



# Updating Higher Education Curricula in Compliance with Labour Market Requirements

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## 1 DESCRIPTION

**Timespan** 2012-2015

**Stage** **OTHER**  
Although formally completed in 2015, the Updating Higher Education Curricula policy instrument will continue in 2018 (as per the provisional Indicative Work Programme for 2018 of the Managing Authority of the Operational Programme 'Science and Education for Smart Growth' - the Ministry of Education and Science), as part of a wider initiative for adjusting the vocational and higher education systems to the labour market needs.

**Focus area** **MATCHING SKILLS FOR TODAY'S JOB MARKET**

## 2 FOUNDATIONS

**Policy Area** **HIGHER EDUCATION**

The policy instrument is associated with bringing the curricula, used to educate students in the system of higher education in Bulgaria, in line with labour market needs.

**Policy Goal** The policy instrument addresses the need for better defining the range of skills and knowledge offered in the system of higher education, through establishing active cooperation mechanisms between higher education institutions and business entities and their associations. Thus, the policy goal of the initiative is to translate the social order for new professionals of the Bulgarian business into the language of education. The intervention contributed to the establishment of a direct link between HEIs on the one hand and employers on the other, including at higher and mid-management level. Key business experts were attracted, together with academics to redefine and update university curricula to better respond to labour market needs. Strategies were elaborated at HEI level for the development of the different degrees of education by professional fields and/or specialties, as a direct response to the needs of the business sector.

**Mismatch** **EXPLICITLY DESIGNED TO ADDRESS SKILL MISMATCH**  
The Updating Higher Education Curricula initiative aims to create direct link between management bodies and academia of higher education institutions on the one hand and the employers' organisations, large enterprises and key experts, on the other, to jointly re-define and update the curricula in the system of higher education.

**Aim of policy instrument** **MATCH SKILLS OF YOUNG GRADUATES**

**Legal basis** **OTHER**  
Decision for Grant Subsidy of the Minister of Education and Science.

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**Administrative level****NATIONAL**

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**Main responsible body**Ministry of Education and Science

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**Stakeholders****GOVERNMENT (CENTRAL & REGIONAL)****EMPLOYER FEDERATIONS****CHAMBERS OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY****RESEARCH CENTRES AND UNIVERSITIES****SOCIAL PARTNERS**

The types of stakeholders, involved in the implementation of the Updating Higher Education Curricula initiative were, as follows: - 36 Higher education institutions - project beneficiaries, responsible for implementation of their project proposals. - Ministry of Finance, Regional structures of MES, National Employment Agency, Executive Forest Agency, regional and municipal administrations, hospitals, Chambers of Commerce and Industry, employer federations, employers, NGOs, media - project partners, directly involved in the implementation of project activities. The overall role of all stakeholders mentioned above was to establish sustainable cooperation mechanisms for achieving the overarching objective of the policy instrument.

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**Funding**

The total Budget for the Updating Higher Education Curricula initiative was BGN 11 571 996.29 or nearly €6 million, financed by OP HRD 2007-2013, co-funded by ESF. Another BGN 2 million is provisionally committed to a follow-up initiative of MES, foreseen to be launched in 2018, involving HEIs as associated partners, regarding the adaptation of the higher education system to the labour market needs.

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**Intended beneficiaries**

Higher education institutions and academics - the initiative foresaw bringing university curricula closer to the labour market needs and hence improving the positions of participating higher education institutions in the market of educational services. Students - the initiative envisaged to provide them with education experiences in practical environment, and attract representatives of business entities, government institutions and other relevant stakeholders to participate as guest lecturers in the delivery of academic courses. Among the key benefits of the initiative are the strengthened cooperation with the business sector, deeper involvement of business experts in the education process and increasing the weight of practically-oriented education in universities.

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**3 PROCESSES**

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**Use of labour market intelligence****OTHER**

The application guidelines of the Updating Higher Education Curricula call for proposals defined as the 'analysis of the priority specialties in compliance with the specific business needs and labour market requirements'. Thus, beneficiary HEIs engaged (either before or during project implementation) in analysis of labour market demand trends and specifics concerning their particular education fields, in cooperation with the business sector, in order to identify the key aspects of their curricula to be updated and adapt them to the actual skills needs of the business sector.

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**Financial schemes**

The initiative was financed by a grant subsidy amounting to 100% of eligible costs.

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**Frequency of updates**

The Application guidelines of the Updating Higher Education Curricula initiative did not envisage the creation of mechanisms for periodic update of the university curricula based on observed or anticipated changes in skills needs of the business sector. Hence, no such actions were taken by participating HEIs.

