

ELT-59

Voices from the New Democracies: The Impact of British English Language Teaching in Central and Eastern Europe

Milestones in ELT

Milestones in ELT

The British Council was established in 1934 and one of our main aims has always been to promote a wider knowledge of the English language. Over the years we have issued many important publications that have set the agenda for ELT professionals, often in partnership with other organisations and institutions.

As part of our 75th anniversary celebrations, we re-launched a selection of these publications online, and more have now been added in connection with our 80th anniversary. Many of the messages and ideas are just as relevant today as they were when first published. We believe they are also useful historical sources through which colleagues can see how our profession has developed over the years.

Voices from the New Democracies: The Impact of British English Language Teaching in Central and Eastern Europe

This short 1996 booklet, edited by Jenny Pugsley and Geraldine Kershaw, aimed to evaluate, in an informal way, the ELT work of the British Council in central and eastern Europe, 1989–95, during the transition from Communism. The British Council was able, with new UK government funding, to step up its English language teaching and teacher training in the region, meeting rapidly growing demand from the new democracies. Firstly, the authors provide as background, an outline of the expansion strategy adopted by the British Council. This is followed by illuminating quotations from local teachers and professionals from 12 countries. Significant roles played by the British Council are detailed, including supporting English language teaching projects, contributing to teacher education reform, producing materials, organising conferences and courses, providing resources, and facilitating training and institutional links with British universities and colleges.

Voices from the new democracies:



the impact of British English language teaching in central and eastern Europe



Introduction

Throughout 1989 and the succeeding years a wind of political and social change swept through the countries of central and eastern Europe. The impact on nations and on individuals was dramatic; the impact on the language teaching profession was immediate. The role of the English language, as a symbol and means of cultural diversity and economic links with the rest of the world, was

transformed virtually overnight. The British Council reacted fast and used new money earmarked by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office to enhance its support to English language teaching projects in the region, including reformed teacher education, both in-service and pre-service; resource centres and libraries; materials production; and English for specific purposes: that is, academic and vocational English.

What was so important about the English language?

English represented for millions of people a release from the constraints of past political regimes. It provided access to English-speaking cultures worldwide, notably those in Britain. It provided a means of communication with all those speakers of other languages whose one common language was English. Use of English facilitated travel abroad for study, work and leisure. It provided a means of communication with the world of business, commerce, finance, public administration and good governance which underpin the development of the new democracies and enhance their potential as EU and NATO members. For English is the medium of international business and finance. Before the reforms and the transition to market economies, countries in central and eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union had special and unusual trading relationships with the rest of the world. Business activity took place through trade banks and other comparable organisations. It was tightly controlled with comparatively few specialists involved. Those who were involved had an absolutely fluent command of English; those who were not, had little or no knowledge of the language.

But now, trading relationships are on a company-to-company basis, resulting in a boom in the demand for English language skills. Students use international textbooks in English in key areas such as finance, accounting, management and marketing. Business executives read international business journals and newspapers. Banks and currency traders are linked into international information systems such as Reuters. English terms have frequently been adopted into local languages. In Poland and Russia there has also been a much higher demand for places on degree courses in accountancy, normally including a foreign language, English being the most popular choice.

English speakers are increasingly taking up influential positions in business and education. For example, the Chancellor's Financial Sector Scheme for the former Soviet Union, which provides working placements in the British finance industry, is very well subscribed, and on returning home participants' skills and experience of the British finance industry enable them to make a significant contribution to the developing economy at home.

What was the British Council's strategy?

The Council adopted a number of approaches to ensure the most effective use of its resources to address a potentially unlimited demand for the teaching of English. Firstly, the Council worked with the teaching profession at all levels. It worked with ministries of education who would provide the authority and backing for national teacher training schemes and curriculum development; it worked with heads of faculty and department who would contribute to the academic input and provide leadership among their own staff. It worked with teachers and trainers on methodology, resource production and management issues to ensure the widest possible cascade effect through the profession.

Secondly, the Council immediately provided books and other resources, including resource centres, so that both teachers and the community at large would have an early indication of what material benefits could become available to them: the promises being made by the West were in part fulfilled early on in very tangible form.

Thirdly, the Council framed much of the above activity into formal projects that were bound by budgets and time-frames but which also declared objectives that went far beyond the immediate - for example "training of 20 000 teachers" - and looked to the wider impact on society as a whole.

Those with academic integrity are rightly cautious of establishing simple cause and effect relationships between language teaching and the long-term development of the education and economy of a nation; even so, there can be no doubt that such widespread language teaching and the accompanying developments in teacher training and curriculum planning will have widespread effects on the infrastructure of the society as a whole and not merely on those whose working lives are based largely in the classroom.

