IDEAL

Impact of Distance Education on Adult Learning

Distance education in European higher education
-THE POTENTIAL-

Report 3 (of 3)

Distance education in European higher education – the potential

About us

International Council for Open and Distance Education

The International Council for Open and Distance Education (ICDE) is the leading global membership organization for open, distance, flexible and online education, including e-learning, and draws its membership from institutions, educational authorities, commercial actors, and individuals. ICDE has consultative partner status with UNESCO and shares UNESCO's key value – the universal right to education for all.

ICDE further derives its position from the unique knowledge and experience of its members throughout the world in the development and use of new methodologies and emerging technologies. Founded in 1938 in Canada as the International Council for Correspondence Education, the organization today has members from over 60 countries worldwide. ICDE's Permanent Secretariat is in Oslo, Norway, and has been hosted by this country on a permanent basis since 1988. ICDE is supported by the Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research and by membership fees.

UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning

The UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL) is a non-profit, policy-driven, international research, training, information, documentation and publishing institute. One of seven educational institutes of UNESCO, UIL promotes and develops lifelong learning policy and practice with a focus on adult learning and education, especially literacy and non-formal education and alternative learning opportunities for marginalized and disadvantaged groups. UIL's mission is to see to it that all forms of education and learning – formal, non-formal and informal – are recognized, valued and made available to meet the demands of individuals and communities throughout the world.

StudyPortals

StudyPortals is an online platform where students can find and compare higher education opportunities worldwide. StudyPortals aims to motivate people to pursue a university degree and helps them in their decision-making by offering information on study options which is accessible, comprehensible and comparable. The ultimate ambition of StudyPortals is to make study choice transparent, globally. StudyPortals covers a whole set of student-focused online study choice platforms, such as MastersPortal.com and DistanceLearningPortal.com. The focus is on quality from both a student as well as a university perspective. Since 2007 the StudyPortals websites have informed and stimulated millions of students to choose the best (international) university programme, and have helped universities to reach out to the right students, worldwide.

Acknowledgements

IDEAL Consortium

IDEAL Taskforce

Table of Contents

Introduction

The present report is the third in a series published within the framework of the project 'Impact of distance education on adult learning' (IDEAL).[1] IDEAL is a joint project of the International Council for Open and Distance Education (ICDE), the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL), and StudyPortals (SP).[2] It runs from October 2013 to September 2015 with financial support from the EU Lifelong Learning Programme (sub-programme Erasmus Multilateral Projects: Project number: 539668-LLP-1-2013-1-NO-ERASMUS-ESIN).

As each report presents the empirical results of a preceding study, this report focuses on the analysis of Study 3: 'Distance education in European higher education - the potential', which examines the profile of potential students within our target group of adult learners. The aim is to find out their profiles, their reasons for entering distance education, and the barriers they face in doing so.

Purpose of the IDEAL project and research questions

The IDEAL project has been designed to get a better understanding of the distance education offered by higher education institutions in European countries, and to examine how higher education institutions can contribute to adult learning by way of distance education.

The project specifically aims to:
- offer insights on the needs of adult learners to both policy-makers and distance education providers
- strengthen the social dimension of higher education by better meeting the needs of adult learners

---

[1] See: www.idealproject.eu
[2] See: www.distancelearningportal.com

- increase the participation of adult learners in higher education through distance education

The central research question of the project is: How can the distance education on offer at European higher education institutions be better matched to the needs of adult learners?

To address this central research question, a number of sub-questions have been formulated:
1. What distance education is offered?
2. What are students looking for?
3. What are the intended target groups?
4. What is the current student body?
5. Who is showing interest in distance education?
6. What are the motivations of students to consider distance education?
7. What are the main barriers to access?
8. What kind of support do adult learners (expect to) receive during their studies?

Policy background

The European Union has a long-standing interest in widening participation in higher education. EU strategies and activities have been largely in line with the worldwide consensus on the key role of adult learning in lifelong learning, ensuring equity and inclusion, alleviating poverty, and building equitable, tolerant, sustainable, and knowledge-based societies.[3] This key role was reiterated at the 6th UNESCO 'International Conference on Adult Education' in 2009 (CONFINTEA VI[4]).

Since the 1970s, UNESCO has played an important role in framing and promoting the discourse on lifelong learning. The Faure Report of 1972, entitled 'Learning to Be'[5] (Faure et al., 1972), recognized that education is no longer the privilege of an elite, or

---

[3] European Commission, 2013, p. 16
[4] See: http://www.unesco.org/en/confinteavi/
[5] See: unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0022/002232/223222e.pdf

a matter for only one age group. Instead, it should be both universal and lifelong. The Delors Report of 1996, entitled 'Learning: The treasure within'[6] (Delors et al., 1996) described learning throughout life as the 'heartbeat' of a society. It also viewed lifelong learning as a principle which rests on four pillars – learning to be, learning to know, learning to do, and learning to live together – and envisaged a learning society in which everyone can learn according to her or his individual needs and interests, anywhere and anytime in an unrestricted, flexible, and constructive way. Lifelong learning covers the full provision range of learning opportunities, from early childhood through schools, to further and higher education, and adult learning and education.[7] There is an emerging recognition that 'Lifelong learning is the philosophy, conceptual framework and organizing principle for education in the 21th century', which puts the concept of learning for empowerment at the centre.[8] However, there is still considerable progress to be made to operationalize the concept of lifelong learning at the institutional level, specifically with a view to widening access, removing existing barriers, developing new paths and structures to qualifications, and responding to the needs of adult learners.

