# **PROFESSIONAL PREPARATION OF TEACHERS OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN SLOVAKIA**

*Gabriela Genčúrová, Košice, Slovakia*

## Introduction

Article 13(6), second sentence of the Basic Agreement of the Slovak Republic with the Holy See of 2002[[1]](#footnote-1) states that**:** "A teacher of religious education has the same status in the employment relationship as teachers of other subjects if he/she fulfils the prerequisites laid down in the Slovak Republic's legal order for teachers of the relevant type and kind of schools." Thus, the Slovak Republic establishes the principle of equality of teachers of religious education with other teachers working in schools or school establishments.

## Teacher of religious education in the process of legislation of the Slovak Republic

A catechist (parish catechesis) as a graduate of Catholic theology, a priest or a layman with a theological but not complete teacher's education could teach religious education in schools after 1989 in addition to parish catechesis. However, after the Slovak state school reform in 2008, the condition of obtaining a professional qualification began to apply to him as well, and the catechist is thus placed in the professional position of a teacher of religious education, who must complete his education according to *Act No. 245/2008 Coll. on education and training (Education Act).[[2]](#footnote-2)*

The minimum qualification for the profession of teacher of religious education in primary and secondary education[[3]](#footnote-3) is the completion of higher education of the 2nd degree of a teacher study programme with an approbation in religious education (theology). Subsequent legislative developments have been along the lines of the implementation of the European Qualification Requirements, which have now culminated in the definition of the qualification requirements for the exercise of the profession of teacher in *Decree No. 173/2023 Coll. on the qualification requirements for teaching and professional staff.*[[4]](#footnote-4)

Other prerequisites for the exercise of the profession of a teacher of religious education are defined in § 9 of *Act No.138/2019 Coll. on pedagogical and professional employees.[[5]](#footnote-5)* The law requires teachers to be qualified, of good character, medically fit and proficient in the state language, and for the teaching of religious education the state additionally requires the authorization of the relevant church.

The ecclesiastical mandate (canonical mission) according to the internal regulations of the church or religious society is also regulated by § 15(5) of *Act No. 245/2008 Coll. on education and training (School Act).[[6]](#footnote-6)* It is based on the assumption that the Catholic Church in Slovakia has, according to its internal regulations, established conditions for maintaining ecclesiastical credentials. The assumption follows from the third sentence of Article 13(6) of the *Basic Treaty of the Slovak Republic with the Holy See*, which establishes the right of the Catholic Church to personal control of the teaching of religious education and control of the content of religious education.[[7]](#footnote-7) According to Canon Law (Book 3, Canon 803 - §2)[[8]](#footnote-8) teachers are to be "*distinguished by correct doctrine and integrity of life*". Therefore, the right to appoint or remove teachers in his diocese is vested in the bishop, as the fiduciary of the Catholic Church, who has the right to grant or withdraw the canonical mission. In this sense, the State also accepts other ecclesial communities.[[9]](#footnote-9)

In this sense, the Education Act opens up the educational market, but does not allow other organisations to interfere in the competences of churches and religious societies. Thus, no one, except the church trustees themselves, has the authority to interfere in the control of religious education and theology.

Further professional, professional, methodological training of teachers of religious education and the provision of methodological and didactic services is provided by the *Catholic Pedagogical and Catechetical Centre* and the Diocesan Catechetical Offices as independent legal entities of the Catholic Church.[[10]](#footnote-10)

## Qualification to practise as a teacher of religious education

The qualification for the profession is acquired by the teacher through professional education provided by higher education institutions pursuant to *Act No. 131/2002 Coll. on higher education institutions*.*[[11]](#footnote-11)* The content of the study follows from the description of fields of study in which universities in the Slovak Republic can provide higher education. In this case, from the field of subject endorsement, religious education (field of study in the system of disciplines of the Slovak Republic 37. Theology) and pedagogical foundation (in the system of disciplines 38. Teaching and pedagogical sciences).[[12]](#footnote-12) The content of the study programme is further defined by the professional standards for the exercise of the profession of pedagogical and professional staff of schools and educational establishments by *Ministerial Instruction No. 39/17*. This sets out the competence profile (specified for each field of education, level or specialisation).[[13]](#footnote-13) The Instruction defines a competence profile for the teaching profession in three areas: the pupil, the educational process and professional development and also takes into account all stages of a teacher's professional development and the individual professional competences. This profile is the basis for setting the objectives and competences of all teacher education programmes.

## Acquiring a qualification as a teacher of religious education at Slovak universities

Currently, five universities (6 workplaces) in Slovakia provide teacher education for the teacher of religious education qualification.