Fourthly, it has been an overt aim of the Council to develop a sense of professional solidarity among teachers and trainers across the region, often transcending national and ethnic boundaries and drawing on their common commitment to pedagogic goals and the value of education as a binding and civilising force among nations. Active networking has been encouraged through the organisation of conferences and the bringing together of key overseas and British people in this field. The Council is

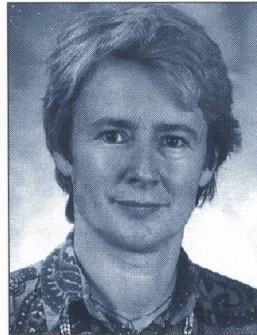
indebted to all those British specialists and institutions, state and private sector, who have contributed to training and evaluation in ELT in the region.

The document you have here is an attempt to evaluate in an informal way the impact of the teaching of English in the region. We wrote to the people directly involved in English language projects for their personal views on how the British input has affected them, their colleagues, their students and their country as a whole. The response was immediate and warm, and often moving. Other evaluation studies will focus on the quantifiable aspects of the achievements of English language projects in the region. These first-hand accounts, from diverse nationalities and cultures, will give you an idea of the ways in which British influence has been felt and appreciated in the region: throughout both the English teaching profession and the developing democratic processes. They also exemplify the implicit value to Britain by way of professional, political and commercial profile. Let our contributors now speak for themselves.



Jenny Pugsley

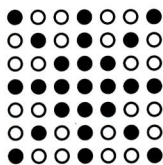
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The British Council

Voices from the new democracies: ELT in central and eastern Europe

1. the past

To get a clear picture of the present we need the perspective of the past. Over thirty years ago, teachers were already going to Britain under British Council auspices.

2. new beginnings

1989 brought massive changes not only to politics but also to education throughout the region. The impact was felt both within education systems and also by individuals.

3. personal influences - people and places

Many teachers told of the way contact with British ELT has affected them personally, changing their whole outlook on life.

4. conferences

Conferences play a key role in promoting the exchange of ideas. But it is not only those who participate directly who benefit.

5. teachers' associations

Local teachers' associations underpin the development of a new kind of professionalism among English language teachers.

6. working on joint projects

One of the keys to success of development projects is co-operation. Joint projects can be truly sustainable, with local teachers taking over the roles of expatriate trainers; resources are then devoted to new tasks.

7. courses

Many teachers, trainers and lecturers have attended courses, both in the UK and in their home countries. These courses have a profound effect on individuals - a milestone, or a dream come true.

8. teaching methods

Teachers refer to the change in teaching methods, which reflects the confidence teachers have gained as a result of training, and the abandonment of certain fixed views.

9. students

In some schemes, students appear at the bottom of the hierarchy. But for many teachers they are at the top - they are the young people who will ultimately benefit from improved foreign language and international communication skills.

10. resources and resource centres

Resources are the key to good teaching, alongside methodology.

11. books and publishing

In some countries the British Council has been actively involved in text book projects.

12. institutions

The process of institutional change has not been easy but it has been worthwhile - that is the view of the main protagonists, the lecturers.

13. institutional links

Institutional links with British universities and colleges provided the impetus for change, and continuity thereafter.

14. business English, English for Specific Purposes

English for Specific Purposes is a key area of ELT, providing specialists and business executives with the skills they need to communicate with British partners.

15. conclusion

To conclude, we listen to representative voices from a range of countries; each one looking to the English language to help build the future.

Abbreviations

BBC:	British Broadcasting Corporation
BTEC:	Brno English Teaching Conference
CUP:	Cambridge University Press
ELT:	English language teaching
ELTECS:	English Language Teaching Contacts Scheme
ESP:	English for Specific Purposes
FCO:	Foreign and Commonwealth Office
IATEFL:	International Association of Teachers of English as a Foreign Language
OUP:	Oxford University Press
PACE:	Polish Access to English
PSLC:	Public Service Language Centre, Lithuania

Voices from the new democracies: the impact of British ELT in central and eastern Europe

1. the past

To get a clear picture of the present we need the perspective of the past - the tale of ELT in central and eastern Europe is a long one. Over thirty years ago, teachers were already going to Britain under British Council auspices:

- Back in the sixties, a group of Hungarian teachers of English went to England for a Summer School. For some reason they were not met at the airport so they needed to phone the British Council to find out what to do. Although they probably all had some pounds sterling no-one could admit to this, as it was illegal for them to have foreign currency in Hungary, and one member of the group was, of course, a spy for the party - but no-one knew who it was. So they waited at the airport for a long time, then eventually one teacher was brave enough to pull out some change and make the call. Everyone was worried about who was watching then. Luckily things have changed. And luckily nothing happened to the one who had some small change, although it could have been very serious. (Hungary)

Not all stories have such a straightforward ending.