The need for continuing reforms at the institutional level was reinforced by the Europe 2010 strategy, the Bologna Declaration and the Leuven Communiqué, as well as by Council directives, resolutions and conclusions on the Modernization of Higher Education Systems[9]. These resolutions determined that more attention should be paid to widening participation in higher education and to achieving high quality and diverse education by means of flexible learning opportunities. At various occasions, UNESCO Member States have reiterated the need to increase the participation of adult learners, as well as the role of higher education institutions in the European context.[10] A number of means to increase the participation of adult learners have developed thanks to emerging technologies. Distance education may not replace on-campus education, but through its flexibility in teaching and learning it can be seen as an alternative for learners who are not able or do not wish to take on-campus education. This alternative

---

[6] See: unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0010/001095/109590eo.pdf
[7] UNESCO, 2014*a*
[8] UNESCO, 2014*b*, p. 26
[9] Council of the European Union, 2011
[10] UNESCO, 2008, p. 15

constitutes an important element of lifelong learning. At the European Union level, lifelong learning has been emphasized as a key policy objective in the Europe 2020 strategy [11] (the European Union's strategy for growth) and the Bologna Process, starting with the Prague Communiqué of 2001. This policy objective was re-affirmed in the 2012 Bucharest Communiqué.[12]

UNESCO has put forward 'Ensure equitable and inclusive quality education and lifelong learning for all by 2030' as the overarching goal of the post-2015 education agenda.[13] The UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, a partner of the IDEAL project, promotes adult learning and education. Working together with UNESCO (with formal consultative status), the International Council for Open and Distance Education (ICDE), also a partner in the IDEAL project, has supported global policy development on distance education for more than 75 years, and works towards increasing the openness in education systems.

The continuing emphasis on lifelong learning as a policy objective sets the background to the present research. The IDEAL project aims to examine the potential of distance education as an alternative means of education delivery for adult learners who have completed their initial education and training and are returning to further education.

Distance education

Distance education has a long tradition and has classically been separated from campus-based education. 'The terms 'open learning' and 'distance education' represent approaches that focus on opening access to education and training provision, freeing learners from the constraints of time and place, and offering flexible learning opportunities to individuals and groups of learners (UNESCO, 2002, p. 22). Such a degree of openness and flexibility will not be offered by many higher education institutions – and most likely only by Open Universities that focus exclusively on distance education (single mode institutions). The IDEAL project, however, seeks also

---

[11] See: European Union, Europe 2020: http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/index_en.htm
[12] See: Bologna Process, Ministerial Conferences (documents) http://www.ehea.info/article-details.aspx?ArticleId=4318
[13] UNESCO, 2014c, p. 3

to include so-called dual mode institutions which offer both campus-based and distance education. These are likely to provide a more limited degree of openness and flexibility, applying a large variety of different interpretations of open and distance education.

The IDEAL project defines distance education as a generic term for different organizational forms of education in which students and teachers are separated in time and space. It includes online education (≥ 80% of the content delivered online) and blended education (30-79% of the content delivered online), as well as modes of education using printed material delivered by post and/or other tools for bridging the distance. In recent years the boundaries between distance education and campus-based education have become increasingly blurred, resulting in a mixed form of education often referred to as 'flexible' or 'blended' education. These terms are often used interchangeably. 'Blended education' describes a course unit or programme that blends online and face-to-face delivery. For the IDEAL project, a course or programme is considered as 'blended education' if a substantial proportion (30-79%) of the content is delivered online. The use of the term 'flexible education' follows the concept developed by the Swedish Agency for Distance Education (DISTUM[14]): 'Flexible education makes it possible for students to select their place, time, tempo and way of studying. The education providers plan, organize and realise teaching with the purpose of supporting students' communication and learning.'

The IDEAL project draws upon this concept to analyse the perceived advantage of the flexibility and accessibility of distance education to students attending programmes offered by different higher education institutions. The project includes distance education of any length (ranging from individual course units to full degree programmes) that can be enjoyed by any free moving student. There might be entry requirements (e.g. work experience or language skills), but once they are met, any student should be free to follow the courses or programmes (i.e. they are not connected to specific exchange programmes).

---

[14] DISTUM 2000

The present report in its context

This report is the third of three independent yet complementary research components of the IDEAL projects. **Study 1** examines the European distance education on offer – what is offered and for whom is it designed? For this study, the programmes and course units listed on the website www.DistanceLearningPortal.com were analysed and a survey was carried out among distance education providers. **Study 2** consists of a survey among adult learners enrolled in distance education to analyse their social profile, their motivations, the barriers they encountered, etc. Both Study 1 and Study 2 have already been published on the IDEAL website The present **Study 3** focuses on potential distance education students – who are they, what do they look for, what are the barriers? *Study 3 constitutes the present report.* The three studies, which are published as single online reports, are meta-analysed and brought together in a final publication to be available in June 2015, which will address the question of how the distance education on offer at European higher education institutions might be better matched to the needs of adult learners. The term 'better' is used in this central research question to indicate that the project will look at *both* the demand and the offer side of distance education.

Following this Introduction (1), the report will outline the Research Methodology and Data Set (2). The chapter on empirical results (3) is divided into 3 sections delivering an overview of the empirical results of the analysis of three different methodological approaches. The last chapter provides a synthesis of the findings and general conclusions (4).

Research methodology and data sets

This third study changes the point of view in relation to the two previous studies, since it seeks to reach out to <u>potential</u> distance education students. Moreover, it features a triangulation of research tools: an online questionnaire (part a), a study choice analytics tool (part b) and five country case studies (part c). Together these three approaches will shed light on the expectations and demands of potential adult learners looking for distance education courses. Embedded in the overarching research question 'How can the distance education offered by European higher education institutions be better matched to adult learners' needs?', the present report sets out to answer the following sub-questions concerning potential students:

1. Who is showing interest in distance education (social profile)?
2. What are the motivations of potential students to consider distance education?
3. What are the main barriers to accessing distance education?

Reaching potential distance education students

International research on distance education and adult learning has always encountered one major issue: it is hard to identify and reach the potential students. The difficulty with adult learners is that they are not a clearly delineated group and not known unless they enrol at an educational institution. Reaching the 'potential adult learner' and systematically collecting data on this group was therefore almost impossible. However, many potential adult learners have one thing in common: if they want to study on a distance education programme at a higher education institution, they are likely to start with an internet search, e.g. through Google, which is likely to take them to StudyPortals/DistanceLearningPortal.

