

## **A New Instrument to Promote Polytechnic Education in the Czech Republic**

The Czech Republic is one of the EU countries with the highest share of industry in the economy. Given this, the education in technical and science fields is of crucial importance. Similarly as other European countries, the Czech Republic has been also experiencing a long-term trend of slight deviation from these fields towards the general fields of study while this preference being particularly frequent in highly gifted students. As a consequence, industrial enterprises are facing decreased availability of skilled workforce qualified in fields essential to them.

In recent years, the public debate concerning this topic intensified and there appeared initiatives looking for ways to increase the interest of the children and their parents in technical fields of study and to show the highly gifted students that these fields offer interesting and fulfilling job prospects of long-term applicability. Experts often express their conviction that a positive attitude towards these disciplines and technical thinking need to be cultivated from an early age, i.e. already in kindergartens and primary schools. Therefore, in relation to declaring 2015 the Year of technical education, the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports has announced the new grant programme *Fostering Polytechnic Education in Kindergartens and Primary Schools*.

The programme aims to provide kindergartens and primary schools with additional financial resources for the acquisition of equipment for polytechnic education and the related teachers training and to increase pupils interest in technical education.

The equipment that can be purchased under the programme includes e.g. building kits fostering the development of manual skills, didactical material for technical education such as tools, cordless electrical tools, consumables and related methodological materials. The programme also provides funding to cover entrance fees to the science centres (non-formal education centres primarily focusing on targeted popularisation of science and technology while placing emphasis on interactivity and learning by means of playing and independent hands-on discovering of science and technology).

The grant programme is built on the principle of co-funding, a part of the costs is covered from the State Budget (the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports), another part is financed from the regional budgets and the third part is covered by other entities, which opens the possibility of combining public and private funding.