Chapter 11

Higher Education Research in the Czech Republic

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11.1 Introduction

For four decades, higher education in the Czech Republic (CR) developed under very rigid regulations imposed by the State. The institutional autonomy, academic freedom and self-governance of the universities were minimal. Any important measure concerning higher education institutions was decided by top government authorities and the content of studies and research were deeply marked by the ideology of the Communist party which played an essential role in their planning. So it is clear that the results of higher education research were not needed in the decision making process.

We are now at the end of a ten-year transition period. The 1990 Higher Education Act gave back autonomy and academic freedom to the universities and changed the role of the State which coordinates and indirectly governs higher education through funds allocated from the state budget. The 1998 Act approved the positive aspects of the former legislation, improved the balance of competencies and responsibilities both at the state (relationship between institutions and state authorities) and the internal institutional level (between institutions and their units) and opened the way for a broad diversification of higher education which included the creation of private institutions.

The context described above needs very good management and strategy planning at the top government level, based on the results of higher education research. This is why there is a continuous development of institutional higher education research which is supplemented by the development of smaller units, usually within universities, and a network of independent researchers in this field.
11.2 Institutionalised research

11.2.1 Centre for Higher Education Studies (CHES)

The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports founded the Institute for Higher Education Development in 1981. It was quite a large institution (about 100 employees) whose main aim was to elaborate ministerial plans and decisions. In 1991, it was completely reorganised. The number of staff fell to 29 persons and it was renamed the Centre for Higher Education Studies (CHES). A new statute determines that its main mission is to carry out research and pedagogical activities in the field of higher education. It is funded by the Ministry of Education.

A further significant change was new partnerships. The main partner of CHES remains the Ministry of Education, but close collaboration has been established with the Council of Higher Education Institutions (representatives of academic senates) and the Czech Rectors’ Conference which jointly form a representative body of all the institutions in the country. Other partners include the Accreditation Commission of the CR, Czech and foreign higher education institutions, foreign research institutions and students.

It was proposed to develop CHES’s mission. First, it was decided to establish a TEMPUS Office as a second department which recently became the Agency for Educational Programmes of the European Union. It administers and coordinates activities required by the TEMPUS and SOCRATES Programmes. A further extension was the creation of a third department, the National Centre for Distance Education, which is responsible for the coordination of distance education provided by tertiary institutions of education. It was created in 1997. The Centre for Equivalence of Documents about Education was founded in accordance with the Convention on the Recognition of Higher Education Qualifications in the European Region. It also assumed the tasks of Network of European National Information Centres (ENIC), Network of National Academic Recognition Information Centres (NARIC).

CHES is a member of research organisations (Consortium of Higher Education Researchers [CHER]; European Higher Education Society [EAIR]), of educational organisations (European Distance Education Network [EDEN]; European Association for International Education [EAIE]; Association of Teacher Education in Europe [ATEE]; Internationale Gesellschaft für Ingenieurpädagogik [IGIP]), and of other international organisations (Institutional Management of Higher Education [IMHE/OECD]; Global Alliance for Transnational Education [GATE]; International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education [INQAAHE]; Network