The IDEAL project is one of the first projects that is able to identify and reach out to a large number of potential adult learners. It can therefore provide insights into the tendencies of adult learners in European distance higher education, in view of the direct offers available on the StudyPortals websites. Two parts of this research make use of

13

this opportunity: a) the online questionnaire which is addressed to visitors of DistanceLearningPortal.com (DLP), and b) the 'study choice analytics' – more about this below.

Online questionnaire

Visitors to DistanceLearningPortal (DLP) were invited to take part in an online questionnaire, since these visitors clearly show an interest in studying at a distance. They were invited to take part in research through a banner that was visible on the DLP website. Clicking on this banner allowed students to fill in questionnaire consisting of 9 questions. The questionnaire was also sent to students who had indicated an interest in distance studies when they registered as users of StudyPortals. The questionnaire is available in the Annex.

Study choice analytics

In addition to the online questionnaire, the interest from potential adult learners was also studied in a different way: through a purpose-built study choice analytics tool on the StudyPortals websites. This tool measures the interest of potential students based on their browsing behaviour. The main idea is that the number of page views per specific programme can be interpreted as an indicator of interest in that programme. For example, if a person searches for an item on Amazon, s/he will browse the website and read the descriptions of the items s/he is considering buying. Study choice works in the same way: if a student is browsing on a website with information about online and distance education programmes, s/he is likely to have an interest in joining one of these programmes at some point. The study choice analytics tool therefore captures browsing behaviour on the StudyPortals websites and enables researchers to analyse this behaviour.

StudyPortals is Europe's biggest and most comprehensive study choice platform. It has more than 35,000 listed academic programmes in four different portals, drawing 3 million visits each month. Once a visitor finds his way to one of the portals, s/he normally visits several different programme pages which all contain detailed information about the programme concerned.

Any programme presented on DistanceLearningPortal and offered by a higher education institution in Europe is included in this analysis. The profile of potential distance learning students and their interests is studied by a) analysing the webpages that these students visit, and b) analysing information that is known about these visitors (such as their IP address).

Page views as an indicator of interest

In DistanceLearningPortal students can search and filter study programmes by keywords, study discipline, duration, tuition fee, and so on. After performing the search, the portal will generate a list of the most relevant programmes. Each programme has its own webpage within the portal. The study choice analytics tool tracks the number of visits to each programme page. After seeing one of the programme pages, visitors typically open a few other pages which are of interest to them. Each one of these views is counted as a page view and is considered to reflect students' interest in the specific study programmes concerned.

The study analytics tool does not count the first entry of the visitor on the website. This makes the data accuracy higher, since random visitors who accidentally end up on that page (via Google for instance) are not taken into account. If after the first entry visitors continue to browse the website and visit several other pages, they have already shown active and explicit interest.

Each programme page includes carefully categorized information about the study programme. The information includes level of study, tuition fee, location of the provider, and discipline of the programme, among others. A visitor can read this information and filter search results based on these criteria. It is therefore possible to measure how many visitors are interested in distance learning programmes, segmented by all these categories. One category is study discipline (such as Law or Social Sciences). As one study programme may have several disciplines, we have taken this into account by

weighing the page views accordingly. If a page has 3 disciplines and it is viewed once, each discipline gets 1/3 of a page view attributed in the analysis.

Location as indicator of origin

The research also takes into account the location (country) of the visitor by logging their IP address. The IP address is a numerical label which is assigned to each participating computer network. IP address location includes information such as country, region, city and postal code. Based on IP address the study choice analytics tool can determine the country of the visitor. As study choice is something which is normally browsed at home and not on a trip, we can assume that most visitors who enter one of the StudyPortals websites are actually residents of the country from which they are browsing. There will be a slight number of visitors for whom this is not the case, but this is considered too small to be significant.

The resulting dataset

The outcome of the study choice analytics tool is a file with log data reporting all visits to the portals. The data file on visits is enormous. It contains of more than 720,000 rows of log information, describing visitor behaviour from August 2013 until July 2014. It enables researchers to analyse that data based on different characteristics of the study programmes. It gives unique insights on what students were looking for on the website and what they are interested in. The visits were collected over a year to tackle the challenge of different activity on the website at different times (such as seasonal influences).

The results of this study are, of course, influenced by the offer on the portals. You cannot look at a programme page if the programme is not included in the database, for instance. If a discipline doesn't get any page views, the reason might be that there is no offer, or that there are no students interested in it. Hence, the results of the study choice analytics tool should be interpreted in comparison to the offer on the portals, not individually. In this way it is actually possible to compare the offer (the programmes present in the portals) with the demand (implied by browsing behaviour on the portals).

All visitors to the portals are treated the same way, with the same search options and database content. This provides a homogenous test environment. Comparing the differences between the various user segments can lead to valuable insights. As the content of portals consists of many different study programmes, it is clear that most of the visitors are there to search and compare study options. Naturally, some visitors may not be prospective students, but as the number of visitors is so large it can be assumed that most of them are students and that the trends monitored in the data imply the real situation.

Use of the dataset

The data from the study choice analytics tool presented the project with a unique chance to use actual browsing behaviour data to map students' interests in addition to the segmentations discussed above (by study programme characteristics such as degree level and discipline, or by country of origin based on IP address). It was also possible to cross-tabulate these segments, for instance based on students' country and desired degree level. A significant number of visitors might actually end up studying on one of the study programmes they found via DistanceLearningPortal sometime in the future. The tool therefore affords a sneak peek into future demand for programmes.

Country case studies

Five external experts were asked to take a closer look at five countries, analysing existing research on potential distance education students, their profiles, needs etc. Aiming for a regional balance, Finland and Greece represent a north–south and Hungary and Germany an east-west dimension. The United Kingdom was added as a fifth country. The experts were chosen by the International Council for Open and Distance Education in a two-step process. First, well established researchers with a high international reputation were contacted in a series of countries. They in turn suggested candidates for the task from their national context. The selected person needed to have an international orientation but also needed to be able to speak the language of the country concerned. The analysis of the five country cases will be presented in the following chapter and can be downloaded at http://idealproject.eu.