One teacher from Slovakia looks back almost 50 years:

- Those of us with a longer memory may probably be more aware of the benefits of British input to ELT in Slovakia than our younger colleagues as we remember the hard and bare years when British presence, in person and in print, was not welcome in our country. When the Teachers' Resource Centre of the British Council was officially opened in Panska Street, Bratislava, my thoughts travelled back to the late 40s. Every visit to the then existing British Institute in Stefanikova Street was impregnated with fear. Fear to be caught on leaving the Institute, detained,

questioned, threatened. And yet we kept visiting it, with love and anguish.

(Slovakia)

Teaching was not an easy task as there was a shortage of resources.

- When I started working at the university I had no experience in ESP (English for Specific Purposes) teaching. I did not know what to teach or how to do it, so I did what most of my colleagues did at the time. We used locally produced textbooks written by teachers who were not trained in materials writing. Each unit followed the same structure: a text followed by some grammar exercises, translation and questions about the topic The system was boring for both students and teachers.

(Slovakia)

Teachers of English always looked towards the source of the subject they taught, however difficult this might be.

- While a student, between 1982-6, English revealed itself through the books and cassettes at the British Library in Bucharest. This was nothing but an oasis of peaceful and warm western culture in our cold town.

(Romania)

To end this section, we can look from the past into the future with a young teacher of English from Poland:

- When I graduated from the English Philology Department in 1979 I saw my future as, at best, an academic teacher of English, teaching endless classes to students and doing much one-to-one to supplement my meagre state salary. I could not have expected in my wildest dreams what fate had for me in store.

(Poland)

2. new beginnings

1989 brought a sea-change not only to politics but also to education throughout the countries of central and eastern Europe. The impact of these changes was felt both within education systems and also by individual teachers and lecturers, some of whose stories are given below.

First, here are some examples of the national pictures:

Russian dropped as compulsory foreign or second language for all school students

Estonia:	1991
Poland:	1989
Hungary:	1989
Kazakhstan:	1991
Bulgaria:	1991-2
Czech Republic/Slovakia:	1990

English has rapidly become the most popular language taught; for example 75% of Estonian school students learn English and in Poland the figure is 80% choosing English as a first foreign language and many of the remaining 20% taking English as their second foreign language.

Poland is a good example:

- After the fall of Communism in Poland, the English language became a priority for the Ministry of Education. Their forward policy stated: "We envisage a situation in which the command of English will be universal ... our aim is to achieve the standards in Holland and Scandinavia"

(Poland)



and one individual tells us the story of how she played a key role in the practical changes which ensued from this policy change:

- In 1989 I was head of the National Council for Language Education. I saw the possibility of establishing a new system of teacher education at 3-year colleges. In 1989-90 the Polish Ministry of Education approved of the new college system, its curricula and the staff to be employed. Buildings left by the disappearing communist party were handed over to local education authorities to be given to new foreign language teacher training institutions. But ... there were no books and no money for books. How to start new institutions without textbooks? I was desperate. A year and a half of hard day and night work in vain? Every funding possibility was tried. Nothing.

British input with the PACE project helped start 59 colleges training English language teachers, thus opening the Polish way to democracy and to market economy. English is an equivalent to literacy in eastern Europe after all!

And then ... the University of Warsaw approached me saying "Now that you've done it for the whole of Poland aren't you going to help us get the flagship university off the ground?"

(Poland)

The PACE project referred to, Polish Access to English, was supported by British government funds and was later to provide a model for a reformed teacher training system for other subjects.

But Poland was not the only target. Other countries, other individuals also benefited from the changes.

One teacher in the Czech Republic gives a clear summary of events:

- My first awareness of increased British input to ELT came at BTEC 1991 (Brno English Teaching Conference); then with the appointment of a British lecturer with some responsibility for in-service education of teachers at the Brno Faculty of Education (1991), the opening of the British Council Resource Centre (1991) and the appointment of a regional teacher trainer (1992).

(Czech Republic)

In Bulgaria, British input seems to have taken up a lot of physical space - even preventing lecturers from getting in to work:

- I first became aware of increased British input to ELT in 1990 when a number of largish boxes arrived, blocking the entrance to the English Department at Sofia. They contained a considerable quantity of contemporary British novels in multiple copies and were a present from the British Council. The books, I realised with relish, could be used to teach several courses on the contemporary novel The other thing was the Academic Links Programme which was established at approximately the same time, and which brought to Sofia a number of exciting lecturers offering new angles and perspectives.

(Bulgaria)

3. personal influences - people and places

Many teachers told of the way contact with British ELT has affected them personally, changing their whole outlook on life. For example:

- British input to ELT has given me peace of mind professionally. I mean knowledge of the available contacts in Britain ... which may be addressed for information on ELT matters, and the resources, which give me assurance.

(Lithuania)

- The major event in my career history was the ESP teacher training course in the UK. It meant a lot to me, because when I went there I had very little teaching experience, and I had vague ideas about modern teaching techniques. I had never had the opportunity of exchanging ideas with professionals and consequently I lacked self-confidence. An important outcome was that all of a sudden I found myself being a member of a large community - the community of English language teachers.

