



# TE\_REG Report WP2b1 / University of Montenegro

## Competency-based Teacher Standards in Montenegro: Practices and Impact

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## Context – Initial Teacher Education in Montenegro

Initial education of teachers primarily takes place at the University of Montenegro (UoM), the only public university in Montenegro, which offers various tracks for training preschool, class, and subject teachers. Other faculties also contribute to the education of subject teachers, as follows:

- The Faculty of Science and Mathematics educates mathematics, physics, biology, chemistry, and computer science teachers. Additionally, mathematics teachers are educated at the University of Donja Gorica (UDG).
- The Music Academy prepares music teachers, while the Faculty of Fine Arts at UoM and the Faculty of Visual Arts at the Mediterranean University educate art teachers.
- The Faculty of Sports and Physical Education educates physical education teachers.
- The Faculty of Philology educates teachers of languages and literature (Montenegrin, Serbian, English, Russian, German, Italian, and French). Language teachers are also trained at the Mediterranean University, UDG, and the Faculty of Montenegrin Language and Literature in Cetinje.

In Montenegro, initial teacher education (ITE) follows three primary models (Figure 1), categorising teachers into the following groups:

1. Preschool teachers who work in preschool institutions and sometimes in the first grade of primary school are required to complete 180 ECTS in undergraduate studies. Class teachers responsible for younger primary grades (grades 1–6 or the first two cycles of primary education) must complete at least 240 ECTS in undergraduate studies. Both groups follow interdisciplinary programmes where pedagogical-psychological and didactic-methodological (PP&DM) disciplines are central, alongside practice in real work environments and coursework relevant to the content they will teach. Their education thus includes both: content knowledge (“know what?”) and teaching skills (“know how?”). These two groups of teachers are considered to have “both strong subject matter and pedagogical preparation, integrating research and practice” (Darling Hammond, 2017, p. 292), aligning conceptually with European concepts for teacher education (Caena, 2014). This group is marked G1 at the figure 1.
2. Subject teachers teach individual subjects in the second and third cycles of primary education, gymnasiums, and general education subjects in secondary vocational schools. This role requires a qualification of at least 240 ECTS. Their studies are primarily content-focused, with only a small share of PP&DM disciplines and limited practical teaching experience (typically involving just one or two school placements over the course of their studies). (G2 at the figure 1).
3. Teachers of professional subjects in secondary vocational schools typically hold qualifications in fields such as economics, law, medicine, or engineering, with a minimum educational requirement of 240 ECTS. Their programmes typically lack any PP&DM disciplines, focusing entirely on vocational expertise. (G3 at the figure 1).