Empirical results

This chapter presents the information gathered through the threefold approach of the online questionnaire, the study choice analytics tool, and the five country cases.

Online questionnaire

The online questionnaire was a survey consisting of nine questions which will be presented by a) social profile, b) motivation and interest in distance education and c) perceived barriers. There were a total of 427 respondents to the questionnaire of which the figure below will show the proportion of European and non-European respondents.

Figure 1: Response rate divided by Europe and rest of world
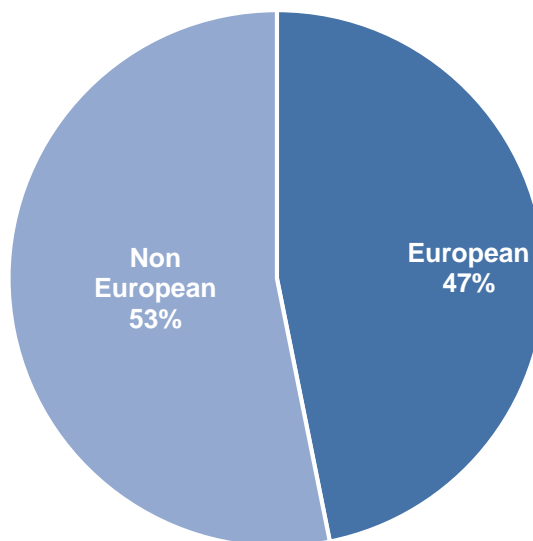
As illustrated in the figure above, over half of the responses (53.16%) were received from respondents outside Europe. The table below shows the distribution of the origin of all respondents, providing more details on the most frequently represented European countries. The best represented European countries were Greece (with

6.56% of all respondents) and the UK (5.85%), followed by Italy (3.51%) and Germany (3.04%). The high number of respondents from these countries is due to already registered users of StudyPortals from these countries who responded to the questionnaire in addition to visitors to the website.

Table 1: 12 most frequently represented countries

(Answers in percent)

| Country	%
Greece	6.56%
United Kingdom	5.85%
Italy	3.51%
Germany	3.04%
Netherland	2.34%
France	1.87%
Portugal	1.41%
Romania	1.41%
Croatia	1.17%
Russian Federation	1.17%
Spain	1.17%
Turkey	1.17%

The original idea was to consider only respondents from within Europe. This is reflected in the format of the questionnaire. However, the high number of valid respondents from countries outside Europe (using the questionnaire selection option ('other') made us reconsider and use the whole sample including non-European countries. The selection option 'other', however, did not provide us with details on the country of origin of those who responded from outside Europe. A comparison of European and non-European responses did not show significant differences.

a) Social profile of potential distance education students

The first four questions of the online questionnaire related to the profile of the respondent (age, country, current occupation and highest level of education completed). The remaining five set out to assess the respondent's interest in further and distance education, as well as his/her biggest barriers and impression about the

role of distance education in increasing equal access to education. The profile of potential students answering the questionnaire is portrayed in the following figures.

Figure 2: Age of potential students responding

427 respondents
(Answers in percent)
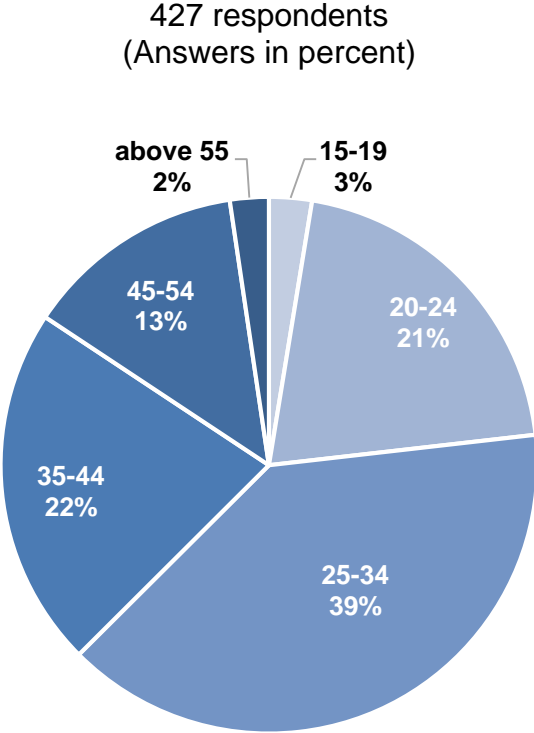
The figure above shows that most respondents are between 25 and 34 years old. About 76.8% of the respondents are 25 or older. This observation is well in line with what has been observed in other studies as being the age bracket which is most interested in pursuing distance education. The following analysis of Question 3 portrayed in the table below reveals the current occupation of the potential distance education student.

Table 2: Current occupation of potential students

426 respondents

Current Occupation	Number	%
In employment	213	50.00%
Student	128	30.05%
Self-employed	41	9.62%
Registered as unemployed	27	6.34%
On leave (parental leave, etc.)	6	1.41%
Studying and working	5	1.17%
Other	4	0.94%

According to the data presented above, most respondents may fall under the definition of adult learners as used within this survey (being either in employment, in retirement, on leave, registered as unemployed, or self-employed, n=288). 50% of the respondents are in employment.

