

## **The Impacts of the Project Increasing the Competencies of Higher Education Teachers<sup>1</sup>**

We live in time of rapid changes, continuous development and digitization of society. This brings higher requirements on the orientation of people in this environment. The mentioned development also affects the area of education. For the changes mentioned above, it is also very important to adequately respond and pay close attention to continual education. Therefore, the University of Finance and Administration (VŠFS) focuses on further education of its teachers, who must be experts not only in the content area, but also need to develop their pedagogical competencies, knowledge and skills. For this reason, in 2019 and 2020 VŠFS implemented the European Economic Area (EEA) project focused on increasing the competencies of higher education teachers (EHP-CZ-MOP-1-001 EHP).

The project reflects a high level of higher education in the donor countries. The transformation of this level of education and the related knowledge shared among the participants will mean the fulfilment of the main EEA Program objectives, respectively in increasing the level of human capital and the educational basis in Czechia for VŠFS higher education teachers. More competent teachers will therefore contribute to the fulfilment of the secondary objectives of the EEA Program, namely the reduction of economic and social disparities among higher education institutions in the European economic area. Sharing competencies, knowledge and skills of the teachers in higher education among the project participants will also help to improve institutional co-operation.

As mentioned above, the target group for the project support are higher education teachers. These teachers have the necessary experience to teach the academic subjects, but they have no pedagogical education. An integrated system of pedagogical education for higher education teachers is missing in Czechia. However, the need for the education of higher education teachers in the fields of pedagogy, didactics, psychology, etc. is nowadays a necessity. Society development, digitization, and student requirements increase tenfold. Sharing teachers' experience between donor countries will help to reduce these differences. Because of it the Czech University of Finance and

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Administration (the project promoter) cooperates on this project with the Icelandic Reykjavík University (the project partner).

Sharing pedagogical competencies, knowledge and skills of employees, mostly via teaching mobility among the project participants has a real impact on improving the teaching abilities of the Czech higher education teachers. The impact of the project helps teachers improve their cooperation with students. The project outcome is evaluated by the number of teachers participating in the project and also the number of students trained by those teachers. At VŠFS there are students from more than 40 different countries from all over the world hence the range of new abilities acquired by teachers will affect approximately 1000 students every year. The outputs of the project may be used as a basis for other international projects and for future cooperation with donor states as feasible.

The project was carried out in line with the project plan and with the objective set. The mobility from the Reykjavík University to the University of Finance and Administration (October 2019) and from the University of Finance and Administration to the Reykjavík University (November 2019 and January 2020) was realized. These activities fulfilled project indicators. At the same time, the goal of increasing the competencies of the Czech higher education teachers were achieved. Unfortunately, due to SARS-CoV-2 situation and the following traveling restrictions and temporary closing of some universities, the rest of the mobility opportunities (from the Reykjavík University to the University of Finance and Administration and vice versa) were not carried out.

Despite the mentioned restrictions and shortening of the project, the program indicators were fulfilled with a number of results. In the first place, the delegate of the Reykjavík University (RU) was a very important member of the International Teaching Week at the University of Finance and Administration. This event was focused on modern and agile management topics, i.e. Consumer Culture and Consumption, Global vs. Local Culture or Fin-Tech and New Financial Services. The participants were involved not only in academic lectures but also in international classes. They participated in discussions in scientific groups and in a cultural program. In addition, the teachers built up a wide base for further cooperation. The results of this cooperation lie mostly in the development of pedagogical competencies.

The project had a very important impact for the academic evaluation of the grant recipient as well. The Reykjavík University was involved in the International Evaluation Panel of the University of Finance and Administration. The RU academic is a member of a collective body that evaluates VŠFS as a research organization now. This is a comprehensive evaluation of research organizations throughout Czechia according to the methodology approved by the Czech government. The evaluation is based on self-evaluation through the International Evaluation Panel in three of its modules (out of five modules), namely in Social Relevance, Viability, and Strategies and Concepts. Thanks to the results gained, VŠFS will be closer to the Icelandic, respectively international academic standards.

The Reykjavík University also joined the preparation of a research project of the University of Finance and Administration. The project will focus on comparison of Icelandic and Czech pension insurance systems as the Icelandic system is one of the most effective ones. Its greatest benefit is motivating people to voluntarily extend the period of productive activity according to a person's physical and mental dispositions. The project will mainly analyse the development, configuration and direction of the pension insurance system in Iceland. At the same time, a methodology for the implementation of proposals based on the project results will be presented. The results of this international cooperation will be again an expansion of the competencies, knowledge and skills of the supported participants.

The participation of the Czech teachers in Icelandic education can also be described as one of the major project impacts. But it is not just about developing competencies. In this kind of intensive cooperation one can get acquainted with the environment, culture or society which cannot be simply included among any of the official criteria. The impacts of the project do not only affect the defined indicators but shape a modern teacher extensively. The benefits of these projects significantly exceed the original objectives. Therefore, it is a positive conclusion that the University of Finance and Administration is implementing a follow-up project with the Norwegian University of Agder. The project will focus on Higher Education Teachers' Digital Literacy Improvement.

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