

# NEW LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS in Bulgaria

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## 1. General introduction

Over the last few years the priorities in Bulgarian higher education ( BHE ) have always been related to the integration of the country within the European Union. Preserving its national characteristics BHE should implement one of the major principles of EU, e.g. the free mobility of people. This equally refers to undergraduates, graduates, post-graduates and university staff. For this purpose Bulgarian universities are aiming at providing the necessary prerequisites for achieving curriculum innovation, quality enhancement of education and, above all, introducing the new learning environments that are constantly popping up.

The good quality of traditional university-based language training ( ULT ) in Bulgaria has always been acknowledged. However, the representatives of the progressive-minded academic linguistic circles have constantly been insisting on introducing relevant radical changes and new learning environments in BHE in the sphere of languages. It is clear enough that such reforms require financial resources which are rather limited in Bulgaria at this moment. What is more the difficult economic situation, social tensions and the general public disposition do not favour the carrying out any radical changes at the moment.

On the other hand there exist at least three reasons why the BHE reform today has become an objective necessity:

1. The fundamental changes in the socio-economic conditions in Bulgaria over the past 11 years;
  2. The almost permanent reforms going on in the systems of higher education in the EU countries, based on the continuously changing environments;
  3. The accumulated lagging behind in some spheres of BHE such as the implementation of modern information technologies:
- 15% of all the material and technical facilities are adequate to BHE;
  - 60% BHE institutions (Language Departments) have Internet access;

The specific features of language training at Bulgarian universities are part and parcel of the overall difficult situation of BHE. The problems that have arisen could be classified as follows:

- outdated facilities and insufficient new educational equipment as a result of the scarce finances;
- decreased quality of the teaching/learning process for the above mentioned reason;
- lack of correspondence between the BHE system and the social and economic requirements;
- inadequate managerial structure and conservatively minded tutors;
- insufficient access to scientific information and information networks;
- lack of coordination and information among the language centres and departments at BHE institutions.

The labour market in Bulgaria has undergone a significant restructuring which has led to the demand for post-graduate manpower of new skills and knowledge especially as regards foreign languages and ICT. A necessity for life-long learning appears. "The Information society" called for the emergence of "the learning society". These processes impose the changes in BHE – from one for "the elite" it has become accessible to the masses.

The integration of Bulgaria in the EU is a priority in BHE. This would be feasible unless foreign languages become indispensable part of the BHE curriculum. The conditions provided should ensure high quality training, the implementation of ECTS, the participation in university networks (e.g. the Socrates programme). The participation of the country in EU educational programmes and the access to European structural funds makes provisions for financing the whole BHE system, including FLT.

### Tasks and aims of FLT in BHE

- Main goal: bringing BHE FLT in conformity with the new socio-economic conditions in Bulgaria, Europe and worldwide;
- Reaching higher efficiency of the educational system and FLT in particular;
- Quality enhancement;
- Raising the compatibility level of the system to those of the EU countries;
- Radical raise of the FL teachers' payment;

- Updating the FLT methods and implementation of all kinds of new learning environments;
- Supporting the coming forward of a new type of teacher bridging the gap between teaching, learning and resources;
- Implementing language advising according to the institution's needs and resources;
- Introducing new technologies, self-directed and autonomous learning (computer-mediated, e-mail and web-based LL environment, etc.);
- Working out learning patterns, learner profiles, feedback;
- Shifting from "product to process" – the new roles of teachers and learners in FLT;
- Focusing on team-work of language advisors;
- Language training –from the classroom to the self-access, Intranet and Internet based learning;
- Setting up a Bulgarian national network of higher education language lecturers for coordinating the efforts and activities in the field.

This National report has been produced on the basis of the contributions kindly submitted by the following Bulgarian universities:

- Bourgas Free University, on behalf of the Foreign Languages Department, prepared by Dr. Diana **Popova**;
- Varna University of Economics, on behalf of the Department of Foreign Languages, prepared by Boris Abrashev;
- Plovdiv University, Department of British and American Studies, prepared by Milena Katsarska;
- Univesrity of Rousse, prepared by Sevda Tsvetanova;
- University of Shoumen, English Language Department, prepared by Pepa Smyadovska
- Higher Institute of Agriculture, Plovdiv, on behalf of the Foreign Languages Department, prepared by Vania Simeonova.

## **2. The role of New Learning Environments in language teaching and learning**

### **2.1 The integration of New Learning Environments in language teaching and learning**

The integration of new learning environments in BHE is rather a needs driven than policy driven phenomenon. It probably starts with the ICT being reality and its impact producing more demanding students, goes through the changing demands of the market - employers preferring professionally trained to academically competent graduates, resulting in increased pressure on language teachers, feeling heavily the need to respond to such demands and finally to University administrators with a shrinking budget and increasing redundancies having to compromise, or rather sacrifice language learning for other disciplines. This makes it imperative to seek solutions at the grass root level while support from decision makers is not always available.