Figure 3: Highest level of education completed

426 respondents
(Answers in percent)
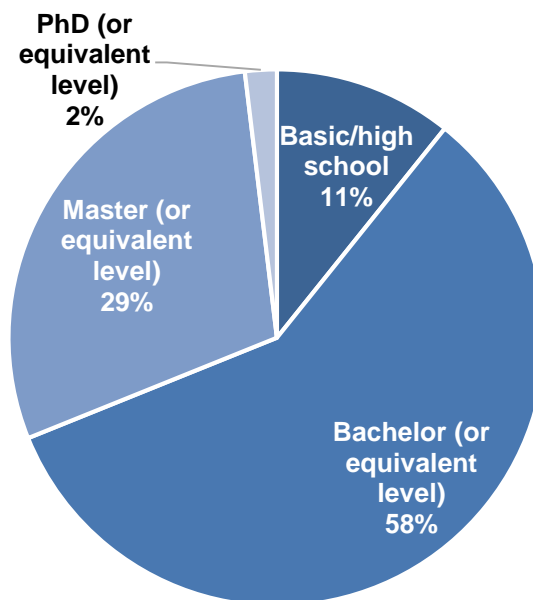
The pie chart above shows that the majority of the potential distance education students have a higher educational degree. 57.04% have a Bachelor's degree; only 10.56% have a basic/high school degree. Hence, according to our sample the average potential distance education student is 25-34 years old, most probably in employment and in most cases already holds a bachelor degree or equivalent qualification. This is in line with what is described in current literature.

b) Motivation and interest of potential distance education students

As students' motivations to study can be highly diverse, it is worth analysing the predominant motivational factors. Some students are motivated by the possibility of career advancement or updating their knowledge; others by the sheer joy of learning. Whilst many students opt for distance education due to time and other constraints in their personal life, it can also be the delivery mode of choice. For example, many distance education students are so-called independent or self-directed students (some of them very young), who prefer distance education because it allows them to study at their own pace, making little contact with other students. A closer look at the data set revealed preferences according to the respective questions in the questionnaire as shown in figures 4 and 5.

Figure 4: Why are you interested in further education? (ranked by importance)[15]
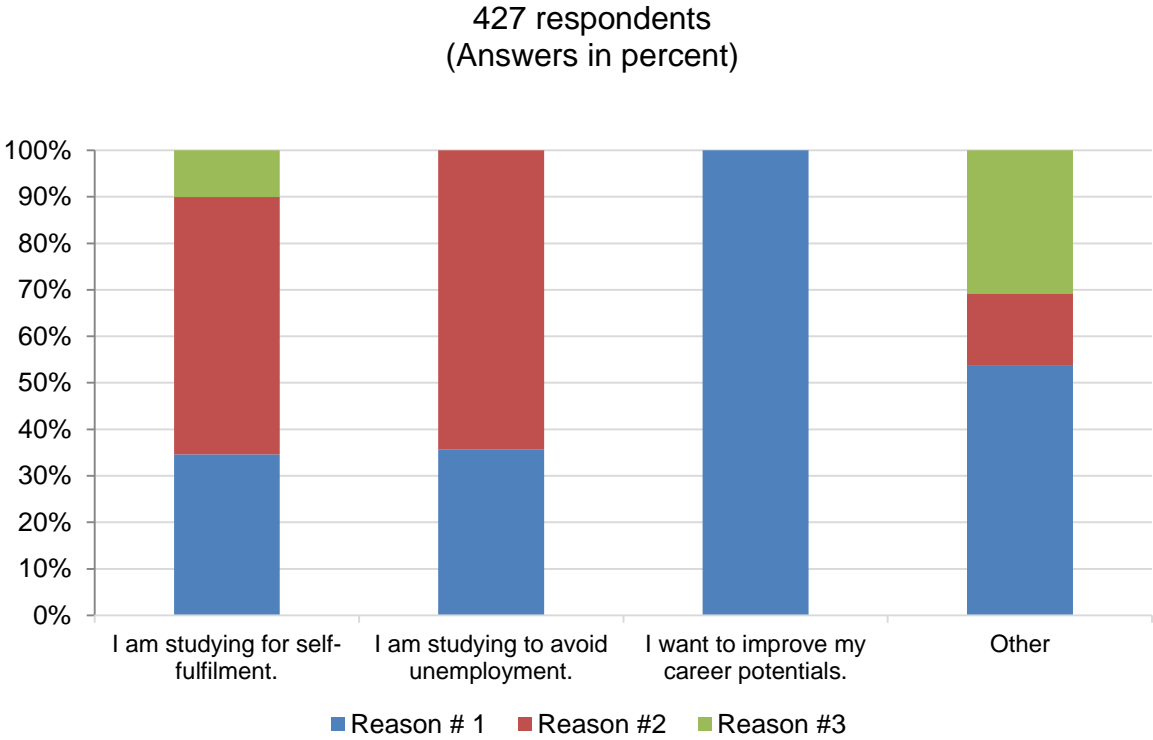
427 respondents
(Answers in percent)

427 respondents
(Answers in percent)

Figures 4 and 5[17] show the responses to the question '*Why are you interested in further education*?' This question allowed for more than one possible answer. Analysis of the responses to this question may help to distil information on both respondents' motivation and the degree of importance they allocate to different motivations, judging by frequency of mentioning. The most frequently selected reason for being interested in distance education was 'improving career potentials' followed by 'self-fulfilment'. This tendency is visible throughout current research. Some responses highlighted that the pursuit of knowledge should be undertaken for its own sake, rather than as an obligation. Avoiding unemployment, the response most closely related to the economic relevance of distance education, was only mentioned by a few respondents.

