

New Education Programmes for EU Cohesion Policy Implementation at the University of Public Services

Zsuzsanna KONDOR¹, University of Public Service, kondor.zsuzsanna@gmail.com

Dr. Györgyi NYIKOS², University of Public Service, nyikos.gyorgyi@uni-nke.hu

Abstract

The University of Public Services (UPS) is in charge of educating and training the public sector in Hungary. Regarding capacity development for EU Cohesion Policy implementation, the need to establish a new supporting educational structure became inevitable by the mid-2010s. Satisfying the complexity of EU regulatory provisions in a fluid operational environment required specific know-how, which was mainly gained through years' long work experience. Meanwhile, frequent reorganisations and high turnover led to the loss of significant institutional knowledge. Both the training needs of a massive influx of new entries and the upgrading of the competence of the existing practitioners had to be addressed. In parallel to the recalibration of the civil service compensation system, the Government linked career development to mandatory learning and invited the University to devise new programmes.

Curriculum development focused on essential policy skills and practical Cohesion Policy knowledge; teaching resources also included case-studies and best practices. Based on the same core content areas, three distinct education strands were set up. 1.) Coordinated by its continuing and professional education centre a one-year certificate programme was introduced in 2017. This has attracted a large audience of public policy practitioners, civil society or private sector project promoters. 2.) In order to reach out to a larger number of public administrators, a module-based e-learning regime was set in place. This form of education allows greater flexibility in selecting education themes and organising study time. 3.) Since September 2020 the option to earn a graduate degree has been available, too. The intensive, one-year master's programme encompasses a broad range of policy and skills areas and also advances students' research foundations. Alumni and employer feedback confirmed improved strategic management capacity, high employability and networking effects.

The pandemic created new challenges, e.g. loss of face-to-face interaction, weakened student engagement, increased stress which spurred the University to revisit teaching methodologies. To improve motivation and enrich learning experience teaching materials have been upgraded to include a broader range of resources and visual aids, expand more on real life experience and present comparative overviews. Case methods were employed for e-learning education. The shift to online learning did not cause disruptions or changes in achievements. However, participants reported losses in the efficiency and effectiveness of learning activities that required interaction and collaboration as well as in networking.

¹ *Zsuzsanna Kondor* is a teacher and doctoral student at the National University of Public Service. She has specialised in EU Cohesion Policy with more than a decade of implementing experience.

² *Dr. Györgyi Nyikos* is a Professor at the University of Public Service. Her teaching and research interests are in Public Finance Management, EU Cohesion Policy and Public Procurement.