# Annex 5:

Concept note:

**Strengthening teacher competencies in study programs for initial teacher education at the University of Montenegro**



**Project "Integration of Key Competences in the Education System of Montenegro"**

Co-financed by the EU and the Government of Montenegro, implemented by the EPRD consortium

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# Short overview of issues and discussions

*Strategy of teachers’ education of Montenegro 2017 – 2024[[1]](#footnote-1)* identified that the study programs of initial teacher education at the University of Montenegro (Faculty of Philosophy, Faculty of Philology, Faculty of Science, Academy of Music, Faculty of Fine Arts and Faculty of Sports and Physical Education) are mostly, with a few exceptions, designed so that students provide the acquisition of adequate knowledge from a specific profession, but **not sufficient preparation for work in educational institutions, i.e. the real work environment**. A detailed analysis presented in the Strategy found that:

* Number of pedagogical-didactic subjects and student workload (number of classes, ECTS), which give teaching competencies is **different from program to program**;
* In most programs, **student workload is insufficient** to provide the necessary teaching competencies;
* In terms of content, some pedagogical-didactic subjects are **not based on modern concepts** (e.g. neglected socio-emotional and key competencies, student orientation is not yet integrated into curricula, programs are not aligned with changes in the country's education policy).

The strategy offered a solution on how to overcome these shortcomings in initial teacher education, offering a clear action plan, which contains the following measures (relating to study programs):

* Improving study programs in a way that they are flexible, modularized, to reflect the needs of the educational system and the individuality of students;
* Determining the minimum representation of the pedagogical-psychological and didactic-methodological group of subjects in the study programs according to which teachers are educated;
* Determining the minimum representation of key competencies in study programs according to which teachers are educated;
* Determining the minimum representation of content on inclusive education in study programs according to which teachers are educated;
* Ensuring cooperation between higher education institutions and primary and secondary schools for the implementation of practical classes during the initial education of all teachers;
* Ensuring continuous improvement of foreign language knowledge during initial teacher education;
* Ensuring the acquisition of digital competence during the initial teacher education.

In December 2016, the National Education Council adopted *Standards of Competences for Teachers and Principals in Educational Institutions*, which also contain **standards of competences for teachers**. Eight standards of teacher competencies have been developed:

* Standard 1: Students and the teaching / learning process;
* Standard 2: Effective and safe learning environment;
* Standard 3: Knowledge of the profession and the subject program;
* Standard 4: Knowledge of subject methodology;
* Standard 5: Planning and preparation of classes;
* Standard 6: Assessment and evaluation;
* Standard 7: Professional development;
* Standard 8: Leadership and cooperation.

Along with each of the eight standards, **descriptors** related to **practice, knowledge, and attitudes** have been also developed.

It is clear from the above that the development of a **module that would give students teacher competencies and based on standards of competences for teachers in the study programs for initial teacher education** would significantly contribute to the implementation of measures from the Strategy[[2]](#footnote-2). In the theory of higher education organization, the module may have different meanings and different applications at different universities, but the term mainly refers to a functional unit composed of subjects (courses) that can be transferred and thus jointly performed for several study programs.

When it comes to the "minimum representation of the pedagogical-psychological and didactic-methodological group of subjects", the Strategy, according to the competencies from the Law on Higher Education, envisages that the decision on that is made by the **Council for Higher Education** as a competent body. The decision would likely be related to the accreditation of teacher education study programs. But such a decision has not been made so far. Taking into account the practice from the region and from the EU, but also the existing practice (composition of study programs, number of subjects and student workload, staffing, number of students in individual study programs, legislation, flexibility, etc.), it would be reasonable to suggest that **minimum representation of psychological and didactic-methodical groups of subjects would be 30 ECTS per cycle of studies** (60 ECTS for integrated studies of the first and second cycle). Modification up to 30 ECTS is not considered a new study program (does not require new accreditation immediately), and at the same time in 60 ECTS (in two cycles - the student acquires the competence of a teacher after the second cycle, master's degree) it is possible to organize a learning and teaching process necessary for psychological-pedagogical and methodological-didactic competencies, including a focus on key competencies, inclusion, foreign languages and digital technologies.

From the very description of the problem we can draw the content of the module that would give the competencies of teachers: it should have a part related to pedagogical-psychological competencies (e.g. through the subjects of psychology and pedagogy), and didactic-methodological competencies (e.g. through the subject of teaching methods). In terms of personnel, **this does not necessarily mean an imbalance of norms of teachers at faculties that are not native to psychological-pedagogical disciplines**. According to the current practice, the teaching methodology is performed by teachers of the faculties of the subject disciplines (Faculty of Philology, Faculty of Science, Academy of Music, Faculty of Fine Arts and Faculty of Sports and Physical Education). According to the measures from the Strategy, teaching methods should be enriched with methodical practice that students would perform in primary and secondary schools, which would be achieved through "cooperation between higher education institutions and primary and secondary schools."

