

Educating teachers of English



Klaudia Bednárová
Head of the Slovak Association
of Language Schools

What made you organize the ELT FORUM?

The situation in the field of language education is not ideal. Generally, there is a lack of quality teachers in Slovakia, and this is what makes public schools as well as language schools suffer major compromises in their choice of teachers. Higher quality can be achieved by continuous (self) education, and this is a primary reason to create and organize the ELT FORUM. The aim is to give more opportunities to teachers for their professional growth, to give them an opportunity to meet, share their experience, see and hear interesting lectures, and find new inspiration.

Why is there is a lack of quality language teachers in Slovakia?

In my point of view, the fundamental problem is the

The quality of English language teachers in Slovakia is not ideal. ELT FORUM, an international conference dedicated to English language teaching (ELT) organized by the Slovak Association of Language Schools, has been trying to improve the situation for three years now. This year more than 500 teachers attended the conference which hosted 35 Slovak and foreign speakers. Klaudia Bednárová, Head of the Association, tells us more about their work.

low attractiveness of teaching as a profession, which is re-enforced by the low, inadequate remuneration of teachers. Those who study teaching often chose this as a second option to what they originally wanted to study, meaning that after being not accepted to study their field of interest they are resigned to become future teachers. The chain starts with students who study teaching just to have a university degree. Only a very few of them will really teach in the future; moreover, their approach to education may still remain half-hearted.

This year some 500 teachers from more than six countries attended the ELT FORUM. It seems they wish to learn.

The third year has been the most successful so far in terms of number of participants. However,

I have to say that it is only a minor percentage of the total number of English language teachers, since there are thousands of them in Slovakia. We tried to accommodate their demands and that is the reason the two-day conference offered its rich program for a minimum fee, making it "worthwhile" for teachers to travel to Bratislava. The response was positive, as participants from outside of Bratislava (excluding foreigners) represented about 45% of all of the teachers at the conference. An interesting point is that about 5% of the participants were teachers from neighbouring countries, the Czech Republic, Austria, and Hungary, who learned about the ELT FORUM from satisfied former participants.

What about this year's "star speakers"?

The star of the third ELT FORUM conference, which included 35 Slovak and foreign lecturers, was Penny Ur, an internationally recognized expert in education. In April of this year, she received the Order of the British Empire from Queen Elizabeth II for her educational activities. Penny Ur's presentation critically

examined the benefits of modern technologies in the educational process. Other speakers included lecturers such as Ken Wilson and Chuck Sandy. The latter, among other things, founded the international online platform iTDI to educate teachers. He presented techniques at the conference that develop thinking, support cooperation, and make students more independent, thus narrowing the gap between what teachers teach and what students learn in classes.

This year the partners of ELT FORUM also included the American Chamber of Commerce.

We are very pleased that the American Chamber of Commerce has also become a partner of our event, as we feel that this fact moves the debate on the issue of quality teaching a step forward. The lack of language-skilled persons is not only a problem within the educational system, but it is a problem for the entire economy. The world of business should be more concerned about the extent to which people are prepared to interact with the rest of the world in English or other foreign languages. Language is not a skill that can be learned in three months. Language training has to start at an early age at school. Companies that do not insist on a high level of language skill of their employees may lose potential profits. Therefore we very positively perceive the participation of the American Chamber of Commerce, which identifies with this idea. The event was organized under the auspices of the Ministry of Education, Science and Research of the Slovak Republic, which also provided financial support for the conference.

