

**Развитие новой магистерской программы библиотечно-информационного образования для библиотечно-информационных факультетов вузов Армении, Грузии и Узбекистана:  
«Евросоюз – восточные соседи – Центральная Азия» –  
трехстороннее сотрудничество в действии\***

**Developing New Masters Program on Library and Information Science for Library and Information Science Faculties in Armenia, Georgia, and Uzbekistan:  
«European Union – Eastern Neighbouring Area –  
Central Asia» Cooperation Triangle in Action\***

**Розвиток нової магістерської програми бібліотеко-інформаційних наук для бібліотеко-інформаційних факультетів вищих навчальних закладів Вірменії, Грузії та Узбекистану:  
«Євросоюз – східні сусіди – Центральна Азія» –  
тристороння співпраця у дії\***

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Шесть организаций из Армении, Грузии и Узбекистана в сотрудничестве с европейскими университетами из Великобритании, Италии, Испании и Латвии участвуют в трехгодичном проекте «Развитие новой магистерской программы библиотечно-информационного образования», который спонсирует программа Tempus – Tacis Евросоюза. Библиотечно-информационное образование нуждается в модернизации, т. к. существующие учебные программы основаны на опыте 1960-х годов. Новые программы будут основаны на лучших практиках, используемых на библиотечно-информационных факультетах университетов – партнеров из стран Евросоюза. Преподаваемые дисциплины будут соответствовать требованиям Болонского процесса. Также будет введен компонент непрерывного образования. Применение новых учебных программ поможет создать общество знаний в этих трех странах.

Six organizations from Armenia, Georgia and Uzbekistan in partnership with EU universities from UK, Italy, Spain and Latvia are participating in a three – year project «Developing New Masters Programme in Library and Information Science», funded by EU Tempus – Tacis Programme. Library and Information Science education needs modernization, as existing curricula are based on 1960s practices. The curricula developed will be based on accepted best practice in European partner Universities' LIS faculties, and sub-

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jects taught will meet the requirements of Bologna agreement. A lifelong learning component will also be introduced. Implementation of the new curricula will assist in building knowledge societies in these three countries.

Шість організацій з Вірменії, Грузії та Узбекистану спільно з європейськими університетами з Великобританії, Італії, Іспанії та Латвії беруть участь в проекті, розрахованому на три роки «Розвиток нової магістерської програми бібліотечно – інформаційної освіти», який спонсорує програма Євросоюзу Tempus – Tacis. Дисципліни, що викладатимуться, будуть відповідати вимогам Болонського процесу. Також буде введено компонент безперервної освіти. Застосування нових навчальних програм допоможе створити суспільство знань у цих трьох країнах.

## **1. Background**

After a difficult period in the 1990's, Armenia, Georgia and Uzbekistan faced the challenges posed by independence. During the past 20 years many improvements have happened in the educational systems of these countries. The majority of universities face the problem of reforming the scientific, educational and management systems, to harmonize them with the Bologna Process, to adopt existing curricula to the challenges posed by the «Knowledge Society», to undertake fundamental modernization of the libraries and archives, as key elements in learning and teaching. UNESCO's Member States, at the 34<sup>th</sup> session of the General Conference in 2007, adopted five overarching objectives for the Medium – Term Strategy 2008–2013. By including the objective of «Attaining quality education for all and lifelong learning» (Overarching Objective 1), UNESCO clearly recognized that «Education for all is at the heart of sustainable human development and is a key means to achieve the Millennium Development Goals»<sup>1</sup>. To be successful in completing this objective it is necessary to provide access to information networks, libraries, archives and community information centres, where the world's information and knowledge resources are preserved. Beside mere physical access, however, end – users need to acquire new skills, including digital literacy, media literacy and information literacy, to be able to derive the benefits from access to information and knowledge for sustainable development.

## **2. The project**

Having in mind fulfilment of the mission «to help Governments to develop and implement national information policies and knowledge strategies in a world increasingly driven by digital technologies»<sup>2</sup> and planning to assist education systems in the republics in fostering information literate societies, the International Scientific Education Centre, the Fundamental Scientific Library of the National Academy of Sciences (Armenia), Ilia Chavchavadze State University, the Georgian Library Association (Georgia), Tashkent University of Information Technology, Tashkent Institute of Culture (Uzbekistan) are participating in a joint endeavour to lead the way in the creation, development and provision of higher education degrees in the subjects of Librarianship, Information Science and Archival Studies through the adoption of an appropriate European education model. To assist these organizations in this ambitious attempt, a multi – national consortium including the six above mentioned institutions from Armenia, Georgia and Uzbekistan and five European Union universities (Middlesex University, London, the Robert Gordon University, Aberdeen, the University of Parma, Italy, the University of Barcelona, Spain and the Rezekne Higher Education Institution, Latvia) was established. The consortium has been awarded a three year grant 145021 – TEMPUS – 2008 – UK – JPCR from the EU «Tempus – Tacis» programme<sup>3</sup>. The disciplines to be developed will be based on accepted best practice in partner European Universities Library and Information Science (LIS) faculties, and it is anticipated that the curricula will meet the requirements of the Bologna and related agreements, and will also be in line with the requirements of the local ministries of education.

## **3. LIS teaching today**

Raising economic relevance of study programmes, matching their scope and content with current demand and the needs of the global labour market and knowledge based economy, and employability of the University graduates is becoming a critical issue for Armenian, Georgian and Uzbekistan higher education institutions. The outcome of educational reforms greatly depends on the curricula being taught in the Universities, which is still precarious for «Library and Information Science» studies in the three republics.

