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***NEW MASTERS PROGRAMME IN LIBRARY AND
INFORMATION SCIENCE***

3rd Monitoring Report

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Time of consortium meeting: 28-29 March 2011

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Venue: Parma university, Italy

Participants: Representatives from all partners in the consortium

Report by: Monika Segbert-Elbert, external expert

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1. Summary

This report covers the reporting period from July 2010, to end of March 2011. The 'wider objectives' and the specific project objectives remain unchanged as documented in the 1st monitoring report.

The consortium of partners invited me to participate in their fourth consortium meeting, held at the university of Parma, 28-29th March, thereby giving me an excellent opportunity to take part in detailed discussions about the activities since the last consortium meeting, and the plans for forthcoming activities until the end of the project.

The most important tasks during this reporting period were focused on

- Finalising procurement and implementation of equipment and e-resources
- Development of curriculum documents
- Running the pilot courses
- Review of the QA seminar

The consortium also discussed in detail the forthcoming activities up until the end of the project in

- Training in partner countries
- Ongoing development of curricula and planning of Master's courses
- Implementation and population of the VLE
- Ensuring the sustainability of the courses
- Planning for the final conference

A particular mention should be given to the excellent partnership in this project: EU and partner countries' project leaders have established very good communications and a clear common understanding. All partners show determination to achieve the intended results in time and budget, while recognizing that in order to maximize outcomes and impact of the project an extension would be valuable.

This visit 'replaced' the country visit to Uzbekistan, which according to the Technical Annex was due to take place at the beginning of 2011. However, given the fact that I had been able to interact with the Uzbek partners during the last monitoring visit to Georgia in July 2010, and by email since then, and that project implementation in Uzbekistan was proceeding smoothly, participation in the consortium meeting was deemed to be a more cost-effective use of my time. It was unfortunate though for all concerned, that the Uzbek project manager had not been granted a visa to participate in this meeting. The 2 participants from the Rezekne Higher Education Institution represented 'archives' in this meeting, given that archival studies are also part of the Master's course.

This report aims only to highlight the main achievements and challenges. Extensive details are provided in the thorough minutes of the meeting. The conclusions are summarized in section 4.

2. Review of activities September 2010 to date

The meeting was opened by the vice-rector of Parma university, who stressed the value of international contacts and courses. This project contributes to one of the main goals of the university, as articulated by the minister of education, namely to internationalize university degrees.

The EU project leader provided a general progress report and focused discussions on the review of activities September 2010 to date, including

- Purchasing of equipment: after the failure of 2 tenders in Georgia, this has now at long last been resolved, resulting in some savings, and procurement of the most up-to-date equipment;
- The report on needs assessment has been finalized, and will serve as a baseline when evaluating project progress in the final consortium meeting;
- Implementation of servers for VLE and repository has been completed in Armenia and Uzbekistan and will soon take place in Georgia; partners discussed the needs for a technical visit, focused on assisting in the best use of the VLE rather than hardware implementation;
- Licensing of e-resources: the Uzbek partner successfully negotiated the license to Emerald e-resources, one of the most important LIS publisher;
- Development of a separate curriculum document listing aims, modules, teachers and their subject specific competences, based on the model supplied by RGU, is available already for Georgia, and will be prepared by the end of April by the Uzbek and Armenian partners. This document is needed for the approval process for the courses; it is in line with the Bologna principles in the case of Georgia and Armenia, whereas these principles have not been adopted by Uzbekistan;
- Pilot courses are underway in Armenia and Uzbekistan, and just starting in Georgia;
- The project website was maintained by the Armenian project team, and a new 'bibliography' link was added recently;
- Co-financing is dealt with through the provision of un-paid staff time (especially in RGU); the substantial discount on the licensing of EBSCO content also counts as co-financing;
- Review of the QA seminar: some of the lecturer's time could have been saved by a tighter time-table of session.

The minutes of the project meeting provide a detailed and accurate record of the meeting concurrent with the monitor's observations and notes. A key outcome of discussions is the agreement that more effort has to be directed towards the implementation of the VLE, such as implementing and translating more modules, and training the academics in using and populating the VLE. At the same time, with the growth of content in the repository, it will be important to ensure that authors and users are aware of copyright / intellectual property rights. This topic will be covered in the next summer school.

One of the lessons learnt during this past period, was that good communications between partners, when organizing workshops, ensures not only that the right audience is invited, but that the lecturers' time is maximized.

The project managers of Armenia and Georgia gave a brief account of progress, including compliance with the Bologna process, and their efforts to attract students for the Masters' course. In Armenia students will be solicited from amongst the librarians of the faculties of the Academy of Sciences; in Georgia much effort is put into marketing the course, and 10 stipends were available for the best students. Knowledge of English by the prospective students is an issue in all partner countries – more translations of professional texts would be helpful in that regard.

The project's financial manager provided a clear financial report that explained savings and re-allocations conform with EU rules and regulations.

3. Planning forthcoming activities to the end of the project

The next reporting period will be taking the project close to its end, and will be marked by the final conference in Uzbekistan in October 2011. It is the role of the monitor to comment on

activities rather than on plans, therefore this short section focuses only on some key aspects dominating the next period:

- Implementing the LIS modules on the VLE: as noted above, various activities are planned to expand content and use of the modules;
- Populating the institutional repository: in Georgia an action plan for the repository foresees uploading of electronic theses and dissertations; Armenia will add 13 journals published by the Academy of Sciences to its repository;
- A 2 week study tour (Parma and London), a summer school (in Georgia), and placements of 15 students in EU libraries and archives were discussed and actions decided; it was agreed that public librarians from Georgia would be invited to the summer school lectures, in the spirit of life-long learning and given the potential impact well functioning public libraries have to improve the livelihoods of the community they serve; an important topic that will be included in the summer school is 'information literacy';
- Disseminating project results at the Crimea conference: a paper on the results and impact of the project will be delivered by the project contractor;
- Organising the final project conference in Uzbekistan: several suggestions as documented in the minutes of the meeting were made to expand the professional content of the conference; this will be a regional conference with participants from neighbouring countries; the conference has a strong potential for advocacy for sustained funding of modern library services at the national and regional level;
- Strengthening marketing and advocacy with the goal to ensure sustainability of the courses: this is a key issue foremost in the planning of all 3 partner countries. A presentation by the RGU partner outlined issues of sustainability as documented in a report by RGU and the Uzbek project manager. Country reports on sustainability have been prepared and shared with all partners.

9. Conclusions

Discussions made it clear that not all activities foreseen in the project workplan can be brought to reach their final impact by the end of the project, in particular the assessment of the outcome of the 2nd year of the pilot courses. Ensuring sustainability by pro-active marketing of courses is an activity that could only start now, and will take some time to take effect. Similarly, controlled growth of content in the VLE and institutional repositories and its best use by academics and students is a longer term process and its impact can not satisfactorily be evaluated by the end of the project. In the monitor's opinion It therefore makes a lot of sense that partners are considering applying for a 1 year extension of the project.

This consortium meeting was lively, action and result oriented, and demonstrated without doubt that the partnership is focused on delivering the project results to a high standard. No major issues have been identified that need addressing over and above the actions foreseen in the workplan, and documented in the detailed and thorough minutes of the meeting.