specific issues of upbringing and education. The authors of the documents for Strategy 2030+ directly recommend this step, especially within the context of developing the potential of pupils with social and other disadvantages.

Strengthening the methodology of cooperation with other (supporting) professions at school is one of the points of discussion that will undoubtedly be of interest, given both the financial demands it imposes on the system and the absorption capacity of the Czech Republic, in terms of the availability of various specialists. In any case, the experience of social educators, for example those experiences that relate to providing support primarily to pupils, and within this context, to teachers or schools in turn, should not be overlooked.

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12 Cf. Government proposal amending Act No. 563/2004 Coll., On Educational Staff and on Amendments to Certain Acts, as amended, which is currently undergoing a legislative process, Parliamentary [Press no. 503](#).

13 As Dr. Václav Velčovský, Deputy Minister of Education noted at the OP RDE Annual Conference on 28 November 2019, in future all education will be perceived as common. This attribute has in fact been consigned to history, which is a good thing.

14 See Guidelines for Education Policy of the Czech Republic up to 2030+. The document was prepared by the External Expert Group for the Development of the Education Policy of the Czech Republic until 2030+, composed of Arnošt Veselý (Group Chairman), Jakub Fischer, Milena Jabůrková, Milan Pospíšil, Daniel Prokop, Radko Sáblik, Iva Stuchlíková and Stanislav Štech. For further details see [link](#).



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