

Košice International School - from idea to reality



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The idea of an international school offering world-class education in Košice has been circulating for a while. A round table discussion organized by AmCham in September of 2019 ignited the spark to get it done and, above all, it inspired motivated and competent stakeholders to join forces. Starting from September, the Košice International School (KEIS) will welcome its first students. Martin Mudrák, Director of AmCham's Košice office and Michael Cresswell, KEIS Headmaster, introduce the project in more detail.

How was the idea of an international school with English as the language of instruction in Košice born?

(MM): The absence of an international school in Košice was viewed as a continuing barrier in the ongoing effort of increasing the regional competitiveness and the attractiveness of the region in terms of existing investment retention and potential future investment. The foundation of such institution is also believed to be crucial in the efforts of mitigating the effects of brain drain through the retention of qualified workforce and attracting of international experts and Slovaks living abroad, for whom quality international education possibilities count among the highest of priorities. This belief was only strengthened with the rising number of corporate calls for action and a number of missed investment opportunities.

How is the establishment of the school aligned with AmCham's long-term strategy and goals in the region? How was AmCham involved in supporting this project?

(MM): Decreasing regional disparities and improving regional competitiveness, especially in the region of Eastern Slovakia, has been one of our long-term priorities, mainly through the activities of AmCham's Košice office since its establishment in 2003. Together with our member companies and partners from across the private, public and academic sectors, AmCham has

been actively working towards fulfilling the vision of the region as a destination for investments with higher added value.

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At AmCham we firmly believed in a strong and positive impact of the foundation of this institution, which could greatly contribute towards regional development efforts of both Košice and Prešov regions. The movement that lead us to this moment, mere months away from the

official opening of the Košice International School, was started at a round table organized by our chamber in September 2019. And although we might have been the drivers of the idea, an idea it would have remained, had it not been adopted by our extremely enthusiastic partners at the European Educational Agency. We were very lucky and grateful to have then and there identified a number of engaged stakeholders, paving the way for an ambitious fast-paced project, which we have strongly supported ever since, as we perceive it as the correct and long anticipated step towards strengthening the position of Eastern Slovakia in the highly-competitive region of Central and Eastern Europe.

Your previous teaching experience covers numerous countries on different continents. How would you describe your general approach to education and what are the core values you would like to promote at KEIS?

(MC): Education around the world has evolved according to where we are in place and time. An education in the 21st-century requires an entirely different approach to teaching and learning as compared to the old days of traditional, industrialized means of education. We are required in our interconnected world to not only have knowledge, but conceptual knowledge and understanding. We must collaborate and be multilingual, with a range of transdisciplinary skills, and an

BIOGRAPHY

- Founding Head of School - Košice International School, Slovakia
- Programme Coordinator (PYP and MYP) - Aalesund International School, Norway
- Programme Coordinator and Pedagogical Leader of three international schools in Rosa, Monza and Vicenza, Italy
- Research and Project Manager - Children's Hope In Action, Hoi An, Vietnam
- Elementary Coordinator - International Schools of Europe, Switzerland and Italy
- PYP Teacher - Malmö International School, Sweden
- Primary Teacher - Australia
- Director of Basketball - Australia
- Australian National Basketball Champion
- Co-Director of a three-business automotive company - Australia
- Accountant and Property Manager - Australia



MARTIN MUDRÁK
Director of Košice Office,
AmCham Slovakia



BIOGRAPHY

Martin graduated as a Master in Translation and Interpretation for European Institutions and Economy at the P. J. Šafárik University in Košice in 2012. During his studies, he completed an Internship at the European parliament and worked as a Freelancer, offering translation, interpretation and teaching services for corporate clients such as U.S. Steel Košice, Getrag Ford and many others. After graduating, he worked as a Project Manager for Web Production Services at IBM in Bratislava. Since 2015, Martin is responsible for leading AmCham's Košice Office and focuses on representing Membership interests, Policy activities and Event Management in the region.



ability to take meaningful action. In order to do this, it begins by developing a necessary set of personal and universal attributes that enables us to be successful in whatever it is that we do anywhere on this planet. The pieces of this puzzle help us all in being internationally-minded global citizens, who can shape and lead a just and sustainable world. These attributes are the core values and culture of life and learning we have at KEIS.

From your previous experience, how can the establishment of an international school help the city and the region?

(MC): KEIS is a groundbreaking inclusion into the Košice community. Having the establishment of an authentic application of the International Baccalaureate Primary Years Programme in Košice, will not only provide a world-class education, but it will drive the future progress of the entire region. Many local families, businesses and multinational companies have been itching and yearning for an access to education that can enable Košice to stand tall on the world stage, bringing future growth that filters through all aspects of the community. This is my inspiration and motivation which brought me here to pioneer this exciting project, because I realize that this city and region need a 21st-century education.

Can you briefly describe the International Baccalaureate Primary Years Programme provided to students at KEIS?

(MC): The IB PYP nurtures and develops children from three to twelve as caring, active participants in a lifelong journey of learning. The teaching and learning is done through inquiry and a framework that brings together disciplinary subjects, so students can explore local and global issues and opportunities in real-life contexts. It is a transformative experience that includes the whole school community who all actively contribute in a holistic learning experience. My general approach as mentioned earlier

reflects the pieces of the puzzle that is the IB PYP. The ten IB Learner Profile attributes is the foundation of everything at KEIS. It is not a student profile, it is who we are. I like to say that we strive to live, eat and breathe the Learner Profile in all that we do.

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The school curriculum currently covers the Primary Years Program (PYP). Do you plan to add the Middle Years Program (MYP) and the International Baccalaureate (IB) program in the years to come?

(MC): Yes, our long-term goal is to not only have the MYP but to have a full continuum of IB education in Košice. This would allow our students to gain an internationally recognized education that opens the door to any university anywhere in the world.

At this moment we have a lot of interest across all age groups, in particular the upper primary years. Next year we may have to look at opening the MYP in 2021/2022 academic school year.

You have recently announced your cooperation with the International School of Indiana. How can KEIS benefit from this cooperation and what do you hope it will bring?

(MC): This collaboration will be amazing. To think that we have an opportunity to engage in student and teacher exchanges would be an enriching experience unlike anything else in the region. I look forward to networking with them, sharing our learning between classes and creating meaningful connections that will enhance the PYP and engage the KEIS community as global citizens.

What would you like to achieve with KEIS in the next five years?

(MC): I would like to achieve further growth of student numbers, continued development of our 21st-century facilities and resources, and begin a KEIS pathway to world universities. I imagine KEIS becoming the leader of education in Eastern Slovakia.