The language teachers at Varna University of Economics (VUE, Department of FLT), focus on languages for business with a stress still on the teaching rather than on learning. One important implication here is that businesses require integration of ICT – operating with computer communication facilities like faxes, telexes, e-mails and handling of documentation which is mainly computer based. This naturally drives teachers to integrate such skills in their courses and what the content of a typical language module looks like is 113 new lecturing, 113 exercises and 113 case studies or project tasks. The last third would contain practical tasks to train meta-skills which should involve the use of the computer, interactivity and intra-activity of various degrees. These are aimed at providing to students the opportunity to take practical decisions while using the language and to train professional competencies.

The Bourgas Free University and the AU FL Departments strongly support the idea that the institutions of higher education should integrate new technologies in the process of language learning/teaching in order to increase its efficiency and to make the best use of their potential for the benefit of the learners, employers, local community and the European integration. At the same time, they realise that it is a difficult, time-consuming and laborious process requiring the efforts of various specialists (language teachers, pedagogical experts, hardware and software specialists, managers and planners, syllabus and materials designers).

So far they have been employing the new Information and Communications Technologies as an addendum to the foreign language classroom, realising the much wider potentials that they have. The major impediments to a

novel and more efficient usage of the available facilities at the University have been the lack of financial means, specially trained staff and appropriate materials.

They have been training learners to become autonomous and learn how to learn with the available means. This small-scale preparation and training has shown good results demonstrated by the students' project work, participation in selection of teaching materials, learning/teaching techniques and modes of learning. The learners continuously make use of the Web, especially the language web sites that they recommend to them. (English – [www.englishpractice.com/newsletter](http://www.englishpractice.com/newsletter); French – the VIFAX programme, etc.). The materials offered on these sites are interesting and up-to-date. A lot of students visit these sites but language teachers cannot monitor their progress and performance. At present they use some of the materials in the classroom and look for possibilities to digitalise them for use on the computers and to make them interactive. But they need money and expertise for this.

BFU and AU students in science, technology and agriculture are the most regular users of the WWW. Almost on an everyday basis they access sites which are related to their specific subject area. This advantage has been made use of for the purposes of learning/teaching English for Specific Purposes. They have been encouraged to collect interesting subject specific materials off the web and then to select from them those which they would like study in depth. This greatly enhances their motivation and prepares them for autonomous learning and responsibility taking. They also improve their IT skills. It is undeniably a preparation for their professional life. They get to know various sources of electronic information, establish contacts with other students in their field from other countries and realise the advantage of being 'on-line' and well-informed for that matter. The foreign language component is an invaluable asset for this all.

## 2.2 Policies underlying the integration of New Learning Environments

At VUE while one third of each language module is clearly targeting at integration of new learning environments the first two thirds are still in the traditional teaching environment. Efforts should be in the direction to change the methods of teaching–learning interaction and increase the role of the learner in seeking and classifying of information, of structuring an issue and presenting a case. The role of the teacher should also be shifted towards more guidance than instruction, to imply showing various paths to students to find their own solutions rather than formulating them, to accept that different people learn differently and to be able to provide the setting for this. The shifting from teaching to learning approaches, the design of a quality system leading to a quality process rather than product, the inclusion in national and international language net-works, are among the priorities of the four-year development plan of the Department.

The openness of BFU to participation in international projects (14 such projects are already a fact) with the resulting mobility of staff and students promotes the integration of New Learning Environments in the learning/teaching/training processes that are under way in all its faculties. The technical facilities (hardware, Intranet and a 24 hour access to Internet) are the available prerequisites for further developments in the field of training learners to become autonomous, training staff to support the self-directed learning, and becoming a valuable partner in an international Network of Universities cooperating in designing and supporting on-line learning environments.

There is a strong belief that the existing system could be combined with other university systems and reconfigured if need be in order to facilitate the use of a common software framework with other European universities.

The policy makers at BFU have proved to be flexible, innovative and ready to cooperate with positive initiatives coming from all the units at the university. Unfortunately, some very good projects do not take off at all because of the lack of financing. Under the present circumstances when the world of science, humanities, culture, economics and politics changes with unprecedented speed, it is of crucial importance for the educationalists to get the means and expertise of catering for the young people of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The language teachers, can become the policy makers, or at least the instigators of change. There should be a change of policy on all levels:

- Institutional
- Departmental
- Staff
- Learner
- Syllabus designers'

- Materials designers'
- Software designers'
- Computer specialists'
- Maintenance staff, etc

### 2.3 New learning strategies: the introduction and promotion of independent learning

Both learners and teachers should develop new strategies for foreign language learning/teaching. These new strategies reflect the new roles that learners and teachers are allocated in the New Learning Environments. The PU, BFU, VUE, AU, the University of Rousse and the University of Shoumen have started developing the following strategies and skills:

- Self-directed preparation for exams and projects;
- Needs analysis of the learners;
- The skill to listen to and take into consideration the needs, wants and preferences of the learners;
- Learners' participation in decision making regarding choice of materials, modes of learning, preferred learning styles, etc.;
- Guidance and support for learners ready to take responsibility for their own learning outside the classroom;
- Development of learning packages for interested learners; etc.