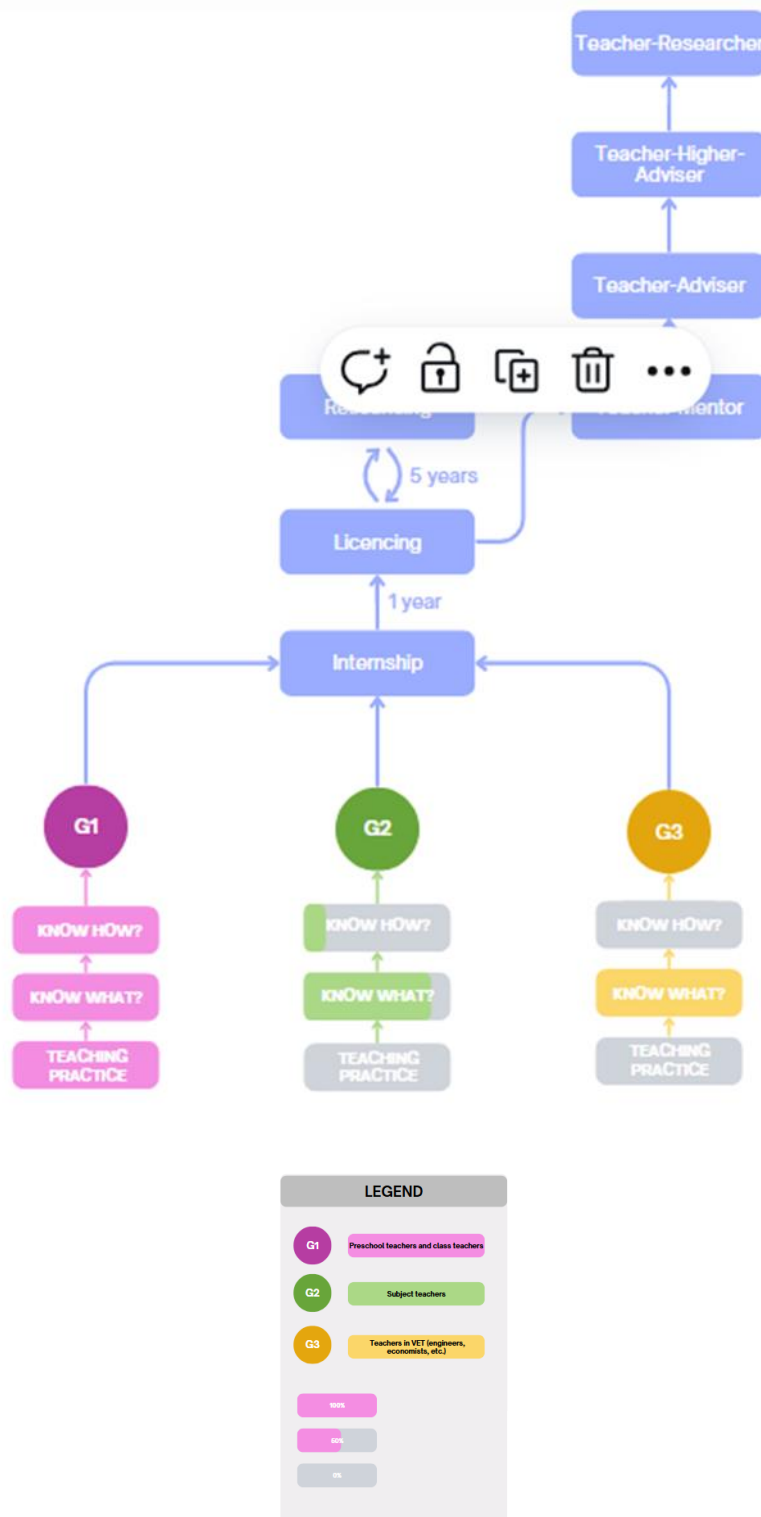


Figure 1. TPD trajectories in pre- and in-service in Montenegro

The Bureau of Education Services (BES), established in 2005, manages in-service teacher education through its Department for TPD.

In this Report our focus is on G1 – preschool and class teachers, educated at the Faculty of Philosophy.



### **Competency Standards for Teachers and Headteachers in Educational Institutions (2016)**

were established by the Bureau of Educational Services. These Standards define cumulative standards (for both pre-service and in-service teachers) to outline a trajectory for teacher development starting from university studies and continuing with in-service activities. Eight competencies are defined for teachers (both class and subject teachers), each with descriptors across three areas: practice, knowledge, and attitudes. The overarching professional development process (both pre-service and in-service) is intended to be a comprehensive pathway for advancement, encompassing personal, social, and narrowly professional aspects (Vučković, Mićanović & Novović, 2023). A brief description of each of these eight standards (for class teachers) follows below.

**S1: Students and the teaching/learning process.** This standard requires a deep understanding of the learning process and students' unique characteristics, needs, and abilities. Teachers are expected to take into consideration students' individual traits when planning and conducting lessons, set high and motivating expectations, and foster student progress, which is evaluated through measurable learning outcomes. This standard consists of: 13 practical (P) 8 knowledge-based (K) and 5 skills-based (S) requirements for teachers.

**S2: Effective and safe learning environment.** This standard emphasises creating a secure, stimulating learning environment where mutual respect and high expectations exist. Teachers promote active learning, encourage a passion for learning through social interaction, and foster a constructivist learning environment that supports students' learning. Consists of: 5 P, 4 K, and 6 S requirements for teachers.

**S3: Knowledge of the profession and subject area.** This standard refers to the teacher's expertise in their subject area and their understanding of how learning and research take place. Additionally, this includes knowledge of the subject curriculum, understanding of terms and concepts, their relationships and hierarchical connections, as well as current issues and research within the subject area, along with common misconceptions related to the subject content. Consists of: 11 P 8 K, and 3 S requirements for teachers.

**S4: Knowledge of subject methodology.** This standard centres on the practical application of didactic knowledge, such as teaching methods, techniques, strategies, and organisational approaches. Teachers should connect didactic concepts with students' capacities, interests, and developmental specifics to promote understanding, inquiry-based learning, and knowledge application. Consists of: 12 P, 7 K, and 3 S requirements for teachers.

**S5: Planning and preparing lessons.** This standard focuses on planning the teaching process on annual and monthly levels, respecting students' prior knowledge, needs, and abilities to ensure consistent progress and learning outcomes. It includes lesson planning and integrating cross-curricular skills, like socio-emotional competencies. Consists of: 11 P, 3 K, and 2 S requirements for teachers.

**S6: Assessment and evaluation.** This standard involves both formative and summative assessments aimed at supporting, explaining, and documenting the learning process. Teachers are expected to provide regular feedback, foster self-evaluation, help students set personal



learning goals, and analyse assessment results to improve teaching and learning outcomes. Consists of: 8 P, 10 K, and 2 S requirements for teachers.