(Romania)

This sense of belonging to an international community of teachers of English as a foreign language is clearly very important; and it is something which the British Council has actively tried to promote through the English Language Teaching Contacts Scheme, or ELTECS.

- In supporting and sustaining ELT in Romania, the British input is made manifest, in my opinion, in the building up of a community of English language teachers from academics to primary school teachers, a community that developed a sense of belonging and whose members have gained self-confidence and self-esteem, and have learned to share experience and ideas, and mostly have learned how to work together.

(Romania)

This view is shared throughout the region:

- If I attend an ELTECS workshop or read the materials which I receive from various Council contacts I get acquainted with the ideas and practical

procedures that are really new and exciting, e.g. the importance of evaluation and change, the importance of positive thinking and personal development.

(Slovenia)

Both individual British consultants and local teachers, trainers and lecturers have played key roles - the names are too numerous to mention, it is a vast and expanding professional network:

- It is impossible to say, I think, whose ideas in particular have influenced me - the list would be very long and include very famous names as well as the

names of colleagues who may enjoy only local acclaim. However, it is not the names, and not even any particular ideas which stimulated the growth ... it is the sense of belonging to a very active and intellectually lively professional community - in my country, in the region, and world-wide - which has not only stimulated but empowered me to try and achieve even more far reaching development.

(Poland)

- There are many outstanding people who have come to Latvia and helped us a lot.

(Latvia)

4. conferences

Conferences have played a key role in promoting the exchange of ideas. But it is not only the lucky individuals who participate directly who benefit:

- (The British Council advisers) encouraged me to take part in conferences at home and abroad I gained more confidence in everything. I shared my newly-gained experience with my colleagues and with my students and I was also able to benefit from their experience and knowledge.

(Slovakia)

The chance to participate is seen as the opportunity to take on a new role - as an ambassador for British Culture.

- I am head of the English Linguistics department in a university in Hungary. I am grateful to the British Council for enabling me to participate in a Conference on British Cultural Studies at the end of August 1991. I found it extremely useful to attend the conference because it dealt with a wide variety of cultural topics and helped me develop a new, updated version of British life and its various aspects. I think all those who, like myself, are involved in the work of an English department anywhere in Europe, should be regarded as "ambassadors" of British culture, and given the opportunity to immerse themselves in an organised, on-location study of new developments in British life.

(Hungary)

Committed teachers see visits to Britain, however brief, as an opportunity to hone their own language skills as well as for professional development:

- A visit to Belfast ELTECS conference was significant ... it was very interesting to meet colleagues from other countries and discuss lots of shared problems. In my view it is important that such conferences were held in English speaking countries as we don't only need to discuss teaching techniques; a teacher's own personal knowledge of the country is essential.

(Russia)

Selected major ELT events in the region since 1989.

November 1989, Budapest English Studies Symposium, Hungary

1991 - Brno English Teaching Conference, Czechoslovakia, opened by Prince Charles

May 1992, first conference of IATEFL Bulgaria

November 1992, first ELTECS conference

September 1994, first Belarusian International Conference for English Language Teachers

5. teachers' associations

Local teachers' associations have played a key role in the development of a new kind of professionalism among English language teachers. Many of the associations set up since 1989 are affiliated to IATEFL, the British-based International Association of Teachers of English as a Foreign Language.

- My first acquaintance with British input to ELT in Russia took place at the first IATEFL-Russia Conference in Zvenigorod in 1991. It was a great feast of ELT and a real breakthrough in my ideas of language teaching and methodology. Until that time we were practically out of reach of modern trends in



ELT. it was there where the idea of organisation of a local association of teachers first occurred to me and my colleague Later that idea was backed up by the British Council in Moscow, and in March 1992 our Voronezh Association of English Language teachers was formed. So the very fact of its appearance was due to British influence. We are very grateful to the British Council in Moscow for support for our Association. We were donated several books on ELT methodology, two members of the Executive Board of the Association had an opportunity to attend Summer School in Britain, I was invited to take part in IATEFL Conference in Brighton. The Conference was a real international eventIt gave me an opportunity to learn how IATEFL works and to apply this knowledge to organisation of work of our Association.

(Russia)

Such associations have also helped individuals to blossom:

- My tale would be incomplete (without) the work I

have been doing in and for IATEFL Poland, and the people I have met through this work. They have provided the encouragement and goodwill without which all the other opportunities might have been wasted, or at least not fully exploited.

(under) the Differential Subscription Scheme ... members of our national IATEFL branches can pay their subscription in local currency, and the money which is raised in this way can be used locally to organise conferences and teacher training events. Yet for this subscription which is only a fraction of what it costs in Britain, our members enjoy most of the privileges of normal membership of IATEFL world-wide - the privileges they would not otherwise be able to afford, since the full British subscription rate would be too expensive for most language teachers here. This unique financial arrangement made it possible to establish IATEFL Poland, as well as sister organisations in such countries as Hungary, the Czech Republic and Romania.

