

Slovakia

Improving the status of teachers is proving costly

In October 2006 a conference on *Crisis in the teaching profession: seeking solutions* was held in Banská Bystrica to discuss problems of the Slovak teaching professions - problems that are not restricted to Slovakia. Official governmental material formulated these problems as follows: 'The teaching profession in Slovakia is characterised by the unclear professional status of teaching staff, the feminisation of the profession, a lack of qualified teachers and regional imbalances in teacher qualification, the low status of the profession, inadequate support from directors of schools and school establishments, and inadequacies in both pre-service education and in-service training.'

Some statistical data will serve to illustrate these statements. 26.4 % of all teachers today are aged 50 to 59 while 6.51 % have already reached retirement age. Qualification requirements are met by 85.6 % of teachers at basic schools, 90.5 % at grammar schools, 82.2 % at secondary specialised schools, and 82.2 % at secondary vocational schools. Typically, problems occur in teaching vocational subjects. For instance, for the subject 'Working with computers' the proportion of hours taught by teachers qualified for this subject was 48.1 % at the 1st stage of basic schools, 44.5 % at the 2nd stage of basic schools, 78.8 % at grammar schools, 82.4 % at secondary specialised schools and 70.9 % at secondary vocational schools. In teaching English and German, the share of hours taught by qualified teachers was 55.2 % and 68.3 % at the 1st stage of basic schools, 92.4 % and 95.6 % at secondary specialised schools, and 50.1 % and 60.9 % at secondary vocational schools.

The government paper, 'Draft Concept Paper for the Professional Development of Teachers in a Career System' should help cover these gaps. It aims to improve teacher qualifications by using a new model of Continuous Professional Development (CPD), which is based on the gradual implementation of five steps. As a first step, professional standards should be linked to each teaching category in four career levels (teacher, trainer, tutor, teaching assistant and counsellor) (1). The next step will be to develop a career system, which will be linked to the system of continuous education (created as a credit system).

The paper is based on the National Programme of Training and Education in the Slovak Republic, approved by the government on 19 December 2001. It also reflects European documents, such as the Memorandum on Lifelong Learning, recommendations of European Commission Working Group B, and European initiatives in VET such as the Copenhagen process. The document was prepared after consultations with the teachers themselves. After the lengthy consultations process was brought to a close, the document was submitted to the government for approval in February and was finally approved on 18 April 2007.

The paper is expected to lead to higher costs for in-service training, doubling the amount provided by the Ministry of Education and resulting in an additional SKK 891 million in

2009-2013 in total. Even more costly is the aim to raise, by 2013, the average wage of teaching staff compared to the national average wage.

Trends in staff numbers, wages and labour costs in regional schooling, 2005-2013

Amounts in SKK/ Year	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Average wage in NE	17 274	18 761	19 961	21 148	22 459	23 874	25 378	26 977	28 677
Number of PS (FTE)	92 441	89 365	89 365	89 365	89 365	89 365	89 365	89 365	89 365
PS Average wage	16 590	18 230	19 343	21 384	24 623	27 509	30 396	33 282	36 168
Labour costs (wages, taxes, levies)	24 835 527	26 381 881	27 992 427	30 945 718	35 633 865	39 810 847	43 987 829	48 164 810	52 341 792
PS / NE Average wage Index (%)	0.96	0.97	0.97	1.01	1.10	1.15	1.20	1.23	1.26
All staff (FTE)	135 235	130 842	130 842	130 842	130 842	130 842	130 842	130 842	130 842
AS Average wage	14 509	15 837	16 774	18 915	21 394	23 872	26 350	28 829	31 307
Labour costs (wages, taxes levies)	31 832 809	33 619 217	35 606 793	40 153 321	45 414 230	50 675 140	55 936 049	61 196 958	66 457 867
AS / NE Average wage Index (%)	0.840	0.844	0.840	0.894	0.953	1.000	1.038	1.069	1.092
MoE budget year on year increase	-	-	-	2 945 455	4 090 909				

Source: SR Government, Annex 7 of the aforementioned policy paper, adjusted by author

Notes: PS - Pedagogical Staff, NPS - Non Pedagogical Staff, AS - All staff (PS+NPS), NE -National Economy , FTE - Fulltime equivalent, MoE - Ministry of Education

Despite approval of the paper, some concerns remain. In its comment dated 21 April, the daily Pravda voiced its suspicion that about 3 000 teachers will have to be dismissed every year if the wages of remaining staff are to be raised by the projected amount. However, the Ministry of Education is against the further reduction of teaching staff as it wishes to avoid overcrowded classrooms. (The table above shows the reduction in teacher numbers in 2006, with no further reductions planned.) As for the accompanying demographic changes, although the fall in live births peaked in 2001 it will take years for this to be reflected in the school population.

So far there has been no comment one way or another from the Ministry of Finance. The only near-certainty is that Slovakia is scheduled to adopt the Euro in 2009. This is not to say that fiscal policy should be eased - dictum sapienti sat est. The new act, to be prepared by the end of year, will have the final say.

(1) The four levels comprise the following categories:

- teacher of pre-primary education (kindergarten); primary education (1st stage of basic school); lower secondary and upper secondary education (2nd stage of basic school, and secondary school); special school (special kindergarten, basic school, and secondary school); teacher at school not providing the level of education (basic school of arts, state language school, language school); organisation aimed at in-service training;
- trainer;

- tutor in educational establishments; in special education needs establishments; in social service and social protection establishments; teacher assistant, tutor assistant and trainer assistant; worker in educational counselling and therapeutic worker in education;
- worker in educational counselling (school pedagogue, social pedagogue); special teacher in schools and educational establishments.

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