

Distinguished representatives of the University of Banja Luka,

Dear organisers of the CELLS 7 Conference,

Dear professors, lecturers, and teacher educators,

Dear colleagues from schools and universities,

Dear students and future teachers,

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great honour to join you today for the opening of the Conference on English Language and Literary Studies – CELLS 7 – here in Banja Luka.

I am particularly pleased to be here in Banja Luka in my first month in the job. I am grateful to the University of Banja Luka and to all those who have worked to make this happen and for inviting me to join. With European Day of Languages tomorrow, this conference could not be more timely.

Considering how we teach English, how we engage with literature, and how we prepare the next generation of teachers is hugely important.

CELLS – the Conference on English Language and Literary Studies – brings together scholars, practitioners, and future educators to reflect on how we teach English, how we engage with literature, and how we

prepare the next generation of teachers for complex, multilingual classrooms

Before I entered the diplomatic service, I worked for a brief time teaching English to future teachers of English. It remains, without doubt, one of the most challenging and rewarding things that I have done and it certainly helped form my thoughts on the importance of language and of effective teaching.

So, I offer my respects to the university professors and lecturers who are educating future teachers: you are not only transmitting knowledge - you are shaping professional identities, modelling reflective practice, and instilling the values that will guide your students throughout their careers. The quality of teaching in our schools tomorrow depends heavily on the quality of the teaching education you impart. So, programmes like yours is something the UK is proud to support through our long-standing partnership with Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The United Kingdom through the British Council remains a strong partner in teacher development, and youth opportunity across Bosnia and Herzegovina. We know that investing in teachers is one of the most effective ways to strengthen societies, build resilience, and open doors for young people.

Applications for Chevening Scholarships to study in the UK are open until 6 October, offering fully funded master's degrees at UK universities for future leaders from across Bosnia and Herzegovina. Chevening is looking for people with strong leadership potential, clear impact in their communities, and the ambition to use UK education, networks and connections to help tackle shared challenges. I hope that there are future scholars here in the room with us today.

To those of you who are training to become teachers: you are entering a profession that will test you, stretch you, and sometimes exhaust you – but also one that will make a difference in a way that few other careers can. Your future students will remember not only what you taught them, but how you made them feel: whether they felt seen, capable, and encouraged to keep going. In a world that often feels divided, teachers are among those who build bridges every day, in small and quiet ways that add up to real change.

I expect this conference to be a productive and inspiring gathering. Take the opportunity to have honest conversations, consider new ideas, and develop practical outcomes that will strengthen English language and literary studies – and, above all, the teaching profession – here in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

I am delighted to be here with you today, thank you for the warm welcome. I am certain this is just the beginning of a strong collaboration between the British Embassy and the University of Banja Luka.

Thank you.