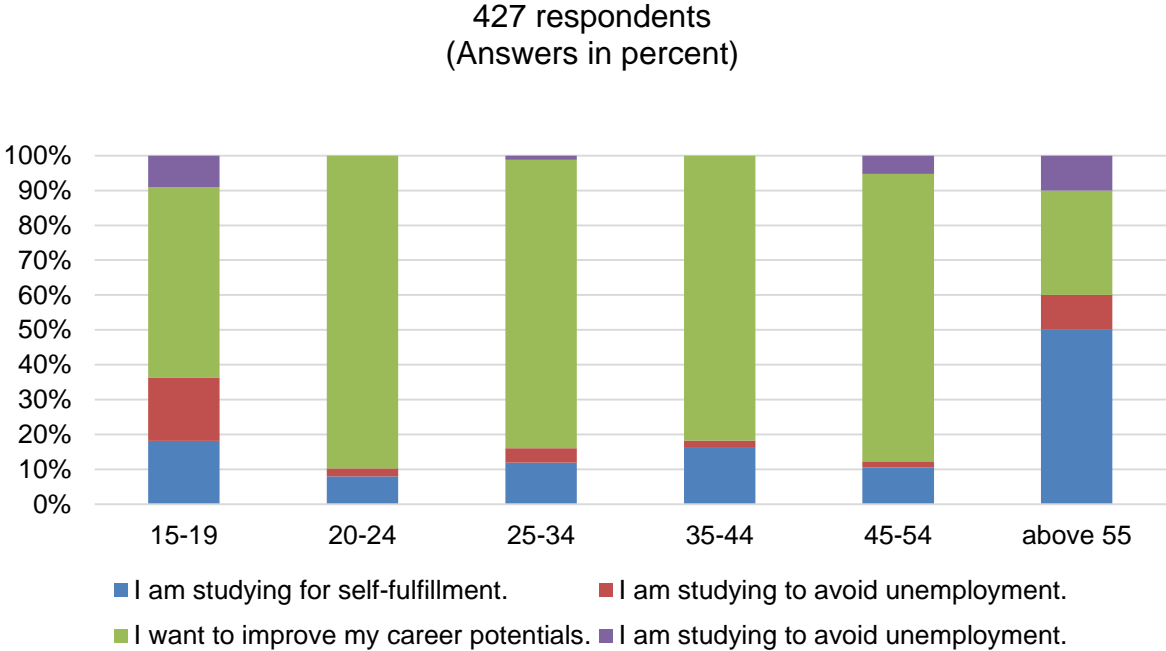[16] More than one alternative could be selected.
[17] Figure 5 does not take into consideration the order in which respondents selected each motivation item in the questionnaire. Instead, it merely shows the frequency with which each item was mentioned.

The analysis of the open text field provides more details on motivation/interest. Respondents used this open text field to specify their own reasons for considering further education, such as a love of study and research, a desire to teach or to share knowledge with their community, wanting to keep up with technological advances in their country, and wanting to serve their clients better.

The cross-tabulation of motivation for further education and respondents' age in Figure 6 confirms that economic factors are less important to the oldest cohort. Respondents below 54 years old have a strong professional motivation, which diminishes drastically for respondents above 55, where self-fulfilment becomes more important. Younger respondents, who may just be entering the labour market, are more likely to want to use further education for avoiding unemployment and improving their career options.

Figure 6: Motivation for further education versus age

427 respondents
(Answers in percent)

■ I am studying for self-fulfillment.   ■ I am studying to avoid unemployment.
■ I want to improve my career potentials. ■ I am studying to avoid unemployment.

Figure 7: I am interested in distance education because distance education…[18]

(Answers in percent)
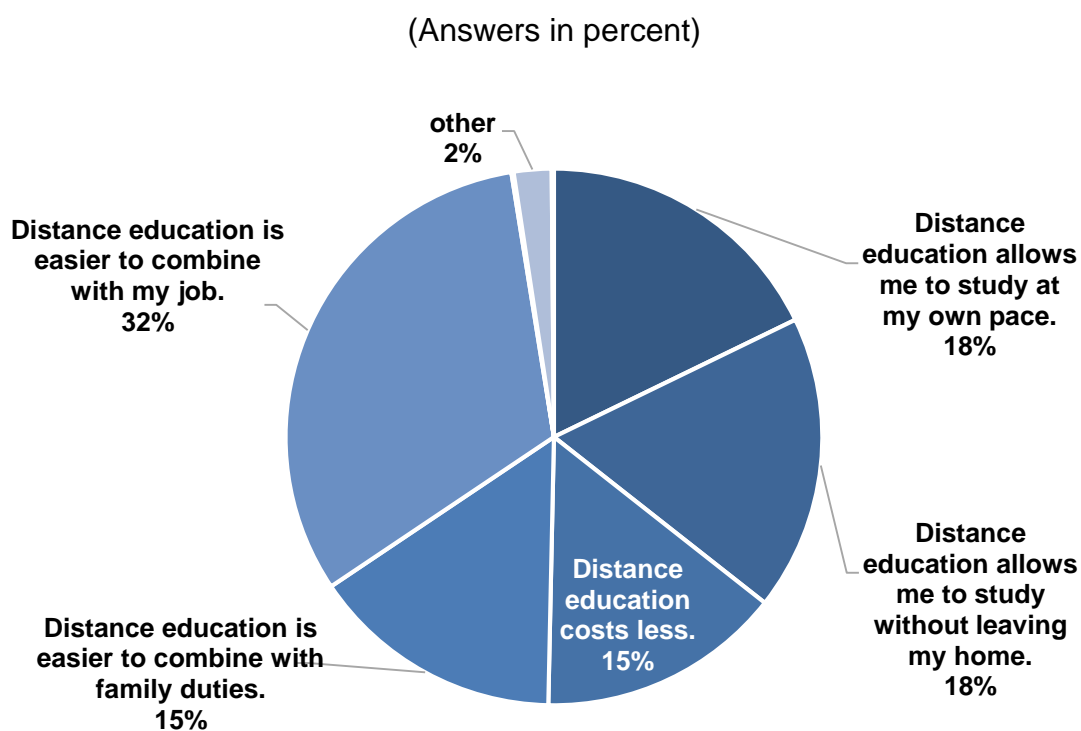
Figure 7 shows respondents' motivations for considering distance education. Among the many choices, 'distance education is easier to combine with my job' is the most often selected reason, chosen by 32% of the respondents. This result is also supported by other studies which show that job-related motivations are a strong determinant for distance education.[19] Next, 18% of the respondents indicated that they appreciated not having to leave home in order to study; another 18% also considered the possibility of studying at their own pace a good reason to choose distance education. 15% consider it easier to combine distance education with their family duties, and another 15% are drawn by the lower costs. 'Distance education is easier to combine with other study programmes at home' and 'distance education makes it possible to do additional courses that my university may not offer' were not popular responses.