**S7: Professional development.** This standard, in terms of TPD, is related to teachers' commitment to lifelong learning and professional development. Self-evaluation is envisaged with the purpose of improving teaching practices, along with establishing collaborative relationships within the professional community of teachers, including professional associations, networks, or the broader expert community. Consists of: 9 P, 3 K, and 3 S requirements for teachers.

**S8: Leadership and collaboration.** This standard defines the teacher's role as a leader in the learning process, one who uses varied opportunities to promote student success. Teachers are expected to engage in competent communication with students, parents, colleagues, and the community, fostering a collaborative approach to student development. Consists of: 3 P, 4 K, and 5 S requirements for teachers.

Standards for preschool teachers are, in some elements, different:

Standard 1: Partnership in relationship: kindergarten, family, local community, with 7 P, 3 K, and 3 S requirements.

Standard 2: Environment for learning and development – promoting children's learning and development, with 7 P, 6 K, and 3 S.

Standard 3: Promoting the inclusion and involvement of children from different socio-cultural and economic context, with 9P, 5K, and 7 S.

Standard 4: Planning and preparing activities, with 12 P, 3 K, and 3P.

Standard 5: Knowledge of learning methods and strategies, with 6 P, 3 K, and 4 S.

Standard 6: Documenting and assessment of the process, with 8P, 5 K, and 3 S.

Standard 7: Professional development, with 8 P, 3 K, and 4 S.

Standard 8: Respecting professional ethics, with 6 P, 3 K, and 3 S requirements.

### **The impact of the Standard (2016) on the ITE**

The University of Montenegro was in the accreditation process during the 2016/2017 academic year and the Standards (2016) were not binding (otherwise, the documents and regulations drawn up by the BES are not binding for universities, the BES has no authority over higher education). Accreditation of study programs and the University is carried out by the Agency for Control and Quality Assurance of Higher Education (abbrev. AKOKVO), by the document Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area – ESG (2015). ESG are general, they concern all programs and do not include specific elements for teacher education. Nevertheless, through the IPA II project, "Integration of Key Competences in the Educational System of Montenegro" ([www.ikces.me](http://www.ikces.me)), AKOKVO developed 2022 a special, additional standard for programs that initially educate teachers. This project involved collaboration between higher education representatives, the BES, the Ministry, and the AKOKVO. That standard is based on the document Standards (2016):

*The study program for initial teacher education results in a qualification achieved after the second cycle of studies (300 ECTS). It should provide teaching and professional (subject) competencies that should be acquired through practical work in primary and secondary schools.*



Teacher competencies mentioned in the standard are further described in the terms of the document Standards (2016). Since UoM completed its reaccreditation in 2022, the additional AKOKVO standard was not applied.

### **How have the curricula for ITE from G1 been created so far (before the additional standard)?**

Based on the National Qualifications Framework, a bachelor program and a master's program (3+2) were developed for future teachers, and the learning outcomes (programs have been learning outcomes oriented since 2017) are defined in terms of knowledge, skills, and competencies (MQF):

*Knowledge is defined as a set of acquired and correlated information that are result of learning. Skills represent abilities to apply knowledge when solving tasks and problems and they can be cognitive and manual (practical). Competence includes abilities to apply knowledge and skills that an individual demonstrates in a working or learning environment. They include the domain of autonomy and responsibility. (MQF – Final Report, 2014, p. 23)*

An integrated 5+0 program was developed for class teachers. The Faculty of Philosophy started the process with an analysis of international reports and research-based papers (ETUCE, 2008; Caena, 2014; Darling-Hammond, 2017; Trippestad et al., 2018; Tatto and Menter, 2019).

Based on that, class-teachers ITE consists of three basic elements:

1. science and arts subjects;
2. pedagogical and psychological disciplines;
3. didactic and methodological subjects (which consist of theory and school-based practice.

In preschool TE the situation is similar, with fewer subjects belonging to the first group, and more subjects from the 2nd and 3rd group.

**How is this situated in separate subjects?** Each subject has learning/teaching goals and learning outcomes. Methodology of teaching mother tongue and literature, for example, in the class-teacher initial education program is studied through three subjects, with the first of these subjects dominated by theory. In comparison, the remaining two subjects are dominated by practice, i.e. students under mentorship realize classes in primary school. All such courses are prepared under the mentorship of teaching assistants and tutors from elementary schools, and after the class — which is always systematically observed — extensive analysis and detailed feedback are given to students by the professor and teaching assistant, as well as often by the school mentor (Vučković, Mićanović & Novović, 2023). The whole learning process is holistic, bearing in mind the fact that specific standards and/or competences *gets in touch* in each classroom situation.

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