This subject in its form, content and teaching approach is still embedded in the practices of the 1960's. This subject is not in high demand amongst secondary school graduates of these countries, and those who do undertake the course are not satisfied with the level of teaching and the knowledge obtained. The level of awareness in western European languages amongst the students is very limited. During job interviews library administrators are giving preference to the graduates of the faculties of philology, history, sociology, on the grounds that they are much more advanced in their intellectual development. To illustrate the current situation in Armenian libraries here is some statistical data<sup>4</sup>. The total number of librarians working in public libraries is 2,104. Of this only 11.5% are the University graduates with a relevant university degree and only 35.5% have a professional college diploma. In all public libraries from the rural areas only 79 staff members are having higher education, and only 48 of these have relevant university degree; 828 are college graduates from which 349 are having professional college education.

As a result library and information work in these three countries is making no significant progress. Another important problem which is facing the library community in Armenia and Uzbekistan is the absence of any lifelong learning programmes and advanced skills courses for the librarians who require thorough professional retraining. It is important to introduce new institutional structures for lifelong learners in LIS, based totally on the models in EU Universities.

According to the observations of the authors, there are several considerable problems in teaching library, information and archives courses that are common to the three countries:

- a. after the collapse of the Soviet Union, faced with economic problems and the transition to a market economy, librarianship was not a priority of the governments;
- b. courses are based on Soviet library science practices and programmes for LIS and are focused on techniques and technical processes, undervaluing the need for the wider knowledge of social processes, science, technology, required to enable library, archive and information services to respond to contemporary demands;
- c. courses have not yet fully incorporated the new areas of the disciplines that are common in Western countries;
- d. there is a shortage of modern LIS and archive teaching materials (electronic resources, sample PC applications);
- e. pedagogical skills of the LIS and archive teachers and trainers tend to be didactic;
- f. familiarity with quality standards is low;
- g. these factors contribute to low levels of interest in potential students;
- h. competence of students in the English language is not high, even though English is the dominant language in the discipline globally;
- i. there is a shortage of relevant materials in the national languages;
- j. no programs offer lifelong learning or support career advancement for the existing large LIS workforce.

#### **4. The task of the project**

It is obvious that the introduction of the new curricula covering Library, Information and Archives Studies totally oriented to the Western experience is the only solution to make this profession prestigious and to attract talented and motivated students. This project intends to help to meet the above stated rationale through a variety of approaches and effective change management processes and these includes:

1. Providing training and development needs analyses in order to ensure an adequate human capacity development for LIS education and training.
2. Development of innovative pedagogy and a diverse range of instructional materials and facilitation methods to suit a variety of learning contexts and learning development needs.
3. Creation of human capacity and enhancement of skills sets to support the growing educational needs of the partner countries' universities in terms of curriculum development, the adoption and engagement with innovative teaching and facilitation methods and the production of relevant teaching and learning resources, improving and maintaining standards of education and training, the development of academic staff in aspects of the pedagogy of teaching, learning and assessments methods and practices, and to gain an accredited higher education teacher status via the Postgraduate Certificate Higher Education and Learning course.

4. Establishment of the relevant ICT clusters in the three university faculties for organizing effective teaching and learning.
5. Introduction of a quality assurance and enhancement system to help ensure maintenance and improvement of the quality and standards of provision commensurate with current practices in the European Union.

## 5. The objectives summarised

As a conclusion we can state that the main outcomes of this project will be:

- the planning, development, implementation and evaluation of an appropriate portfolio of LIS curricula;
- developing, recruiting and training academic and managerial staff of the participating Universities;
- ensuring effective long – term development and delivery of new and innovative lifelong learning programs;
- setting up well equipped ICT centres in the faculties including improved access to a wider range of learning materials; and,
- introducing quality assurance measures which will ensure sustainable development of the library and archival work in the three countries

The activities presented in this article and project further developments can be tracked via the web site at <http://www.flib.sci.am/Tempus>. As far as Armenia is concerned, the authors firmly believe that «the next few years will be a busy time for the Armenian library community, a period in which libraries with the help of digital technologies must become active contributors to the management of change in Armenian society, must approve the new image of a ‘digitally competent’ librarian and attract young and motivated persons to join the library community of Armenia<sup>5</sup>. This will help to keep librarianship in the mainstream of progress, and the challenges of the ‘Knowledge Society’ will not sweep out Armenian librarians from developments in the future»<sup>6</sup>. The authors are also confident, that this project will lead to an increased number of new programmes being offered within the respective LIS faculties in the partner countries. The benefits of this project will enhance the knowledge base of the library and archival workers in Armenia, Georgia and Uzbekistan. And lastly, the successful realization of this multi – country project will allow staff at all universities to develop high standards of teaching, learning and assessment skills; to produce LIS related curriculum; and to introduce quality assurance practices that will lead towards building knowledge societies in the partner countries.

## 6. Progress so far

Eleven potential library and information science lecturers have attended two six – week periods at Robert Gordon University in Scotland, UK. They have participated in a masters' course and had extra sessions on curriculum development. They are about to receive extra tuition from lecturers from the EU participating institutions at a two week seminar in Georgia in June. They have found this very helpful and in Georgia and Armenia they hope to start a new Master's course based on this. In Uzbekistan there is more national control of curricula but within the constraints of the courses they currently provide they hope to develop the courses along the lines of what they observed at Robert Gordon University.

The legal framework for courses varies between the countries involved. Curriculum development is more centralised in Uzbekistan but the experience of the lecturers who went to the UK is not in vain. In Georgia they will soon start teaching a new curriculum and in Armenia they have already started a course in an institution that did not have a course before in library science and are waiting for the results of the deliberation on the course in Aberdeen to formalise the new curriculum.

Additionally the funding allows for the purchase of computing equipment and as of the end of March 2010 computer laboratories and servers had been established in the national Academy of Science in Armenia and in participating institutions in Uzbekistan.

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