As further reasons for being interested in distance education, potential students mentioned in the open text field the possibility of travelling and researching on their

---

[18] More than one alternative could be selected.
[19] European Commission, 2013

own terms (1 respondent), the ease of combining distance education with other study programmes at home (1 respondent) and the unavailability of suitable courses in their own country (1 respondent).

Barriers to distance education as perceived by potential students

What is perceived as a barrier to participate in distance education can differ widely from one individual to another, but a closer analysis reveals a number of common trends. Some perceived barriers do not necessarily cause potential students to refrain from engaging in distance education. Whilst unequal participation rates have multifaceted causes, ranging from those located at the level of the individual learner to those linked to institutional and cultural contexts, there are some communalities that can be observed. In the following section of the questionnaire, respondents were asked to select and rank which of the given barriers were the most important to them.

Table 3: Perceived barriers

427 respondents[20]

Perceived barriers	Number of mentions	Percentage of all barriers
Costs	218	29%
Distance education technology	107	14%
Language of the programme/course (if not taught in your native language)	83	11%
Other	58	8%
Recognition of my prior qualifications/alternative access routes	116	16%
Time	166	22%
Grand Total	**748**	**100%**

The options most often selected were 'costs' (mentioned by 29% of the respondents), followed by 'time' (22%) and 'recognition of prior qualifications' (16%). The following figure shows how respondents ranked the barriers according to their importance.

---

[20] More than one alternative could be selected.

Figure 8: Barriers in order of importance

(Answers in percent)
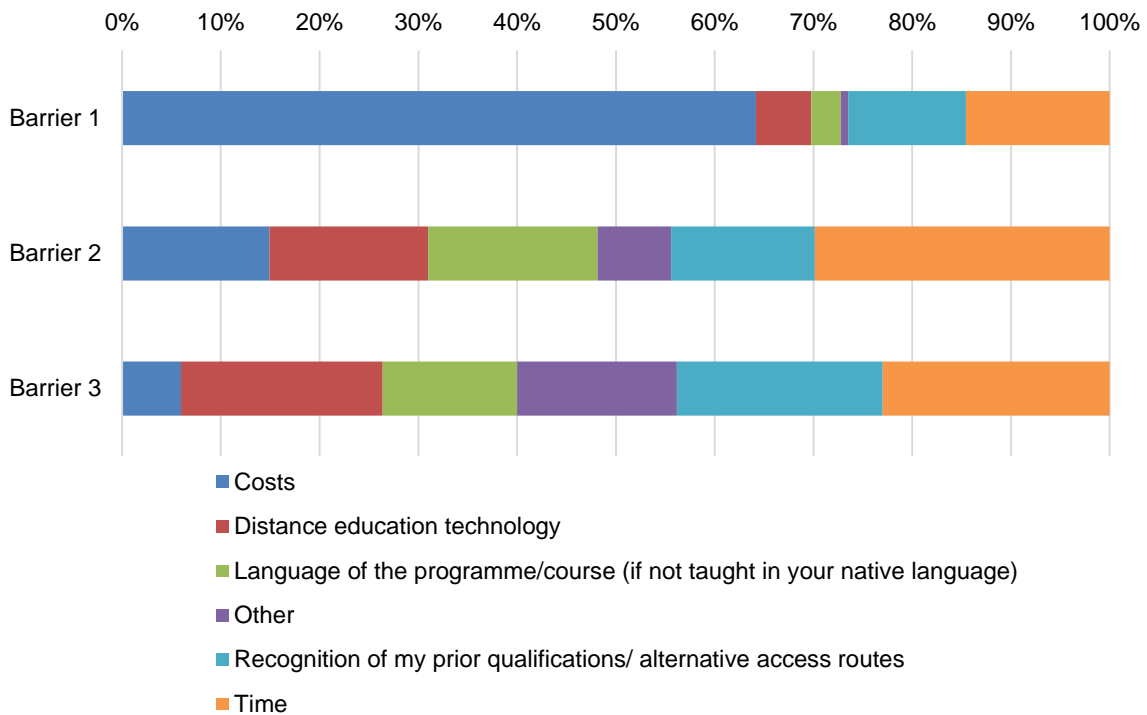
The figure above shows that costs were not only the most often selected barrier, but also the biggest one, ranked as barrier 1 by 56.34% of the respondents. Not considering 'other' (because not all respondents specified), time was selected as both the second and third most important (barriers 2 and 3) by 17.61% and 22.90% of the European respondents respectively. With view to the section on 'other', some of the respondents gave further specifications mostly referring either to time again, or to the unavailability of the course or lack of interaction with fellow students and teachers.

Selected statements on perceived barriers in the open text field of the questionnaire could be categorized into the three following dimensions:

Costs

- 'Unfortunately many courses are too expensive. I ended up doing my current course at diploma level as it was affordable but I would have preferred to do it at a higher level.'
- 'I wish I could take further education... Unfortunately I cannot afford it.'
- 'It is quite a good option for people who cannot afford to study abroad or to travel long distances. For me personally distance education is plan B (like I mentioned before) in case something goes wrong with my applications for conventional programmes.'
- 'I can't be left without an income while studying. So distance learning makes sense.'
- '(it should be)…affordable, so that anyone seeking an education can obtain it. Why place a plate of food in front of a person chained to a wall on the opposite side and say "enjoy, eat!"?'
- Flexible payment options

Time/flexibility

- 'This is the only way for me to study. I work full time and I am a mother of 5 kids.'
- 'I take distance education to integrate working, caring for family and learning/researching.'
- 'I considered taking distance learning because I'm self-disciplined and understand better when I learn at my own pace.'

Transferability, recognition and reputation of qualifications

- 'Distance education may be a valuable addition for persons already wedded to a career. By themselves, however, qualifications obtained by distance education are NOT very useful.'
- 'The prestige factor and recognition of the distant education institute.'

