

Information Technology For Flexible And Learning And Training

Valery Zagursky

Institute of Electronics and Computer Science

14 Dzerbenes str., Riga

LV-1006, Latvia

(371)-2-528938

zagursky@edi.lv

As Baltic Countries enter the emerging global information society, new opportunities for transforming lifelong learning and continuing training are beginning to emerge. The convergence of information and communication technologies is enabling the creation of new multimedia telematic applications and services. The European Union has been committed to simulating these developments since the 1980, in frameworks of ESPRIT Programme launched in 1984, RACE Programme on advanced communications in 1985, Delta (Developing European Learning through Technology Advance) in 1986-95. The experience have been carried forward under the area of "Telematic for flexible and distance learning".

The purpose of this report is to present three main challenges in Latvia: improving access to learning facilities; meeting the increasing demands for cost-effective learning solutions; improving quality, deferring standards understanding and simulating the market.

There are several models to provide successful implementations of information technology for flexible and distance learning and training. The first model applied by author is the "On-Demand Learning and Training Network". It is based upon the principle that a network of distributed knowledge from all possible fields of science can respond to any learning need on demand. Telematic will be used for the retrieval of this knowledge distributed over the network and for delivery of skills training and certification. The second model is a "Network for distance Education and Training".

It makes use of telematics for opening the network of knowledge centres to target external groups such as industry, study centres and homes (open university, continuing education, professional degree). The third model is the "Virtual University Campus and Class". In this model information technology is used to interconnect the different partners in network by developing added-value communication and interaction applications between them and thus enabling applications such as Virtual programmes (for example, Socrates in Europe), PhP programmes, business programmes, services programmes.

All this models have laid the formulation for improving access to learning facilities. It has enabled the creation of a number of centres or networks for specific learner groups. This may be Training Technology Support Units to increase the access to learning resources for schools, small and medium enterprises, libraries, faculties of university and laboratories of institutions at least. Positive learning and training outcomes may be achieved in pilot applications, particularly where distance learning and searching is combined with periodic face-to-face individual interactions: now - by e-mail, in future - in the form of teleseminars and conferences. As yet, this has tended to support existing social, institutional and educational arrangements, but it does provide the basis for the development of new paradigms for learning and training.