

Learning is a continuous, lifelong process

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RAPID changes in technology, exploding knowledge, and ongoing research have made lifelong education a must if people are to keep their minds, as well as their skills and qualifications, sharp. Universities across the world are responding by offering new forms of lifelong learning that go beyond those provided within post-graduate studies. The programmes evolving in Slovakia are responding to the desires of those who want to continue their learning and the format and subjects often differ from the traditional university approach. They often include language and computer skills courses as well as senior education within the so-called university of the third age.

"Education in Slovakia is not among products sought after in the market," Valéria Geffertová, from the Institute of Lifelong Education at the Technical University in Košice, told The Slovak Spectator when asked about the interest of people in further education at the institute. "Currently we can say that the motivation of some students for various forms of education is determined by formal-administrative factors rather than by their personal interests and ambitions."

Geffertová's institute in Košice offers study programmes in management and business skills, pro-



Universities are attracting more seniors to courses.

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grammes designed for state and public administration, various kinds of retraining programmes and topical offerings tailored to the needs of clients. It also offers educational programmes financed by EU funds designed in cooperation with companies.

The Centre for Continuing Education at the Technical University in Zvolen builds upon the university's knowledge base in the fields of forestry, wood sciences and ecology. Erik Selecký from the centre told The Slovak Spectator that it then develops specialised courses in these fields financed via the European Union's 2007-2013 Rural Development Programme as well as the Slovak state budget. It also offers 'classic' courses such as those in languages and computer skills and through its so-called University of the Third Age it tailors programmes specifically for older citizens.

Selecký sees a broad and growing interest in continuing education, especially for specialised programmes.

"During the last few years we trained over 1,500 people within the specialised courses in the Rural Development Programme," he said.

The activities of the Institute of Lifelong Education at Žilina University focus on three basic fields: language education, senior education within its University of the Third Age and education for the employees of Žilina University, Lucia Hrebeňárová, the director of the institute, told The Slovak Spectator.

"We provide 'general education' within our institute," said Hrebeňárová. "Specialised classes and training in practical work skills are in most cases provided by departments and faculties which intersect with practical

applications via bachelor's, master's and doctoral theses or research projects.

Universities of the third age

The first University of the Third Age in Slovakia was launched by Comenius University in Bratislava in October 1990. Now most Slovak universities offer specialised courses for seniors. Age requirements differ from university to university but these programmes are generally open to students aged 40 and older.

"Our University of the Third Age offers seniors the chance to acquire new knowledge in various fields via 13 study programmes," said Hrebeňárová, explaining that this kind of education is not understood as increasing a person's work qualifications but adding that it has a high importance for society as well as the individuals.

She sees such education as a kind of preparation for the future and a way to create space for the maintenance of seniors' experience.

"The interest in senior education is increasing," said Hrebeňárová. "Right now there are 320 seniors attending our 13 study programmes. According to demographic forecasts the whole population will get older and thus this target group will constantly grow. Thus, it is important to really pay attention to the outcomes and benefits that this kind of education can bring to the whole of society."

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