NORWAY:
NATIONAL REPORT ON NEW LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS – THE EUROPEAN LEARNING SPACE

1. General introduction

The most important factor in the setting-up of new learning environments has been the existence of ICT.

We have now come to the end of phase one – the creation and use of multimedia laboratories for foreign language teaching. Phase two consisted mainly in transferring a lot of the interactive learning materials to the Internet to improve the learning situation.
The next step was (is) to develop the interaction between student and student, as well as between student and teacher on the web – both in realtime and asynchronically.

Perhaps the time has come to evaluate the role of the university teachers role and create a new learning culture.

2.2 Policies underlying the integration of New Learning Environments

The Ministry of education has taken an active part in furthering the introduction and use of ICT in education:

– White paper No. 36 (1998 – 99) "principles for the Structure of Higher Education" discusses how universities and colleges are to behave in the current situation where enrolments for many traditional primary subjects are falling, while the need for continuing distance education. The paper also emphasizes the need for assessing a further increase in ICT instruction and continuing education and training, and for promoting ICT as an integrated part of many subjects and courses.

– The more recent action plan from the Ministry of education (<u>ICT in Norwegian Plan for 2000 – 2003</u>, www.) that discusses the challenges, targets and measures for ICT in education that the sector is to work towards.

In the 90s, two national agencies were created:

– SOFF (The Norwegian Agency for Flexible Learning in Higher Education)

SOFF was established in order to develop the competence of the existing higher education institutions, both public and private, within the field of distance education.

SOFF's key activities are

- – Information
- – Co-ordination and collaboration
- – Counselling
- – Evaluation
- – International network
- – Distribution of project grants

– The Work group for Digital Study Aids (Arbeidsgruppen for digitale læremidler)

The group is seeking to develop digital study resources and make them readily available and assessing and making available digital study resources developed by other parties.

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

It has become possible to create entire learning environments on the web. The most complete at the moment seem to be OSEN (Oslo Studies in English on the Net) (www.hf.uio.no/iba/nettkurs/), the cybercity Dreistadt where you can study German (http://cmc.uib.no/einsteigen.html), and the Virtual Institute of Romance Languages IVEREN ([www.iveren.com)](www.iveren.com), where you can take French University courses.

To promote independent learning on the web The Network University was created:

The Network University (NVU) in Norway is currently a partnership of 9 universities and colleges collaborating to provide university and college education on the Internet.

Objectives
The NVU formulated the following strategic visions for the future:
The NVU should
- be the major provider of Norwegian higher education on the Internet.
- make higher education available primarily to grown-up students, independent of time and place
- facilitate life-long learning in the workplace

In order to meet these high objectives, it was considered essential to develop a homogenous organisation which
- markets and distributes online courses provided by the member institutions
- facilitates student registration and local exams
- is flexible with regard to the validation of courses provided by other member institutions
- builds competence on ICT in education through collaboration and exchange of expertise.

NVU students come in two categories:
- On-campus students at member institutions, who take on-line courses as part of their degree programmes
- Off-campus students who either take individual courses as part of their continuing education program, or they may be working towards a degree which as yet will have to be finished on campus.

2.6 Redefining the profile of the actors involved

ICT has the potential of to change our focus from teaching to learning. Teachers will become advisers, give feed-back.

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

The successful introduction of ICT in the education system is   totally dependent on adequate teacher expertise. According to the new framework for teacher training, student teachers must receive training in the pedagogical use of ICT for use in their subsequent careers. There is also a need to increase the expertise of existing teachers.

With the implementation of Reform 97 ICT was given priority in the continuing education of teachers, and a special plan was developed in this area. The use of ICT is presented in the introduction to the curriculum - in the goals, in the main points and in the teaching methods for each subject. Guidelines including ICT have been developed for each subject, and special guidelines for the use of ICT have also been prepared.

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

The process of implementing a competence reform for adults in Norway started in 1999, based on a report from a Government Committee in 1997 and a White Paper presented in 1998 and debated by the Norwegian parliament in January 1999. This reform will embrace all adults in and outside the labour market, and it will have a broad, long-term perspective.

An important element of the reform is the development of educational opportunities, which exploit the huge potential that lies in the workplace as a place of learning, and much of the training in the workplace will have to be provided by the workplace's own resources. Nonetheless, there will be a comprehensive development process throughout the public educational system, where existing rules, teaching methods, organisation and management are reviewed in order to adapt primary and lower secondary education, upper secondary education and higher education to the competence reform for adults.