The lecturers in English at the FL Department at AU Plovdiv have some ideas about introducing autonomous learning modules for some of their students. They got acquainted with this way of learning by their Finnish colleagues who have been working on ALMS since 1995. These modules are alternatives to more traditional teacher-led courses. Student motivation is an important concern. The learners should have their own responsibility for any changes or corrections taken in the learning process in order to remain motivated and to continue learning. As BHE is faced with demands for more effective, flexible and economical teaching programmes the language teachers at AU consider Autonomous learning to be one possible way out of the difficult situation. Their aim is to develop a system which would satisfy these demands and, above all, give the students the capacity for language study for life. Moreover student autonomy is an area which could be developing fast. Learner training will have to be defined according to the needs of the specific students taking part in the programme. The new teacher's role also includes sharing with colleagues and planning. Implementation and evaluation of one's teaching. This means that a stress should be put on team work and the emphasis in the future will be on action research done by a team that shares an interest in active autonomous learning as well as on the development of the new role of the language teachers.

### 2.4 Facilities for independent learning

With the increasing role of NEW LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS there is a high need to focus on AUTONOMOUS learning and individual improvement of language skills and competence. For the achievement of this purpose the Shoumen University suggests not only to make use of the above mentioned modern facilities, but

- to transform them into self-access highly-equipped resource centres;
- to work in creative teams with more experienced European specialists in developing audio, video and software materials;
- to create multimedia centres which will comprise all kinds of activities as the Language Centres at the Universities of Helsinki and Gent.

The introduction of independent learning at VUE is restricted by the facilities available at present. Apart from the language self-access laboratory equipped with audio record-players we can make use of one computer room with eight computers and several CDs. Internet is still not available in this computer room and at present it can only be used as a teaching room and not for self access study. As obviously teachers cannot teach the students how to make use of the Internet (most students are more competent than most teachers) then teachers will have to be taught first how to make use of ICT as a learning tool. Teachers will also have to become aware of available learning platforms and of how to make use of them. Independent study elements should be gradually in-built in the traditional teaching content so that both students and teachers can easily progress.

The functioning of the Multimedia Centre at AU, Plovdiv and the application of ICT in the teaching/learning process are certainly going to make up for the inadequacies of language learning in higher education in Bulgaria. General and specific language courses and materials are offered tailored to the specific needs of the learners. A

self-study component was developed. A computer lab with 11 computers and Internet connection is open for the students 6 hour a day. Most often they use software for ELT both for ESP and GSP.

## 2.5 Development of learning materials

Members of staff at VUE took part in a three-year Tempus project designing three multimedia courses for language learning. The templates were made with Tool-book and are used with students for teaching English for Business Law, English for Tourism and English for International Trade. They plan developing our own computer based teaching materials – an authoring tool, which is the longer-term objective. This will provide their own in-put in the independent learning of the students.

The language teachers at BFU have developed their own learning/teaching materials for general English, German and French and also for Special Purposes Language teaching. Most of the materials are collected in the newsletters and Collected Papers editions of the TEMPUS JEP 07307 as well as in the published materials of the other projects. They have also produced plenty of materials for the seminars run by them for various audiences – primary and secondary school language teachers, university lecturers, teachers at the military academies, etc. But they have had no experience in developing multimedia materials for use on Intranet and the Internet so they definitely need to be trained for that.

A team of foreign language lecturers from the Language Unit of the Faculty of Postgraduate Studies of Rousse University in cooperation with EU partners and partners from the Regional Employment Agency and representatives of NGOs supporting the small and medium businesses have developed joint language curricula and specialised LT materials based on a needs analysis for the region and the country as a whole. The Project involved several stages: preparing, testing and finalising the products. The newly developed modules and training products are offered to the target groups for the purposes of continuing training and fighting unemployment.

