



# E-LEARNING AND THE LIAISON WITH THE BUSINESS – "TODOR KABLESHKOV" UNIVERSITY OF TRANSPORT GOALS

**Petar Kolev**

„Todor Kableshkov“ University of Transport, Sofia, Bulgaria

**Daniela Todorova**

„Todor Kableshkov“ University of Transport, Sofia, Bulgaria

**Nina Gergova**

„Todor Kableshkov“ University of Transport, Sofia, Bulgaria

© MESTE NGO

JEL category: **I2, I23, D83**

## **Abstract**

*One of the major tasks of Bulgaria is to create favorable conditions for the university education and professional development of young people. This is a national cause that will provide European development of Bulgaria. On the other hand the up-to-date education and opportunities for development of young people would contribute to improve demographic status in the country. Also they are major factors for overcoming the economic crisis and increasing the quality of life.*

*The EU developed a special Resolution on the social inclusion of young people to meet the requirements of the Lisbon Strategy. All activities and events aim at promoting the entrepreneurship, innovations and competencies of young people. The goal is to stimulate young people to strive for independency and realization by taking independent decisions and applying individual approach to life.*

*The paper discusses a concept for development of electronic forms for distance learning as required condition for adapting the education to business needs. The achieved results according to the implementation of the pre-set indicators in the project: "Development of Electronic Forms for Distance Learning and Virtual Library at Todor Kableshkov University of Transport, Sofia" are presented. In current market conditions, the contemporary universities have to efficiently combine education with business so that they can meet the challenges of the labor market.*

**Keywords:** electronic forms, distance learning, education

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

The education is purposeful process, including both training and education of the students. An action plan eEurope has been adopted in 2000.

Address of the corresponding author:

**Daniela Todorova**

[dtodorova@vtu.bg](mailto:dtodorova@vtu.bg)



The plan envisages creation of information society for all. It is part of the Lisbon Strategy for modernizing the European knowledge-based economy. There is a need of high-quality generally accessible education that will offer opportunity for acquiring qualification and re-qualification, needed for the real business conditions in the country.

The number of the higher education institutions in Bulgaria – 51 (30 universities, 13 specialized higher schools and 8 independent colleges), demographic collapse, as well as the EU requirements for harmonizing the approaches and practice with other European countries resulted in an increase of competition in the field of university education.

Recently, the emigration of young people grew in Bulgaria. Also the rate of youth unemployment reports an increase. This in turn, results in increasing the competitiveness of the labor market for young professionals.

The young graduates in order to be successful in the labor market need to have knowledge, skills and competencies covering the employer's expectations. (Strategija, 2014)

Regarding this the education obtained in university has to meet the economic needs of specialists with certain skills and qualification.

## 2. TODOR KABLESHKOV UNIVERSITY OF TRANSPORT EDUCATIONAL POLICY

Todor Kableshkov University of Transport, having 92 – year –old history, is a key player on the educational market. It has considerable experience in training of transport specialists from all educational and qualification degrees and according the opinion of the managers of the big transport companies is the biggest academic and research transport centre in the country.

The university's educational policy is based on mission, objectives and strategic goals. It is addressed to the society needs in regional and national aspect.

Particularly important for the education is to realize bilateral liaison of each and every Program with the labor market:

- Experts from the practice in the best available way may formulate the need of fundamental and specialized knowledge that is required for the future work of the students. Therefore, many experts and practitioners orientate towards continuation of the education for the purpose of career development;
- Holding periodic meetings between representatives of the academic circles, which serve certain program, and representatives of the practice to discuss and agree on the guidelines for development and improvement of the program. The discussions and suggestions are resulting in introduction of new programs, update and adaptation of the curricula to the requirements of the business.

The fact that the training of the students in the university is for the most part theoretical and sometimes big discrepancies with the needs of the labor market are found out results in two approaches: besides the adaptation of the curricula to the needs of the users of young professionals, the method of **work on personal motivation of the students** is developed to increase their activity and more easily adapt them to the labor market.

The successful training of the students for the requirements of the working environment is carried out by means of realizing internships, providing firsthand liaison with the future employers.

Todor Kableshkov University of Transport supports close and regular liaisons with Bulgarian employers in the field of transport including but not limited to the sphere of organization and management of the transport activity, transport infrastructure, transport design, etc., as the focus during the last years is on the following aspects:

1. **Organization of Student Forums;** During these forums the students have personal meetings with successful Bulgarian Managers, Executive Directors and Entrepreneurs. The forums aim at providing the students with practical advice and guidelines for their future realization and career development.
2. **Carrying out specific trainings for better future realization in labor market.**

The training of the students, especially in the last semesters is extremely practical, as representatives of the business, proven experts in their spheres participate in the educational process.