(Poland)

English Teachers associations in central and eastern Europe

Country	Association	Established	Affiliation to IATEFL
Albania	NAETA, National Association of English Teachers of Albania,	1991	1993
Belarus	BELNATE - Belarusian National Association of Teachers of English,	1994	1994
Bosnia	BHETA - Bosnia and Herzegovina English Teachers' Association,	1994	Pending
Bulgaria	IATEFL, Bulgaria,	1991	1991
Croatia	HUPE - Croatian Association of Teachers of English:	1991	1992
Czech Republic	ATECR - Association of Teachers of English of the Czech Republic,	1991	1991
Estonian	EATE - Estonian Association of Teachers of English,	1991	1992
Latvia	LATE, Latvian Association of Teachers of English,	1991	1992
Lithuania	LAKMIDA - Lithuania English Teachers' Association,	1991	1992
Poland	IATEFL, Poland,	1991	1991
Romania	BETA - Bucharest English Teachers' Association, Romania,	1990	1991
Romania	TETA - Timisoara English Teachers' Association, Romania,	1990	1991
Russia	Russian English Teachers' Association,		1990
Russia	SPELTA - Saint Petersburg English Teachers' Association,	1994	1995
Slovakia	Slovak Republic English Teachers' Association,	1992	1996
Slovenia	Slovenia English Teachers' Association,	1966	1990
Ukraine	Ukraine English Teachers' Association,	1993	1993

6. working on joint projects

One of the keys to success of development projects is co-operation. Such projects if well conceived can be very influential. Joint projects can be truly sustainable, with local teachers taking over the roles of expatriate trainers; resources can then be devoted to new tasks. Local teachers recognise the challenge of working alongside rather than under British colleagues and reap the benefits of this close cooperation.

- I work at the Public Service Language Centre. The Centre was founded by the Lithuanian Government, the British Council, and the United Nations Development Programme in Vilnius in 1993. The main aim of the PSLC is to upgrade the foreign language abilities of Lithuanian government officials. I receive everyday support from the British Council consultants. The support from the British Council is strategically planned and provided in a professional way. It is a challenge to work with the British Council colleagues.

(Lithuania)

The effectiveness of this mode of working is recognised by those who come into close contact with it:

- It should be said that the effect of British input to ELT in the Czech Republic has been enormous. No other source of aid to ELT comes remotely near being as effective as that channelled through the British Council. This is due to two reasons. First, the measures supporting ELT were prepared (for the most part) in consultation with the Czechs, after extensive preliminary enquiry as to what they felt was needed here. And second, the support was given in the framework of several long-term programmes, and ones with a multiplying effect. As a result, the ELT input has been focused on real priority areas, and will continue to have an effect for a long time into the future.

(Czech Republic)

7. courses

Many teachers, trainers and lecturers have attended courses, lasting from a few days to several months, both in the UK and in their home countries. These courses have a profound effect on individuals - a milestone, or a dream come true.

- The milestone in my teaching career was September 1993 when I learned about a two-week intensive ESP course organised by a British Council ESP teacher trainer in Bratislava.

(Slovakia)

- England - an excellent and fruitful 11 week course in teaching ESP, focused on teacher training as well, was a main station on my way to (postgraduate study). I came back full of inspiration, enthusiasm, and input for my teaching and courage for teacher training.

(Slovakia)

- I had the opportunity to visit England. The dream of my life came true. The three month course meant a lot for my professional development The participation to the course was made possible by the joint efforts of the British Council and the Ministry of Education in Bucharest. The outcomes of the course were to be seen soon. Coming back, being the leader, I was well trained, ready to share experience and ideas with everybody.

(Romania)

Courses in Britain show the benefits of different modes of study, as these two extracts from letters from the Czech Republic and Lithuania show.

- During my visiting fellowship to a British university, which was also funded by the British Council, I was greatly impressed by the stimulating atmosphere of postgraduate seminars.

(Czech Republic)

- The British Council has supported my training in the UK. In August 1994 I spent two weeks in the English Language Unit of a British university, where I could observe classes, share ideas with the teachers on class preparation and course design. I was impressed by the way they organise materials, and had a chance to study them. The training course provided me with a lot of ideas about working with intermediate and advanced students, and preparing courses for students with different needs.

(Lithuania)

The influence of such courses is felt long after the course has ended - trainees learn about themselves and their own countries as well as about Britain.



8. teaching methods

Many of the teachers refer to the change in teaching methods, which reflects the confidence teachers have gained as a result of training, and the abandonment of certain fixed views.