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**Development**

As Updating Higher Education Curricula was a single-project initiative, its approach remained unchanged during the period of its implementation.

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**Barriers**

The only obstacle to the timely introduction of the updated curricula in the participating HEIs were the heavy administrative procedures, that had to be followed in the process. As a result, the university curricula, which were updated within the framework of the initiative, were introduced in 31 of 36 HEIs during the initiative's lifetime.

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**Success factors**

The key factor that contributed to the success of the initiative was the involvement of a wide variety of stakeholders, including single employers, employers' organisations, government institutions etc, in the implementation of separate projects of HEIs. This involvement ensured the relevance of the updated curricula to the actual skills needs of the businesses in Bulgaria.

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**Monitoring**

The following indicators to measure progress were defined in the Application guidelines: - The number/percentage of HEIs that have introduced new curricula. - The number/percentage of students, educated on the updated curricula. The above indicators and descriptors were measured upon the conclusion of project activities in 2015.

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**Innovativeness****VERY INNOVATIVE**

The Updating Higher Education Curricula policy instrument is highly innovative for Bulgaria, as this was the first case of such a large-scale initiative being undertaken, involving 70% of all HEIs in Bulgaria, in an attempt to improve the process of matching higher education outcomes to labour market needs.

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## 4 SUSTAINABILITY

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**Evidence of effectiveness**

In the framework of the Updating Higher Education Curricula initiative, 36 (out of 51) higher education institutions (HEIs) in Bulgaria received financial support for the implementation of the project proposal, aimed at improving the quality of education they offer in accordance with the labour market needs. In all 36 HEIs new curricula were introduced, designed with the participation of the business sector and taking into account the specifics of labour market demand. The benefits, resulting from the implementation of the initiative, exceeded expectations and can be outlined in the following aspects: - Established sustainable ties between HEIs, the business sector and the regional/municipal administrations for effective functioning of the "knowledge triangle" (HEIs-research-business). - Creation of work groups of academics, employers, key experts from the business sector, cooperating to design curricula in order to enhance the practical applicability of education outcomes in the system of higher education. - Engaging, on a long-term basis, key experts and leading specialists as guest lecturers in the delivery of university courses. - Active partnership between HEIs and business in providing the most adequate environment for practical training of students: organising and conducting practical exercises in a real working environment, conducting seminar exercises for students with the participation of business practitioners, etc. - Established effective cooperation between HEIs and employers for updating the existing and designing new curricula for priority specialties in conformity with the specific needs of the business at regional level. - Established effective cooperation with the business for professional realisation of graduates at regional level: business representatives and employers were introduced to prospective job candidates, framework agreements were concluded on providing jobs opportunities for university graduates. Besides employers and employers' organisations, a large number of government institutions, regional/municipal administrations, NGOs, etc. were involved in the implementation of the initiative as partners under the separate projects, which further enhanced the benefits for HEIs and students in terms of both economic and public sectors covered.

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**Engagement of stakeholders**

The key pre-requisites for the sustainable engagement of employers and their associations in the continuous process of updating university curricula to the skills needs of the business sector are associated with the established partnerships under the initiative, which proved to be of mutual benefit for both HEIs and their students on the one hand, and for employers, on the other.

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**Transferability****EASILY TRANSFERABLE**

The key prerequisite for successfully transferring the policy instrument to other countries is the willingness of the business sector and all other relevant stakeholders to engage in skills matching activities in the field of higher education. This satisfied, all of the elements of the initiative could be transferred, namely: - analysis of curricula with regards to their correspondence with labour market needs; - involvement of business experts in the educational process in HEIs; - updating / creation of new university curricula; - approbation of the updated / newly created curricula in the education process; - deeper involvement of the business sector in the application of the updated curricula through organisation of study visits for students to business enterprises.

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**Sustainability**

The Updating Higher Education Curricula policy instrument will continue in 2018 as part of a wider initiative for adjusting the vocational and higher education systems to the labour market needs. This is foreseen in the still provisional Indicative Work Programme for 2018 of the Ministry of Education and Science. HEIs will be involved as associated partners under this new initiative, whereas its main goal is to continue the process of updating university curricula and vocational programmes to better answer the skills needs of the business sector, as defined in the vocational standards and competency profiles of positions and occupations in leading sectors of the Bulgarian economy. Thus, the new initiative will seek for establishing a direct link between university curricula and the Competence Assessment System 'My Competence'.

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