The development stage involved joint planning and specifying the format of the products to be developed as well as collecting the LT data to be incorporated in the LT products. Training methods involved distance training, semi-autonomous/flexible training (with periodical tutoring) and fully autonomous training. All products are IT-based using most advanced equipment available. The outcomes of the project include:

1. joint language training curricula and specialised LT materials in printed and electronic versions for:
  - German for SMEs in Tourism / Hotel Industry / Catering Industry for Bulgarian / Greek learners
  - English for SMEs in Tourism / Hotel Industry / Catering Industry for Bulgarian / Greek learners
  - German for Medical Purposes / Nurses / Physiotherapists / Health Care Sector for Bulgarian / Greek learners
  - English for Medical Purposes / Nurses / Physiotherapists / Health Care Sector for Bulgarian / Greek learners
  - English for Telecommunications for German / Bulgarian / Greek learners of English
2. A 15-hour language CD-ROM for English / German in Tourism for SMEs and an instruction manual (in printed and electronic versions)
3. 3 bilingual or trilingual (as relevant) glossaries of terms for the above-specified LT modules
4. on-line self-training module "English for Telecommunications" for German/Greek/Bulgarian learners of English

The AU, Plovdiv became a partner in a Leonardo project, called "DICTION" with coordinator Leeuwenborgh – Sittard, the Netherlands. Being a European Multimedia Language E-learning project it aims at contributing to further development, implementation and dissemination of e-learning of modern foreign languages and Open and Distance Learning by Internet technology in Europe.

The main target of this project is AU together with the European partners to produce and implement webbased language modules which should contain self instructional material developed with tools like Frontpage, Dreamweaver, etc. This Diction modules provides hypertext, images, animation video and most important, hyperlinks to relevant national and European Internet sites with information, dictionaries, assignments, etc. The module is related to the levels of the European Framework of reference. It is based on active learning and interactivity. It has functionalities for:

- e-mail: to support writing and communication skills and international knowledge and comprehension of each other's culture ( communication with native speakers);

- Groupware and Chat-functionality: as a communication platform that enables students from different countries to communicate online with each other;
- Videoconferencing: as a possibility to communicate online with native speakers;
- Electronic Learning Space: the Diction modules are situated in an electronic learning space (like Constructor, Lotus Learning Space, Top Class), which enables the students to upload their results and the teacher – to receive feedback;
- A Diction module corresponds to the European standards for educational multimedia.

The Diction modules will be tested and implemented in the curricula of the national language programmes of the project participants.

## 2.6 Redefining the profile of the actors involved

The language teaching staff at **VUE** assume that the process of redefining of the profile of teachers and learners of foreign languages has already been started at **VUE**. The courses have been restructured on a modular basis and each module has an independent learning component. In future the learning needs will be analysed through Internet based questionnaires for learners and employers/administrators. The questionnaires will measure the need of independent study of the customers and it will then be reflected in the course design. . At present there is no specialization in course designing and course teaching but the need of such division may become strongly felt in the near future. There is also the problem of training teachers to use ICT and to in-put teaching materials in a data-base. While this may be technologically not so difficult, serious work should be done though to train the teachers to encourage students find their own learning paths while not losing track to the final destination.

It seems that it will be easier to teach the students how to learn in the new learning environments. Given the fact that knowledge is acquired more often than not in a random, non-systematic way, the students may even find it easier to cope with an environment highly dynamic and non-heterogenous as the ICT can provide instead of the **boringly** familiar textbook confinement. It is obvious that the degree of learning will be much higher when students search for the particular information they want to find then when the teacher forces them to find particular information.

## 2.7 Training programmes and courses for language teachers: in-service programmes, staff development

At present no such courses are available at **VUE**, for example. Such training could be made possible through partner projects with West European universities which have the know-how and will help new-comers to initiate the process of integrating the new learning environments. In-service training by foreign partners could be a profitable strategy, provided the parties have a clear understanding of each other's resources and a clear vision of what they want to achieve. As the course design and the course teaching are the two ways of integrating of new learning environments, though they may require considerably different teacher skills, the training perhaps should be directed at defining the two profiles so that each individual could see where she/he fits. Then it will probably become clear that different approaches to staff development will be needed.

All the foreign language teachers at BFU (part-time and full-time) have attended in-service training courses. The expertise they have gained comes not only from these courses but also from the various projects we have taken part in. As a result they have developed their own expertise in the field of teaching/learning LSP (Languages for Specific Purposes), languages for young learners, etc. Several of the teachers took part in a British Council Project for training teacher trainers. They have all participated in a number of seminars organised or run by the British Council in the last 8-10 years. All the full time language teachers have taken part in the British Council Summer School in the methodology of foreign language teaching/learning.

They ran a retraining course in English for philologist (teachers of Russian) and have the appropriate programmes and teaching experience for that. This is one example of catering for the demands for life-long learning coming from the community.

About 5-6 years ago they began to organise seminars for the teachers of foreign languages from the other universities and schools in Bourgas. They were very successful (shows data from the feedback). Three university teachers did two sessions each at a seminar for the English language teachers from the military schools (academies). The event was organised by Hamish McIlwraith Manager of the Peacekeeping English Project.