Using this form of training the students have the opportunity to directly derive knowledge and experience from the employers, while the clarity in terms of the labor market requirements is increased.

According the up-to-date official data in Bulgaria only 1.7% from the population of working age (25-64 years) is involved in some form of lifelong learning, having stipulated in Lisbon Strategy for EU – 28 a figure of 13%. (CESE 1885, 2009) (Strategija, Lisbon Strategy, 2000)

Regarding this, it is very important an efficient lifelong learning system to be established and developed that will stimulate the constant “self improvement” and to facilitate employment mobility, for instance by means of applying appropriate didactic tools and contemporary forms of training – distance, electronic, etc.

The dynamic development of the contemporary information technologies provides opportunity for applying new contemporary and flexible forms of education.

The aim of the contemporary distance and eLearning is to provide each and every person that needs knowledge and skills with access to training via appropriate methods, resources and technologies.

The development of educational models based on technologies is a key concept of open education, released from spatial and time constrains.

The eLearning development is in line with the development policy of Todor Kableshkov University of Transport, namely:

- to develop and modernize educational process by means of new forms, methods and technical appliances, to enhance quality of education;
- to orient the education towards business requirements through maintaining stable relationships with companies, professional

organizations, governmental and non-governmental institutions;

- to provide opportunities for lifelong learning and qualification.

E-learning is natural response to the needs of contemporary student for flexible training, accessible anytime and anywhere. Contemporary computer technologies are used for the preparation, carrying out and management of the training.

The Bulgarian eLearning faces a huge challenge, since a lot of resources are needed to become a fact. In 2012 our university developed a project that was approved: “Development of Electronic Forms for Distance Learning and Virtual Library at Todor Kableshkov University of Transport, Sofia” in search of opportunities for development of this alternative form of training. (Anon, 2012)

The project is under OP “Human Resources Development and co-funded by European Social Fund. The grant is amounting to BGN 530 994, 95 (EUR 270 000). The project objective is to promote lifelong learning process as opportunity for improving the professional skills and competencies without prolonged absence from work by developing electronic forms for distance learning at Todor Kableshkov University of Transport. It is envisaged to create conditions for development of electronic forms for distance learning, adapted to certain educational needs and providing opportunities for self-planning and development of flexible academic courses at Todor Kableshkov University of Transport. (BG051PO001-4.3.04-0024, 2012)

To this end, a Training Center will be developed and modernized. It will offer e-learning and services. Additionally, an Internal University Quality Assurance and Control System will be developed. A comprehensive training program in distance form, online courses (subjects) in a volume exceeding 50 % of the academic content of the respective curriculum of MSc Programs will be developed.

The courses will be uploaded to distance learning platform of Todor Kableshkov University of Transport.

The project implementation period is two years as we expect the electronization of the educational process to improve the quality of the academic activity and to provide an opportunity to the students to use course materials in a convenient for them time, without considering the strict time schedule of the classes.

The project upgrades the existing distance learning platform at Todor Kableshkov University of Transport, as 16 additional attractive electronic courses will be developed for different Programs.

University Informational and Telecommunication Centre has been created at the university that will administrate, coordinate and assist the organization of training through electronic courses.

Through its operation and services provided, the centre helps to improve the accessibility of the educational infrastructure and to create the conditions for equal access to education and training.

There have been chosen the most spread platform for direct and distance learning MOODLE that is widely used in higher schools and offers good conditions for communication between lecturers and students. For this system is typical that it has wide range of opportunities regarding designing courses, integrating electronic materials and has great options for control and verification of students' knowledge, communications, consultations, forum, statistics and many others.

A system for development, integration and maintenance of latest technologies in education is in process of development. This system includes Web – technologies of lecturers' activity (lectures, seminars, current monitoring of student activity, test system for assessment, etc), for instance Modular Teaching System – a complex system for computer training, Network based, electronic applications for the needs of training is some of the professional fields – accessible through the local students' network 24 hours per day, aiming to provide self-preparation and verification of knowledge, Multimedia products by courses.