- As I am in everyday contact with these teachers and trainers, I know that during the past five years a major change has taken place in the ideology of foreign language teaching, testing and examination technique in our country. The old, rigid and 'convenient' routine methods are being changed for more flexible ways of providing for the clients/users the proper services according to their needs. The new ideology and methodology are bringing about a wider selection of course programs in our teacher training, 'tailor made' courses for the learners, establishing open learning or self access centres I am only sorry that in the past I had to spend years experimenting, collecting new materials, as well as reinventing the wheel to provide good courses for my students, and that I am not a

trainee now, with the availability of all the assistance and exchange of experience there is now. (Hungary)

Methodology and the new resources provided by Britain go hand in hand.

- While the material support in the way of resources, i.e. books, equipment and furnishing for the resource room and media room are the most immediately visible results of the British Council's assistance to the department, I feel that it has to be stressed that these resources have had a most decisive impact on the ways we approach the teaching of English, and on our methodology of designing course programmes. This in turn has shown our students, and the Czech teachers as well, entirely new and modern attitudes to language learning and teaching, including self-access methods and individual responsibility for progress and development.

(Czech Republic)

9. students

In some schemes, students appear at the bottom of the hierarchy. But for many teachers they are at the top - they are the young people who will ultimately benefit from improved foreign language and international communication skills.

- I cannot say that I am a good teacher. What is important is that the people in our country, especially young people, have and will have opportunities of learning English properly.... The better the teachers are, the better the students will be.

(Czech Republic)

Students are numerous - but there are ways to reach them all.

- To mark the Queen's visit to Russia in 1994, the first ever visit by a British monarch, a "big idea" was needed. The result: the production of 40,000 copies of a Letter from Britain, an information pack for teachers of English. Our thinking went something like this:
there are 50,000 schools across Russia
in each 2 - 10 teachers of English
teaching 20 children in each class
just think how many of Russia's future leaders we can reach for just a penny a person!

(Russia)

- English has become part of the National Curriculum in many countries from Europe. There has been a tremendous demand for learning English and students enjoy learning it.

(Romania)

Britain has influenced students at primary level, in secondary schools, at universities and in adult education.

- I have been a teacher at a Primary Teacher Training College for two years. I am a mentor teacher too, since I work in a special primary school where I teach English for 8 and 9 year old pupils. I believe that children should be familiar with foreign languages as soon as possible to get the right attitude to English.

(Hungary)

- It is impressive to see the students of the bilingual school, how self confident they are, how creative and capable.

(Czech Republic)

- I think that British input on our students is evident. British teachers work with our intermediate and advanced students. The feedback from the students is positive. The teachers are good at motivating students and learners value contacts with them and their efforts to stimulate students to speak and increase their participation.

(Lithuania)

10. resources and resource centres

Resources can be the key to good teaching, alongside methodology. A lecturer from Russia describes the importance of this:

- First of all, it is the access to resource materials through the British Council Library that made my work so much more interesting and, I believe, effective. For too many years teachers of English have had limited opportunities just because they lacked books and textbooks of English, to say nothing of audio and video materials; and it goes without saying that teaching a language isn't only teaching rules of grammar and spelling, and offering vocabulary lists, but getting one's students acquainted with the country where the language is spoken, its ways, customs, its history and literature.

We now have a lot of good manuals and other means to be happier in class, and my students may indulge in numerous language games, tests, etc. which they like so much, not only because it's fun, but because they come to know Britain and the way the British people communicate much better.

(Russia)

Resource centres provide a focus for teachers:

- Teachers' Resource Centres in each district have benefited from the loans and donations of the British Council. Books, textbooks, cassettes, dictionaries, have become available to all the teachers in my district.

(Romania)

ELT remains a key area of activity and the resource centres are part of overall plans to support English language work.

- The (Resource Centre) network has been crucial for the furthering of ELT work in the country. The books, videos and journals they make available to the public are invaluable: through them, teachers, students and the general public have had access to a vast range of information about Britain and about English itself They have also served as a focus for a whole range of other activities (seminars, guest speakers, and so on) that have enriched the ELT profession. And what is perhaps most important of all, they are spread throughout the country, where help is needed most: the British Council has not repeated the mistake made by representatives of other major countries, that of concentrating all efforts in the capital, where the need is in fact the least.

(Czech Republic)

Where a country is too vast to set up an effective network of resource centres which every teacher can reach, other creative solutions are adopted:

- The English Page appears monthly in the Teacher's Gazette - a weekly supplement comparable to the Times Education Supplement. With a subscription of 120,000 it has a potential readership of around 165,000 foreign language teachers. Twenty-five 'English pages' have been produced so far; their practical focus provides teachers with class activities they can use in school.

(Russia)

11. books and publishing

In some countries the British Council has been actively involved in text book projects:

- Ten million copies of the book Happy English have now been sold. Written by a Russian lecturer and a British Council-sponsored Lektor, and dedicated to the British Council, this book has been selling at a rate of five copies a minute since it was first published in 1992. Happy English is the first Russian textbook for young learners which is based on everyday English. Soviet textbooks recorded, for example, Lenin's sojourn in London, reading in the British Museum. Happy English takes the young learner to tourist's London. And instead of Masha and Ivan going to the Gastronom, Mrs Claydon is pictured in the supermarket.