They are aware of the latest developments in and need for quality assessment which can ensure the provision first class foreign language learning/teaching. This is why they took part in the establishment of the Optima association for quality assessment.

Training primarily future teachers for all levels of education (primary, secondary, tertiary) Shumen University offers in-service courses mainly for language teachers. Members of teaching staff need constant improvement of qualification to answer the modern tendencies of training. Attending courses at European Universities, delivering lectures and actively taking part in their education practice, contributes to the increase of knowledge and linguistic competence.

## **2.8 Measuring proficiency: assessment and self-assessment**

The system of assessment of students' language proficiency at VUE, for example is fairly traditional and measures knowledge in grades from Poor (2) to Excellent (6) without reflecting the language level of the student. It is part of the assessment system of the University and is likely to produce ridiculous results when applied to languages. You may have a student of a Lower Intermediate level with an Excellent mark (6) and a student at an Advanced level with a Good mark (4). Yet the first student will have difficulties in communicating in the language while the second will express himself freely though with occasional mistakes.

If new learning environments lead to new learning paths and to new targets then we should be careful to apply a new system of evaluation of achievements. The principles, procedures and grades of such system should be negotiated between the actors.

The same applies for language courses. The procedure now is to evaluate the course after it has been designed and before printed. There is no real feed-back on the course effectiveness as a whole or on any of its components. What is actually evaluated is rather the quality of teacher performance in teaching the course and this is done only on voluntary basis. As long as no system of course or teacher evaluation is functioning at the moment, there should be very careful preparation and negotiation of principles of assessment and monitoring before introducing one.

The members of the Department at Plovdiv University are presently involved in a project supported by PU Funds for Research and Development which is aimed at designing test formats for exams in Practical English, Literary and Culture Studies and Linguistics. These are to be introduced in electronic form to be used independently as mid-term or continuous forms of assessment.

## **2.9 Action research on the implementation of New Learning Environments**

# **3. Promoting multilingualism and cultural diversity**

## **3.1 Promoting the learning of the less widely used and less taught languages**

DFLT plans to introduce teaching of several new languages but this can be done only on an extra curricular basis as they can not receive government funding. Courses in Spanish, Dutch, Italian, Swedish, Greek, which are not being taught at present, can be offered through a Language Centre, which will be a new establishment within the DFTL. The Centre will make it possible to meet the needs of the students of VUE, and of the general public to study above languages. In addition the Centre will also provide paid courses to students who have used their paid contact hours but still need to study languages and are prepared to pay for their study.

The FL Department at BFU have some experience in teaching the less widely used and less taught languages. They are among the few in the country where courses in Norwegian are offered to both students and the local community. Moderators from Norway visit the University on a regular basis to observe lessons and assess the progress of learners. Practice has shown that there is a great interest in these courses. They regularly receive books, dictionaries and teaching materials from Norway.

The BFU also has the facilities and staff for teaching Russian which in the last ten years or so has turned into a less widely used and taught language in Bulgaria.

Courses in Turkish were for some years offered at the University. It is a language of regional importance for the Balkans and it is useful to expand the study of Turkish.

In the case of the less widely used and taught languages the new ICT are of great importance because they increase the opportunities of the learners to stay in touch with native speakers from other countries. The further developments in the New Learning Environments would be particularly useful to them if they make distance learning, on-line assessment and evaluation possible.

At Shoumen University in order to enlarge students' linguistic competence and particularly to emphasize the close relation between Indo-European languages and introduce them to contrastive analysis research, optional language courses are included in their curriculum: Italian, Hungarian, Polish and Japanese. The visiting lecturers teaching Japanese Mie Kobayashi and Noriko help greatly in the dissemination not only of Japanese language, but also improved intercultural communication.

Promoting less widely taught languages is one of the main targets of the Multimedia Centre at AU Plovdiv and the language teachers there have found a new solution to this apart from the traditional way of teaching Bulgarian to foreign students for example. In this respect the Leonardo Diction project aims at stimulating the new technologies in European foreign language teaching (Bulgarian included) with the help of the experience gained in the various Socrates I and Tempus projects. A research was carried out to spot existing Bulgarian language software to be used at initial stage but it turned out that it is hardly available. Thanks to the fact that this Centre was equipped within the JEP 11225-96 Tempus project its staff have been trained and are thinking along the lines of preparing web based Bulgarian language modules to be produced by 2003.

Expected results: the modules will be published on the Internet site and the user will be able to access them. A web site with this index as a storage and retrieval structure will be as detailed as appropriate. For reasons of copyright for instance, much of the material may not be open for the general public but may be for sale. In that case a description of the product will be provided and information about how and where to purchase it.

