

# Managing or sponsoring language training?

**The language audit is a new idea in language training management in Slovakia. Nowadays everyone is looking carefully at expenses and return on investment is a key parameter in budgeting for training courses. A language audit allows precise information to be obtained on the results of foreign language learning at a firm.**

## But we have a language school...

Great! You no doubt recognize that training should be conducted in a modern and professional manner. The quality should be examined externally and objectively, using a tool that verifies the efficiency of the training – the language audit. Training and testing should take place as two separate processes. The language school is responsible for the first of these, with the second process being conducted by an external organization. A professional language school should have no need to fear an audit.

## Case study

A firm is training several dozen employees in a number of different towns and decides to have the employees each choose their own school. At the end of the semester, the person managing the training courses receives many different documents on their progress in learning at these individual schools. And of course, the marks show that all of the participants advance to the next level, though the different reference systems being used do not allow these results to be compared and analyzed. What's more, the tests were conducted by individuals directly involved in teaching course participants. How can a reliable decision be made on the basis of this data? The firm decides to introduce the language audit.

This option is provided by Educational Testing Service (ETS), an organization which has set modern trends in education management for over 60 years. ETS is the author of tools for measuring language proficiency acknowledged the world over, specifically international certificates such as TOEIC and TOEFL.

## The language audit is a new idea in language training management that provides precise information on the results of foreign language learning at a firm.

On the basis of a needs analysis and a dialogue with the firm, rules for participation in language training courses are drawn up. The new principles assume regular testing of employees with an external test, which will assess their current level of ability precisely and allow the definition of a scale for progress, e.g. that learning will take place over the course of a year. Then employees know that the results of the learning depend above all on their own efforts, and that they will be measured objectively. Before the training begins, they take

the TOEIC examination, which assesses the level of proficiency on a scale from 10 points to 990. There is no way to 'flunk' the test, which reduces unnecessary stress. Employees then begin the training course. After the employee completes this next stage, the examination is conducted again. A comparison of the results before and after the training allows employee progress to be assessed nationally.

## Analysis of results

Collating the results from the two stages of testing allows difficult decisions to be made. If, for example, one year ago Mr. X scored 400 points on the TOEIC scale and now has 500, it is immediately clear that he made fruitful use of the training. It is worse if the situation is reversed, which sometimes happens. The results of a reputable international examination are then indispensable in avoiding suspicion of bias or a subjective approach in assessing progress.

## Incentive and attendance

As a direct result of the introduction of a language audit, attendance of classes increases significantly. For example, at of the firm Leroy Merlin Polska, attendance was 50% on average prior to the introduction of the audit. Following a change in training provide, it rose to 93%. Of the group receiving the training, 84% achieved the goals that had been set.



## When should teaching begin and end?

Tools for effective language training management should provide information to the training department or employer regarding the length of time employees should attend courses. For a majority of employees, the foreign language is only a part of their job. This is why establishing an appropriate level of proficiency for a given firm allows the training system to be modified later. This brings savings for the training budget, while allowing employees to continue developing their knowledge of the language.

## Summary – tests are only a part of the project

Above all, the key to the success of a training project is the dialogue with the firm introducing the language audit, the needs analysis and the clear definition of the goal to be achieved. Is it better to implement incentives for employees (an international certificate as the prize) or to monitor progress (measuring using a test)? Or perhaps both are equally important, as is often the case? A further step is internal communication and the promotion of the new solution. Employees always respond reluctantly to tests, which is why it is worth informing them that the language audit will show current language ability. This is exactly how the TOEIC test is constructed – it shows what the employee already knows and how he or she deals with the foreign language in practice.



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