The project implementation will result in a number of effects, more specifically:

- The creation and development of electronic forms of distance learning will stimulate the process of lifelong learning as opportunity to improve the professional skills and competencies, without long absence from work;
- We will improve access to educational environment and create conditions for efficient involvement in the academic process of persons, geographically distant or persons with special educational needs (people with disabilities) at Todor Kableshkov University of Transport.
- The curricula will be adapted to certain educational needs and will provide opportunities for individual planning and development of flexible academic courses.
- Concerning lecturers: During the process of development of Centre for Providing Electronic Education and Services at Todor Kableshkov University of Transport full provision in terms of available human and material resources will be ensured, including increasing the capacity and attractiveness of using (preparation and tuition) of electronic courses and thus the number of the lecturers, applying electronic methods of education will be increased.
- The access to academic materials, using the digitalized materials in the "Virtual Library" will be facilitated.

The project realization will create a ready to use model for multiplication for the needs of other universities or business organizations.

Because once established, the distance learning platform will provide opportunity with the available university resources to carry out unlimited number of courses according the developed and published in it curricula, as well as creating new distance forms of curricula or different courses/modules.

The integrated and functioning "Virtual Library" will provide the opportunity, without the need of additional resources, for re-use of its electronic resources, as well as their continuously enrichment with new records.

The available information mechanisms will provide the premise, and the need of further training

(employers and employees) and receiving income from additionally carried out electronic courses (in terms of lecturers) are sufficient incentive to be natural factors for multiplication of the educational model.

Being the only higher school, specialized in the field of transport, in Bulgaria, Todor Kableshkov University of Transport aims to promote the lifelong learning process by developing electronic forms of training.

Thus opportunities for improving the professional skill and competences, without long absence from work, are provided.

To develop and support a serious liaison between science and practice is of significant importance in present circumstances. It is necessary the scientific achievements to be actually used in practice, which in turn will contribute to greater efficiency and effectiveness of the research itself.

One of the most efficient solutions in the conditions of global economic crisis is to invest in science and to stimulate the interaction between business and scientific organizations.

Todor Kableshkov University of Transport is extremely competitive university on the educational market. The university ranking, carried out by surveying a number of indicators, positioned our university as leading institution in all professional fields.

To meet the needs of labor market Todor Kableshkov University of Transport offers attractive and useful programs with narrow specialization and specific focus.

They are accepted with interest, because the transport sector is one of the most promising sectors in the national economy lately.

The university trains students in two areas of higher education and seven professional fields, 12 BSc Programs, 19 MSc Programs and 22 PhD Programs.

To increase the quality of the education the curricula of all programs are periodically updated and harmonized with the needs of labor market, recommendations of the business, results of surveys in business organizations and institutions.

The training of students and PhD students is directed to an overall preparation, oriented to the specifics of certain type of business – the transport one.

Significant funding for development of the science and technologies under “Transport and Transport Infrastructure” Operational Program is envisaged in the European Research Area for the period till 2020.

There are many prerequisites for development of many projects, concerning the transport infrastructure both in Bulgaria and Europe.

The training of specialists with qualification in these areas determines the goals, tasks and motives for training in the different programs, offered at Todor Kableshkov University of Transport and is the response to the current needs of the labor market.

This educational market requires from its participants to offer adaptation, attraction of new categories of students by introducing attractive programs, courses, new forms of training. Leading direction in the education should be the focus in the future development of the students, to provide safe and reliable start of the career.

Nowadays the Higher Education System in Bulgaria faces a double challenge: on the one hand to accelerate and finish the process of structural reforms, overcoming the deceleration in relation to the leading European countries; on the other hand – to successfully realize the process of strategic transformation of the higher education: from supplementing service to factor for gaining advantage in the European and Global rivalry for knowledge, material prosperity and spiritual progress. (MON, 2014)

The long Bulgarian transition to democracy and market economy is yet to lead to the establishment of consistent qualifications systems, which would match the new economic processes. Amid conditions of high unemployment, the enterprises experience an ever increasing deficit of workers having the necessary qualifications, which, in parallel with the aging population and slow pace of the reforms in education, is seen as a significant impediment to economic growth and attraction of new investments into Bulgaria. (MES, 2014)

### 3. CONCLUSION

The implementation and development of sustainable liaison *education-science-business* is of key importance for the development of the economy.

This is a winning formula that provokes ideas and search for opportunities for their realization. The quote of George Bernard Shaw, namely: *"If you have an apple and I have an apple and we exchange these apples then you and I will still have one apple. But if you have an idea and I have*

*an idea and we exchange these ideas, then each of us will have two ideas."* is appropriate.