1. Trnava University in Trnava, Faculty of Education,
2. Comenius University in Bratislava, Evangelical Faculty,
3. University of Constantine the Philosopher in Nitra, Faculty of Arts,
4. Catholic University in Ružomberok

- Faculty of Education Ružomberok

- Faculty of Theology Košice

1. J. Selye University, Faculty of Education Komárno.[[14]](#footnote-14)

In terms of religious affiliation, Comenius University provides teachers of the Evangelical religion, J. Selye University provides teachers of the Reformed religion as "teachers of catechetics", and other HEIs provide teachers of the Catholic religion. All of the above-mentioned faculties offer this study as a teaching programme in combination with other subject endorsements, with the exception of the Faculty of Theology at the Catholic University in Košice, where the study of teaching of religious education is offered as a single endorsement teaching programme with an increased scope of both pedagogical and theological foundation.

Currently, following the processes of nationwide monitoring of the quality of higher education and its alignment with the European Standards (ESG), 342 teacher combination study programmes in the first two levels of higher education, 3,738 standard education programmes and 61 translation and interpreting study programmes have been accredited in Slovakia to date (Chart 1).

Among the teacher study programmes there are 8 study programmes in the combined study programme of Teacher of Religious Education and two in the combined study programme of Teacher of Catechetics. The ratio of religious education teaching programs within the teacher degree programs is approximately 2.92%. To the total number of programs of study, it accounts for approximately 0.241% of the accredited programs of study in the Religious Education endorsement (Figure 2). Thus, the majority of teacher study programmes consist of teacher study programmes in other subjects, For example, study programmes in history or history teaching are accredited in Slovakia 27 i.e. three times more than in religious education teaching, while the time allocation (RUP)[[15]](#footnote-15) History is approximately the same (6 hours of primary school and 6 hours of secondary school) as religious education (9 hours of primary school and 2 hours of secondary school).

There are 3738 accredited standard study programmes in Slovakia, of which the teaching of religious education as a teacher of one approbation constitutes approximately 0.054%, which is approximately 0.048% of the total number of study programmes (Chart 3).

In general, these data suggest that specific fields such as religious education teaching have only a negligible share in the total number of programs even in teacher education programs.

## Further opportunities to qualify as a teacher of religious education

If a teacher education graduate wishes to extend his/her education in Slovakia to include an approbation in the subject of religious education, he/she shall do so in accordance with *Act No. 361/2019 on Education in Professional Development.[[16]](#footnote-16)* Only the Faculty of Pedagogy and Theology of the Catholic University in Ružomberok and the Evangelical Faculty of the Comenius University in Bratislava have been approved by the Rector of the University.[[17]](#footnote-17) These provide an extension study in Religious Education following on from the Religious Education Teacher Studies programme (Level 1 and Level 2). Among the extension study programmes approved by the Ministry of Education, there is no other extension study in religious education provided by a university or other educational institution in Slovakia.[[18]](#footnote-18)

Similar is the case with the Supplementary Pedagogical Studies. Only the Faculty of Theology Košice of the Catholic University in Ružomberok has been approved by the rectors of higher education institutions in Slovakia.[[19]](#footnote-19) No other university or educational institution has accredited programmes and modules for the teaching of religious education approved by the Ministry of Education and Science of the Slovak Republic.[[20]](#footnote-20)

## Conclusion

Teachers are professionally prepared for the performance of the teaching profession and religious education only from the Catholic, Evangelical and Reformed religions, despite the fact that in Slovakia we have an approved State Educational Programme of the Catholic, Reformed, Orthodox, Evangelical (Augsburg Confession) and Church of the Brethren churches..[[21]](#footnote-21) Education is provided by 5 colleges at six sites in a total of 12 study programmes. Four prepare graduates for the Catholic one for the Reformed and one for the Evangelical religion. Extension studies in Religious Education can only be completed at two universities in two religions (Catholic and Evangelical) and Supplementary Pedagogical Studies for the Religious Education approbation at only one workplace of one university (Catholic Religion).

How will this education develop further? Is there any interest from students? How will colleges cope with the new legislation? What further opportunities for professional training and development do religious education graduates have? These and other questions arise in reflection on the current state of religious education teacher education in Slovakia.

**Kontakt**

PaedDr. PhDr. ThLic. Gabriela Genčúrová, PhD.

**Catholic University of Ružomberok**

**Faculty of Theology, Department of Social Sciences**

Hlavná 89, 041 21 Košice SLOVAKIA

Phone: +55/6836128 ; +421 918 337 427

Email: gabriela.gencurova@ku.sk

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