### 3.2 Promoting cultural understanding and intercultural awareness

Despite of the insufficient materials to promote awareness of different cultures and the consequently low level of knowledge on the subject matter, the students at VUE are quite open to cultural understanding and to accepting cultural differences. One might come across though on differences in perceptions, concepts, reasoning, conclusions, priorities and values which are easily identifiable in the teaching-learning process. Students sometimes tend to have misconceptions about different cultures due to either isolation or lack of information or false beliefs because of little opportunities to travel abroad or meet peers from other countries.

To improve students' comprehension in the field of both literature and linguistics, courses on the cultural, sociological and historical aspects of language are introduced in the regular schedule at Shoumen University. The analysis of authentic literary and historic texts widens their cultural background. In the seminars assoc. prof. Yonka Krasteva uses video to bring students closer to the historical period of literature and culture.

The course in Studying Culture, conducted by M. Katsarska at Plovdiv University, employs as source materials for the course a mapped directory for Internet research in the field, sets up a discussion list for students taking the course, where relevant to the content of the course topics are discussed, and also provides mechanisms for online tutoring and supports students' independent project work which makes use of IT for study purposes. The tutor on the course is presently developing self-access units in Ethnography, Popular Music, Advertising and Literary Representations of Communities in a network with colleagues from the University of Sofia, the New Bulgarian University and the University of Veliko Turnovo. These self-access units aim at developing students' skills for independent study and research and introduce innovative methods in national terms/ for non-contact learning in the area of Culture Studies.

### 3.3 Accessing authentic resources and materials

There is extensive expertise at the FL Department at BFU for exploiting authentic resources and materials for use in the foreign language learning/teaching. However, the main thrust of the use of authentic materials has so far been in the area of a more traditional use of these materials. Dr Diana Popova has done considerable work related to the methods and techniques, the criteria for selection, grading and sequencing of authentic materials for learning/teaching English for Science and Technology.

The DFLT at VUE acquired specialist literature – coursebooks, methodology books, dictionaries, through a Tempus JEP 1994-7. If books and materials in German and French are added, donated by the respective

cultural institutes, that makes a modest resource centre. Student's books in Marketing, Management, PR, Tourism, Banking, Accountancy etc in English are available in the VUE library. Periodicals, videos, books are also available to teachers and students through the library of the British Council.

As a whole, authentic materials are insufficient to meet the needs of so many students and teachers, some of them are outdated, newspaper and magazine subscriptions are almost non-existent.

In order to prepare their assignments and presentations the students at Shoumen University can use the self-access British Council Resource Centre (reference books, multiple copies of books, reading and listening materials, video films and television programs), Internet centres available at the University.

### **3.4 Student and staff exchanges**

Student and staff exchange is non-existent at VUE. Staff mobility has only taken place through a number of Tempus projects when colleagues had the opportunity to visit the country whose language they teach to Bulgarian students, most of them for the first time. Student and staff exchanges are a powerful means of learning languages and cultures, and they should become part of the new learning environment for VUE as well. At the time of writing this report they are not.

TEMPUS programs gave opportunities for student and staff exchanges at Shoumen University. Groups of English Philology students have been of exchange programs involving team teaching in foreign classrooms in Durham, Bradford, Granada. Handbooks of teaching materials on Bulgarian culture, customs and folklore were issued in 5 different languages: English, French, German, Spanish and Bulgarian. Thanks to our relations with the ELT Department at the University of Saint Andrews we have worked out a syllabus and teaching materials for EAP - English for Academic Purposes. Senior lecturers Aglika Popova and Vesselin Budakov have applied their experience in the classroom. Budakov also uses the Internet as a distance-learning means to collect essays and term papers, checks them and returns them to students with comments.

The participation of the Language Departments at AU and BFU in many TEMPUS-PHARE projects made possible the increased mobility of students and staff to Belgium, the UK, Spain, Germany, Turkey, Ireland, Norway, France, Finland, Russia and other European countries. All the visits to these countries enabled them to see and experience the use of the new ICT for the provision of language courses for non-native speakers of the foreign languages. The trainers and administrators who paid short-term visits to study the experience of EU partners were selected carefully. The choice of participants was carried out on the basis of their readiness to work for and contribute to the project objectives, as well as their willingness to acquire new skills for working with modern equipment, elaborate the new modular language programs and apply them in their current teaching work. It has been our ambition to allocate the short-term visits according to the number of participants in the project from each institution and at the same time bearing in mind their particular contribution to achieving the project's final objectives.