The business and the universities have to work together, so that they give opportunities to young people to find their place, where they can suggest, share and develop their innovative ideas thus providing guaranteed economic development.

Therefore our main task, as university is to develop and support efficient liaison *education-science-business*, since it is important the specialists we train to be well prepared for the practice.

### WORKS CITED

- Anon. (2012, 02 04). *BG051PO001-4.3.04-0024 Project Development of Electronic Forms for Distance Learning and Virtual Library at Todor Kableshkov University of Transport*. Retrieved 03 25, 2014, from VTU Todor Kableshkov: [www.project-dovb.vtu.bg](http://www.project-dovb.vtu.bg)
- BG051PO001-4.3.04-0024. (2012, 11 05). *BG051PO001-4.3.04-0024 Project „Development of Electronic Forms for Distance Learning and Virtual Library at Todor Kableshkov University of Transport”*. Retrieved from Todor Kableshkov University of transport: [www.project-dovb.vtu.bg/](http://www.project-dovb.vtu.bg/)
- CESE 1885. (2009, 01). *Lisabonskata strategija za perioda sled 2010 g.* Retrieved from European Economic and Social Committee: <http://www.eesc.europa.eu/resources/docs/integrated-report-bg.pdf>
- MES. (2014, 01 10). *National strategy for lifelong learning for the period 2014 – 2020 as adopted with DCM No 12 of January 10, 2014,* . Retrieved from Republika Bulgariya Ministerstvo na obrazovaniето i naukata: <http://www.mon.bg/?go=page&pagelD=74&subpagelD=143>
- MON. (2014, 05). *Strategija za razvitie na vissheto obrazovanie v Bŭlgariya za perioda 2014-2020g.* Retrieved from Republika Bulgariya Ministerstvo na obrazovaniето i naukata: [www.mon.bg/?h=downloadFile&fileId=5859](http://www.mon.bg/?h=downloadFile&fileId=5859)
- Strategija. (2000, 03). *Lisbon Strategy*. Retrieved from Shumenski Universitet: [http://web.shu-bg.net/normativna-baza/lisbon\\_strategy](http://web.shu-bg.net/normativna-baza/lisbon_strategy); [www.strategy.bg](http://www.strategy.bg)
- Strategija. (2014). *Nacionalna strategija za uchene prez celija zhivot za perioda 2014-2020 godina.* Retrieved from Republika Bulgariya Ministerstvo na obrazovaniето i naukata: <http://www.mon.bg/?go=page&pagelD=74&subpagelD=143>

Received for publication: 21.03.2014  
Revision received: 03.06.2014  
Accepted for publication: 23.06.2014

**How to cite this article?**

**Style – APA Sixth Edition**

Kolev, P., Todorova, D., & Gergova, N. (2014, 07 15). E-learning and the liaison with the business - "Todor Kableshkov" University of transport goals. (Z. Čekerevac, Ed.) *MEST Journal*, 2(2), 95-101. doi:10.12709/mest.02.02.02.10

**Style – Chicago Fifteenth Edition:**

Kolev, Petar, Daniela Todorova, and Nina Gergova. 2014. "E-learning and the liaison with the business - "Todor Kableshkov" University of transport goals." Edited by Zoran Čekerevac. *MEST Journal* (MESTE) 2 (2): 95-101. doi:10.12709/mest.02.02.02.10.

**Style – GOST Name Sort:**

**Kolev Petar, Todorova Daniela and Gergova Nina** E-learning and the liaison with the business - "Todor Kableshkov" University of transport goals [Journal] // *MEST Journal* / ed. Čekerevac Zoran. - Belgrade : MESTE, 07 15, 2014. - 2 : Vol. 2. - pp. 95-101.

**Style – Harvard Anglia:**

Kolev, P., Todorova, D. & Gergova, N., 2014. E-learning and the liaison with the business - "Todor Kableshkov" University of transport goals. *MEST Journal*, 15 07, 2(2), pp. 95-101.

**Style – ISO 690 Numerical Reference:**

*E-learning and the liaison with the business - "Todor Kableshkov" University of transport goals.* **Kolev, Petar, Todorova, Daniela and Gergova, Nina.** [ed.] Zoran Čekerevac. 2, Belgrade : MESTE, 07 15, 2014, *MEST Journal*, Vol. 2, pp. 95-101.