The Norwegian geography with its long distances and its sparse but relatively computerised population makes it easy to understand why there is at present a pronounced political will to encourage greater use of information and communications technology in teaching and the development of new flexible, user-adapted courses, adult teaching methods and media-based teaching. The demand for distant studies in French throughout Norway has been there for some time already, but the tools for distant teaching now at our disposal have made it possible to respond to this demand in a more efficient way than before. Today the article in short supply is neither software or

hardware, but rather qualified university teachers willing to invest some of their time in developing teaching programmes in collaboration with computer scientists and colleagues.

7. Needs in the area of New Learning Environments

7.1 Seen in relation to language teaching and learning

The primary needs at the moment is the need to change the mentalities and to disseminate and share experiences in ICT. Universities need to

– support innovators and encourage sceptics.
– change the teacher-learner situation into a situation where students access and organise information and get feedback from the teacher. The goal must be to move beyond placing course lectures and materials on the web and adopt pedagogical models that take advantage of ICT possibilities: the creation of a new learning culture.

7. Needs in the area of New Learning Environments

7.1 Seen in relation to the provision of language learning to students with special educational needs

– All planning of ICT in education assumes that ICT will be adapted to suit different requirements – in particular those of people with special needs.

8. Measures to be taken to meet the needs identified

8.1 At institutional level

There has to be an awareness of the needs to develop the new learning environments further . Secondly an action plan to introduce measures to take care of the needs has to be arrived at. Thirdly , the institution must implement the proposals in the action plan.

At the University of Bergen, a committee has proposed several measures to be taken, among ohers that

– Teachers who already have begun to adopt new pedagogical models utilising ICT should be encouraged to continue their developments and should be given a forum for sharing their innovations with other teachers.
– Sceptical teachers must be encouraged to adopt ICT in their courses.
– The University should reallocate 10% of its budget to support ICT related measures.

– Departments incorporate more fully in their regular courses the learning materials and learning environments that have already been created on the web, but are still mostly used in continuing adult ducation

9. *Examples of good practice*

The Virtual Institute of Romance Languages IVEREN ([www.iveren.com)](www.iveren.com), created by The French department at the University of Bergen in collaboration with the Institute for Romance Languages at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology in Trondheim (NTNU) and lingo.uib.

What could be better than copying the features of a real-life campus?

Our foremost goal is therefore to create a learning environment that connects people to people, not people to machines. The response is not a predefined mechanical one, like from a language learning CD-ROM, but a human one.

Language learning, on a University level, however, cannot be based on a simple chat alone. Students and teacher want to exchange not only thoughts and sentences, but also documents of various sort and provenance. The use of drawings, tables, images, and blackboards and projectors to put them across, as well as bulletin boards and the use of different rooms for minor group sessions, have proved to be fruitful in real-life teaching. A teaching/learning system which seriously attempts to copy real-life facilities must therefore be able to handle objects, that is: allow to create and delete them, assign them to persons or groups, maybe hide them from others as well. The solution that met these requirements was the use of a MOO. A MOO is basically a Multi-User-Dungeon (as known from multiplayer computer games), where the underlying structure (computer language) is *Object Oriented*.

Participating in a MOO then is basically playing a role game. A participant "owns" a MOO character whose name and gender he can alter; he can play a role, fake emotions, etc. Many students confirm that being able to hide behind their keyboard and screen, especially the knowledge that no one is able to see them blush as in real-life, gives them a new confidence.

The teacher is given a highly flexible tool. He can just wait for the students to connect and ask him questions, he can divide them into groups and make them discuss a theme, he can give them a task sheet to fulfil, he can give a lecture on a given subject with or without questions from the audience. Even if the students are not physically present, the teacher knows at every time the amount of idle seconds since their last utterance. He can easily expel noisy students. In real life, a projector that contains several slides is a problem for people being to late for class. In the MOO, a late student can browse through the whole series to catch up with the others.

We have outlined here some of the advantages of a MOO system in language teaching and learning: the real-life metaphor, the connecting-people-philosophy, the combining of online conversation and object handling, the flexibility for teaching, and the impact on language performance, learning and evaluation.

(This description is an extract from a paper presented at the EADTU conference in Paris last year.)