(Russia)

- The new textbooks for the 5th and 6th grades have been written by a group of Romanian teachers under the co-ordination of the British Council experts.

(Romania)

Joint publishing projects are another kind of new venture, and the British Council has supported such initiatives where appropriate.

- We are greatly influenced by American (English). We are looking forward to improving this situation, the more so that we have launched some pilot projects with several British publishing houses (CUP, OUP, Longman)

(Russia)



- Some leading foreign publishers have approached Polish coursebook writers with offers of co-operation which may lead to interesting British-Polish initiatives in this area.

(Poland)

Local academics have been assisted with their own projects:

- In July 1990 I had the privilege to stay in London as the guest of the British Council. The purpose of my visit was to collect material for my book on Shelley and Turner, and to have a chance of seeing Turner's paintings in the original. I also consulted scholars in my field of research. After my return home, I have put to good use my experiences in Britain. I have

published two books, one in English and one in Hungarian. Both books have proved useful for students at undergraduate level and especially at postgraduate level.

(Hungary)

British publications are now more widely available throughout the region:

- In 1990 ... there were no original English books. Now we have not only the British Council offices but the BBC centre and other British publishers' offices have opened. Now British English Language Teaching books, coursebooks, graded readers, and low priced editions, are available in Bulgaria.

(Bulgaria)

12. institutions

The process of institutional change has not been easy but it has been worthwhile - that is the view of the main protagonists, the lecturers:

- I think that most colleges in Hungary have their Cinderella sleeps, dreaming about what should be done, but at the same time, they are afraid of changes - radical changes. Most of our first reaction to new ideas is 'this is impossible', and I think we need foreigners, not because they are wiser, or more experienced, but simply to show different attitudes to things. What we cannot believe in, they may, and luckily sometimes they succeed. This is what happened in our college too at the beginning, but after a while everybody believed in the success of the programme and we got involved. As to the institution, sometimes I feel other colleagues from other departments think that what we are doing is too much of a hassle, and I can understand and feel pity for them at the same time, because those who don't get in the flow cannot see the point of why it is worth doing.

(Hungary)

In some areas entirely new institutions were needed:

- I am a senior member of a teacher training department for modern languages (English and German) known in English as the Fast Track. This department has been in existence only for slightly more than three years and was founded, like eight other similar departments, to help meet the desperate need for modern language teachers especially in lower secondary schools. This situation arose after the Velvet Revolution in 1989, when Russian stopped being compulsory through our system of education and then students are now free to choose between several foreign languages (including Russian). Everybody wanted to switch to English (or German) overnight.

(Czech Republic)

13. institutional links

Institutional links with British universities and colleges provided the impetus for change, and continuity thereafter:

- In 1990 I was approached by a newly founded Teacher Training College in South East Poland to help them organise the College for Teachers of English and to act as their consultant (a formal requirement to have the college academically recognised). The perspective of having to be consultant for a Teacher Training College made me seek contacts in Britain to obtain some advice and assistance.

(Poland)

- Our contacts with British academics have improved greatly, especially under the Academic Links Programme. This has facilitated the exchange of ideas and has given us an impetus to reconsider, develop, and update our curricula, and to introduce new courses and new approaches to teaching.

(Bulgaria)

14. business English, English for Specific Purposes

English for Specific Purposes is a key area of ELT, providing specialists and business executives with the skills they need to communicate with British partners.

- Further help came in the form of training which was provided mostly by the British Council and various British organisations which co-operated with it - including some government agencies like the Know-How Fund. Thanks to EMAS, the English for Management Advisory Service, for instance, which was set up with the help of the Know-How Fund, and whose training courses I attended both in Britain and this country, I am now a qualified teacher and teacher trainer of English for Business Purposes.

(Poland)

When students need to opt for a language for specific purposes, many opt for English as an indispensable tool - a key to professional survival.

- For the last four years I have worked at the British Council ESP Resource Centre at the Technical University in Sofia. The Resource Centre Library is rich in textbooks for professional English. Having in mind that a few years ago there was almost nothing in terms of materials, now it is amazing to see nearly all good textbooks collected on one site. 80% of the students at the Technical University choose to study English as a foreign language - their studies are supported by the materials at the resource centre.

(Bulgaria)

15. conclusion

To conclude, we will listen to representative voices from a range of countries; each one looking to the English language to help build the future.

- For someone coming from a small, often unknown country, it is comforting to know that there is a way in which I can be a member of a big family, and that there is a language which disregards territorial and political boundaries.

(Slovenia)

- So what does the British Council mean to me? Basically: good partnership, where the British Council and I do our best in offering each other assistance, acknowledgement and optimism. And the best thing is that the British Council does not mean this only to me. Like ripple after ripple, it assists new and new English language teachers, making them first better professionals and consequently less satisfied with their own teaching situation, and eventually ready to initiate and carry out changes beneficial to teachers, students, institutions and the country.