# Project: Integration of Key Competences in the Education System of Montenegro

The project refers to the implementation of the EU policy on key competences for lifelong learning, defined by the Recommendations of the *Parliament and the Council of the EU* on the European reference framework of key competences for lifelong learning (2006, 2018). Basic information about the Project are:

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| Program: | IPA II. - Sectoral Operational Program for Employment, Education and Social Policy of Montenegro 2015-2017 |
| Project Title: | Integration of key competencies into the education system of Montenegro |
| Contracting authority: | Ministry of Finance of Montenegro, Directorate for Financing and Contracting of EU Aid Funds |
| Beneficiary institutions: | * Ministry of Education - main beneficiary * Bureau for Education Services * Centre for Vocational Education * Examination Centre * University of Montenegro - Faculty of Philosophy, Faculty of Philology, Faculty of Science * Primary and secondary schools |
| Implementation period: | Two years (30 August 2019 – 29 August 2021) |
| Total budget: | 939,779.70 € (85% EU, 15% Government of Montenegro) |
| General goal of the Project: | Improve the quality of primary and secondary education provision and support initial teacher training, continuous professional development of teachers and quality assurance at the level of primary, secondary and higher education. |
| Project purpose: | * Improving student achievement in relation to key competences for lifelong learning and the quality of work and teaching in primary and secondary education; * Improving the quality assurance system at all levels; * Development of education and professional competence of teachers both in initial teacher education and in continuous professional development in terms of integration of key competences in learning with a special focus on STEM disciplines. |

The key implementing body of the Project is the **Project Team**, composed of representatives of the beneficiary institutions. The project team has 16 members (four representatives of the Ministry of Education, five representatives of the Bureau of Education Services, two representatives of the Faculty of Science, and one representative each of the Centre for Vocational Education, Examination Centre, Faculty of Philosophy, Faculty of Philology and Quality Assurance and Control Agency).

The project has five components, of which Component 2 Curriculum Development envisages activity 2.6: Pilot revision of the study program of mathematics in terms of pedagogical and psychological, didactic and methodological aspects and content, with a focus on innovative teaching pedagogy and STEM competencies. Thus, the focus of the Project, according to the general description of the task, should be only on one study program that educates teachers.

On the one hand, such an approach would only slightly contribute to the general goal and purpose of the Project, while on the other hand there would be a real risk that the pilot version of the revised study program and the developed model of "representation of pedagogical-psychological and didactic-methodological group of subjects" would not be acceptable for faculties that educate teachers at the University of Montenegro, and that the implementation of the Teacher Education Strategy brings a different model. Therefore, the Project decided to modify the implementation of this activity and focus integrally on the measures and activities envisaged by the Strategy.

# Proposal of activities

In order to implement the measures from the Teacher Education Strategy it is necessary to develop **two modules of teacher competencies as part of study programs - 30 ECTS each** (for one cycle of studies), based on standards of competences for teachers. It should "cover" learning outcomes from competency standards and be structured according to the structure of study programs at the University of Montenegro. It can contain: matrix of learning outcomes, list of subjects, learning outcomes by subjects, description of each of the subjects (course, syllabus), description of performance, methods and forms of work, method of checking the achievement of learning outcomes, bibliography, etc.

In order to incorporate these modules to be truly into the study programs performed initial education of teachers at the University of Montenegro, it is necessary **to connect the Standards of Teacher Competences with the national quality assurance system**. It is possible to develop an additional standard for the accreditation of study programs that provide teacher qualifications, based on the developed standards of teacher competencies. This activity would be provided in cooperation with the Agency for Quality Control and Assurance that is the competent body for the national quality system in higher education. **It is also possible to develop a model of cooperation between the faculties at the University of Montenegro that educate teachers and employers of their graduates**: It would be logical to structure this cooperation through the Bureau for Education Services and the Centre for Vocational Education. Cooperation can be established by a long-term agreement, and the focus would be on the methodical practice of students in primary and secondary schools.

For the implementation of these activities, it is first necessary to obtain the support of key actors in higher education (Directorate of Higher Education of Montenegro, Council for Higher Education, University of Montenegro, Agency for Quality Assurance and Control), and the Project Steering Committee. The project would, with the cooperation of beneficiary institutions, identify and engage experts to support the process. Materials would be produced by groups composed of representatives of beneficiary institutions. For the development of the module of teacher competencies, a group should be formed in which members would be nominated by the **faculties that educate teachers**. The development of quality assurance standards would be developed by the **Agency in cooperation with the University**, while cooperation between faculties that educate teachers and schools **would be led by deans and principals of the Bureau for Education Services and the Centre for Vocational Education**.

**Time frame for activities:** The project team expanded by a group of experienced teachers could work on the first version of the competency standard by the end of 2020. After the draft of the standard is completed, a group for the development of the module can be formed and in three months (January - March 2021) to draft the module. Thereafter, in the next three months, the documents may be finalized, consultations held and referred to the competent authorities for adoption.

1. The Teacher Education Strategy 2017-2024 with the Action Plan for 2017-2018 was adopted at the session of the Government of Montenegro held on December 29, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. The modules could also be used, if envisaged, for the education of teachers of vocational subjects in secondary vocational education as a partial or even full qualification. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)