The language teachers enlarged the scope of the activities undertaken by them on their return to the home institution. One very positive outcome was the new understanding of the vast potentials of the New Learning Environments for the improvement of foreign language teaching at AU and BFU. The benefits derived from staff training are disseminated to other colleagues at specially appointed Department meetings, when the newly gained knowledge and experience is shared. Each mobility participant delivers a report about their stay abroad and informs the other colleagues of what they have already achieved. Moreover they describe all the activities carried out during the study periods together with the outcomes.

## **4. The role of New Learning Environments in training programmes for language and language related professions**

### **4.1 New Learning Environments and the training of language teachers**

The language teachers that are being trained at BFU and will be trained need to be properly trained for the New Learning Environments and the special roles that they will have to play in foreign language teaching/learning. Even though it is very difficult (because of the lack of technical facilities in the primary schools, where they do their teaching practice) for the future teachers to start implementing the principles of autonomous learning, self-

directed learning, responsibility taking in the primary school, they can at least be given some prior training and experience while they are still at university.

Training primarily future teachers for all levels of education (primary, secondary, tertiary) Shoumen University offers in-service courses mainly for language teachers. Members of teaching staff need constant improvement of qualification to answer the modern tendencies of training. Attending courses at European Universities, delivering lectures and actively taking part in their education practice, contributes to the increase of knowledge and linguistic competence.

A team Plovdiv University lecturers has developed a vocabulary for advanced learners of English which is introduced at the Regional Centre for Distant Education at PU. The module creates possibilities for extracurricular advance in English vocabulary in a set of specific areas, such as Economics, Tourism, Nature, Employment etc.. It is targeted at students of English Philology in their 3 and 4 year of study and also at advanced learners of English who wish to follow an additional course in English vocabulary. The distance module offers a sufficient degree of tutoring, provides self-testing mechanisms and can also be used as a self-access unit where each learner can map his/her own way through the study material.

#### **4.2 New Learning Environments and the training of translators and interpreters**

The BFU has a programme for translators and interpreters (English, French and German). The traditional type of instruction and training students have received so far needs to be diversified and the new opportunities that the ICT open need to be adequately employed in their programme. The introduction of video-conferencing facilities in the training of the future translators and interpreters will certainly prepare them much better for the real-life activities they will be involved in as professionals. Consecutive and simultaneous translation can be practised much more efficiently through the Internet (chat groups, special interest groups, on-line discussions, etc)

The new active role that languages undertake in the development of society demands an emphasis on courses for translators and interpreters at Shoumen University. Special emphasis is laid on seminars for translating from the foreign language to the native tongue and vice versa. Translation skills are enhanced by the compulsory written assignments and extra-curricula activities - Business English and ESP, organized by the ELT sector of the Department of Modern Languages.

### **5. The role of New Learning Environments in continuing education programmes or courses (not to be focused on too heavily)**

BFU is ready to offer programmes for continuing education. So far they have had master's programmes.

On the other hand the introduction of continuing education is pending at VUE and will be provided by the Language Centre therefore they cannot report on this yet.

The future integration of Bulgaria into the European Union (EU), and especially in the sphere of agriculture and food industry, suggests continuing education of the national administration with the aim to improve their competence and knowledge in accordance with the European standards and thus enhance their efficiency and compatibility with the requirements of EU.

The successful implementation of the notion of continuing education presupposes foreign language training and retraining of administrative staff in field of agricultural and food industry related to the EU accession requirements. The Multimedia Centre at AU placed 80 administrators to attend language sessions aiming at acquainting with specialized terminology of the European Administration, basic learning materials, English language multimedia software and an opportunity for self-study under the guidance of a university tutor. These workshops proved to be a success and are believed to become a tradition.

#### How to use Information and Communication Technology (ICT) for promoting European co-operation?

##### **5.1 Using ICT for co-operation in the development of programmes**

The Department at BUE took part in a three-year Tempus JEP 1994-7 and developed three multimedia courses in English for Law, Tourism and International trade. The project consortium included partners from four Bulgarian

universities, King' College of London, University of Wolverhampton and Technical University in Berlin. This is one example of working in co-operation. We see opportunities for cooperation in two main strands – enhancing professional development of teachers to respond adequately to their new roles and for the development of partnerships.

The staff of the Language Department at BFU have been interested in using ICT for co-operation in the development of programmes since 1994-1995 when we worked together with their partners from Bradford and Ilkley Community College on a TEMPUS project. They got acquainted with the network set up in a college affiliated with BICC for learners of English as a foreign language. They were impressed by the bank of learning/teaching designed for self-access and self-directed learning. The expertise that the team shared seemed to be applicable and appropriate in the Bulgarian context. They could work with colleagues from several colleges, members of the network, for designing programmes for Specific Purposes Language teaching. Unfortunately, they could not join their association and benefit from what has been achieved and contribute to it with ideas because the annual subscription could not be afforded. The language lecturers at BFU believe that working with colleagues from other European countries will be stimulating for all parties. Networking through the new ICT could extremely facilitate the teachers and the learners. It can open new vistas for the European integration, by creating the right conditions for training learners to be independent and autonomous and ready for life-long learning.