(Slovakia)

- If change is to be implemented, then foreign language classes are a propitious means of learning and developing democratic values.

(Romania)

- There are so many visible and palpable results like: joint textbook writing, joint MA programmes in British Cultural Studies, a solid network of teacher trainers, to mention just a few. To what end? To develop a coherent and comprehensive ELT system on our native grounds. Who are the most responsive to these programmes? There is no doubt that the young

generation is the most responsive, and functions as a pushing force in implementing change via English language learning. In the long run, the beneficiary of the British input in ELT will be the Romanian community.

(Romania)

- What I especially appreciate is that British Council lecturers are not only concerned with doing useful work while they are here, but that they are trying to train their Czech counterparts and to set up systems that will still work when they have left the country.

(Czech Republic)

- To me it sounds like a fairy tale: from zero level to the opportunities which are opened for us today. As for the future: I have got a feeling that the more I learn the more remains hidden from me. I feel especially guilty for my often improper use of English words and, sure, grammar as well. My desire is to have a "feedback" - in other words to spend a longer time in an English speaking country. At any case: I am determined not to get fossilised!

(Czech Republic)

- (There is) a tendency in the West to view all the ex-Communist countries as identical, or at least much alike, and hence to try to use the same criteria and suggest the same solutions to what seem similar issues. In fact, the countries of central and eastern Europe had been shaped by far more diverse factors than the common Communist past, and differ greatly among themselves. It is the task of a perceptive local ELT community to sensitise students to their own



unique cultural inheritance - before we ask them to conform to the rules which apply in other national and corporate cultures. To do otherwise would mean subjecting our learners to uncritical acceptance of Western values - indeed to a form of cultural imperialism.

(Poland)

- British input to ELT in Lithuania affects us positively. If there are different points of view due to different cultures we manage to achieve consensus. I think that competence, good will and enthusiasm have helped us to solve all problems. Constant contacts with British teachers have helped me and my colleagues to understand and value the British culture.

(Lithuania)

- It is precisely because I see the transition from old ways as not quite completed that I feel that continued input would be vital especially in relation to the Czech teachers: we will still need advice and guidance in implementing new methods and in integrating British resources in the teaching process.

(Czech Republic)

- I consider myself very fortunate. I know I was a young inexperienced graduate at the right time at the right place. The help of the British Council and a British language school helped me to make a good start. The rest was my hard work and co-operation with colleagues. I would like to encourage all teachers in their efforts undertaken in their countries. We can do so much with help from Britain, more than we originally thought was possible.

(Poland)

Afterword

The Berlin Wall came down in 1989. By 1990 the British Council had already established projects ranging from highly innovative pre-service training programmes for English language teachers, to assistance in the design of Business English programmes for both the public and private sectors.

The speed with which Britain responded was greatly appreciated and was in stark contrast to the speed shown by multi-lateral aid agencies and other bilateral aid agencies. Equally appreciated was the fact that Britain offered assistance in an area that the new governments in the region had immediately identified as critical to their economic and political development: the British Council responded to their wants rather than insisting on telling them their needs.

Six years on, it can be demonstrated that the ELT expertise and resources that Britain provided has led to significant improvements in the effectiveness of English language teachers throughout the region. But it has led to much more than that: by introducing a project approach to development at a time of great change within these societies, Britain has helped establish a cadre of professionals who are skilled in the management of change, and, most important, capable of further educational innovations which will undoubtedly be required. The impact of this approach has penetrated deeply into their education systems and

has already been felt way beyond ELT. The British Council has also ensured that the lessons learnt in one project are disseminated not only to other projects in that country but to all the countries in the region.

Through these projects, Britain acquired a well-earned reputation for educational innovation and for a willingness to become genuinely involved. The readiness shown by the British Council to help, not just by providing money, but by establishing projects and ensuring a genuine transfer of skills, is already reaping Britain both commercial and political benefits.

There are links established with UK higher education institutions and publishing organisations; as a result, there are now individuals and groups within British institutions with interest in and familiarity with countries in Central and eastern Europe; there are already increased numbers of students from the region in Britain, and increased sales of publications to the region.

Even more fundamental to Britain's long term interests in Europe, but perhaps less tangible, is the fund of goodwill that these projects have generated towards Britain throughout the region. It should not be squandered.

(University of Lancaster)

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The British Council is Britain's principal agency for cultural relations and is an integral part of its diplomatic and aid effort. The Council's purpose, in accordance with its Charter, is to promote a wider knowledge of the UK and the English Language and to encourage cultural, scientific, technological and educational co-operation between Britain and other countries. The Council opened many of its offices in central and eastern Europe before and shortly after the second world war and therefore despite gaps in operations in certain countries has a long history in the region.