## 5.2 Using ICT for co-operation in the delivery of programmes

The Language Department staff at BFU possess adequate facilities and believe that they could implement the delivery of the programmes if they have the financial support to train their staff to become the 'bridging figures' between the former role of the teachers, the new learners and the new resources, to be able to monitor, advise, counsel, and provide consecutive feedback.

At present their staff is computer literate and some of them have been specially trained to design computer programmes, to set up web sites, and to use all the available resources on the Web.

Delivery of programs and learning modules in co-operation is an extremely viable marketing strategy, allowing for a quick response to demands for learning and offering the right learning package made to customer needs. Partners will be complementing each other in covering the various segments of the market.

## 6. Needs in the area of New Learning Environments

A nation-wide network of educational institutions for research, implementation and dissemination in the area of modern foreign language teaching and learning has been set up. It will provide a means of diversification of the system of modern foreign language teaching and learning and coordinates the efforts of BHE language teachers to introduce the latest achievements in the new learning environments. The founders of the Nat net and members of the Managerial and Scientific board are language teachers from SU, PU, AU, BFU, VUE and the University of Veliko Turnovo.

### 6.1 Seen in relation to language teaching and learning

Some of the needs have already been mentioned. But there are some needs which merit special attention.

- Needs analysis of target learners.
- Specially trained language teachers who would participate in the design and implementation of programmes in the context of new technologies.
- Teams comprising software designers, language teachers and hardware specialists.
- Piloting of new materials.
- Setting up of Local Area Networks for trying out materials, before releasing them on the Web.
- Restructuring of learning content to incorporate meta-skills
- Teacher training in the new role, changing from learning-by-telling to learning-by-doing
- Raising student awareness in the new methods of learning and raising student motivation to learn
- Development of tools for storing, structuring, retrieving and delivering of learning materials

### 6.2 Seen in relation to the promotion of multilingualism and cultural diversity

- Resources for on-line learning of all European languages.

- Interactive programmes allowing learners to exchange culture specific information with their peers.
  - Promotion of mutual understanding and tolerance.
  - Inclusion of more authentic materials in the learning process through the Internet
  - Promotion of international debate forums for discussing values and traditions using ICT
  - Introducing opportunities for travel for both teachers and students
- 6.3 Seen in relation to the promotion of European co-operation
- Language programmes targeted at advanced learners of foreign languages promoting the ideas of the EU and its expansion.
  - Measures facilitating the mobility of staff and students (placement years in foreign countries whose language is studied, international teams of teachers and students working on joint projects using the new ICT, etc.)
  - Introduction of EU programs, streamlined in promoting partnerships and travel
  - Development of joint projects
- 6.4 Seen in relation to the provision of language learning to students with special educational needs

## **7. Measures to be taken to meet the needs identified**

### **7.1 At institutional level**

- To develop a language center proper which would offer courses to students, as well as to the general public both in general foreign languages and in languages for specific purposes.
- To develop an Intranet offering language learning software accessible to everybody on the premises of the University.
- We envisage the setting up of a self-access centre to cater for the needs of learner autonomy of our students and of the local community.
- Reorganization of traditional forms of administering the teaching-learning process at the University
- Restructuring of learning content
- Introduction of new teaching and learning methodology
- Market orientation of delivery of the product including delivery of distance learning packages

### **7.2 At regional level**

- To involve the local authorities (municipalities), the Small and Medium Enterprises, the prison authorities, and the Regional Educational Inspectorate in analysing the needs of the learners of foreign languages.
- To develop joint programmes for distance learning, evaluation and assessment.
- To organise interdisciplinary teams for developing software programmes and materials, and the methodology for exploiting them.

### **7.3 At national level**

- A strategic development plan for integrating all universities and colleges in a National Framework aiming at:
- Establishing the criteria for "good learning/teaching materials to be used on the Internet".
- Setting up a national team to work with the local teams of teachers, materials and software designers, policy makers and managers.
- Quality assessment of the piloted materials.
- Guaranteed access to the on-line materials for all the Universities members of the Framework.
- Promotion of language learning as a national priority
- Introduction of national standards
- Certification

### **7.4 At European level**

- Sharing of experience and expertise with colleagues from all European countries.
- Programmes and projects ensuring the financial backup of all the national and local projects targeted at the realisation and materialisation of the potentials of the ICT in the New Learning Environments.

Reliance on the local experience and expertise of the foreign language and software specialists and enhancing their potentials through focused training in the right setting in the countries where the language is spoken.