- 'The recognition of the course from the employer.'
- 'I'm considering taking distance education to have a recognized European education and a range of orientation that doesn't yet exist in France. I'm also considering taking distance education in order to be educated with more of a learner-centred approach than what France can offer me. Thirdly, I'm in a transition period, finishing my medical studies, beginning my practice and involvement in my department to build an academic career. It doesn't leave much time to attend courses during the day, so I have to consider education at night!'
- 'Accreditation of official bodies'
- 'accreditation of online colleges to my country board for universities'
- 'as I say I am not interested in full distant education since it is not accredited in my country'
- 'Concerns about respect for distance degrees by employers'
- 'diploma recognition in my country'
- 'Not knowing the quality of education/reputation of the school unless it is part of a well-respected full-time university'
- 'recognition of distance degree in my country, Jordan'
- 'recognition of the certificates'
- 'Relevance of distance learning centre certificates in my country'

What other barriers do potential students see in distance education?

Lack of interaction

- 'lack of face-to-face interaction'
- 'Suboptimal quality of interaction'
- 'boredom, lack of live social interaction'

Limited offer in area of interest

- 'availability of the desired course'
- 'can't find appropriate programme'

- 'Difficult to find good courses in my country'
- 'Limited choice of subject area'
- 'programmes offered'
- 'there aren't enough of them'

Lack of information/awareness

- 'I think it would be very convenient if educational fairs were held in different communities and countries, dedicated to distance learning options alone! I also believe it would be very helpful if they were held in several different languages with an option to receive info about what papers and courses you'll be needing as a resident student or pupil of the country that is hosting the fair...'

Requirement of physical presence

- 'Class based activities'
- 'Need to travel for face-to-face'

The final question asked whether distance education was perceived to be an enabling factor to increase equal access to education. However, the questionnaire is addressed to potential students who have not yet engaged in distance education. It therefore represents an estimation rather than a reflection of personal experiences. Nonetheless, over 50% strongly agreed or agreed that 'Distance education helps to increase equal access to education'. Only 10.30% of respondents disagreed with this statement.

Figure 9: 'Distance education helps to increase equal access to education'

427 respondents
(Answers in percent)

- 5 – Strongly Disagree, 10.30%
- 4 – Disagree, 8.43%
- 3 – Neither agree nor disagree, 19.91%
- 1 – Strongly Agree, 38.17%
- 2 – Agree, 23.19%
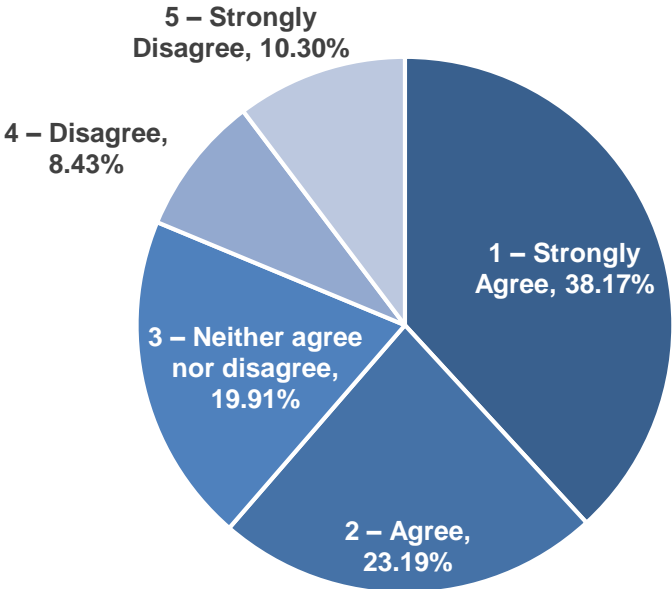
Study choice analytics

The IDEAL project has access to the browsing behaviour of millions of visitors to the StudyPortals websites. This browsing behaviour is used to analyse the study choice behaviour of prospective adult learners. The tool that was used for this is called 'study choice analytics'. The technical and methodological aspects of using such information as an indicator for of student interest is discussed in the Methodology section. Analysis of the data set is carried out according to the following dimensions:

I.   origin (e.g. continent of origin, European region of origin, country of origin)[21]
II. education delivery mode (e.g. online)
III. education and programme offer (e.g. cost, duration)
IV. study discipline, degree of qualification
V.   location of host institution

The data set contains a total of 720,000 logs from August 2013 until July 2014. This dataset is a summary of the entire traffic to the StudyPortals websites: 3 million visits per month. The table below shows the distribution of all the page views by country of origin. The following table gives an overview of the 9 most frequently represented countries, of which Germany, Greece and the UK will be further analysed in depth in the country reports.

---

[21] The Annex provides details and grouping of countries by continent and European region

Table 4: Country of origin

(Answers in percent)

Country	%
United Kingdom	11.50%
United States	8.90%
India	5.64%
Germany	4.48%
Greece	4.13%
Netherlands	2.36%
Pakistan	2.36%
Nigeria	2.14%
Canada	2.08%

More than 20% of the visits showed interest in any sort of blended or online structured delivery mode. Although almost 70% of the page views refer to 'traditional face-to-face interaction', distance education and blended forms of learning are on the rise and have become a decisive factor facilitating adult participation in higher education, as several studies have shown.

Table 5: Interest in education delivery mode

(Answers in percent)

Interest in… (Educational Modus)	%
Blended	6.78%
Blended/Online	0.71%
Face-to-face	69.63%
Face-to-face/Blended	0.75%
Face-to-face/Blended/Online	0.55%
Face-to-face/Online	1.35%
Online	11.45%
Blank	8.77%

With reference to the level of education that potential distance education students are looking for, the table below shows that a vast majority (almost 70%) are seeking a master's degree. As already confirmed in our data set, the flexibility of distance

education provides an attractive environment for pursuing specifically post-graduate studies.

Table 6: Degree level of interest

(Answers in percent)

Degree	%
Bachelor	10.23%
Master	69.24%
PhD	10.13%
Non-degree (Short Course)	10.40%

Figure 10 below presents the distribution of the country of interest. There is a vast preference for institutions in the UK (over 48.60%), followed by the Netherlands (17.97%) and the United States (8.18%).[22]

Figure 10: Country of interest
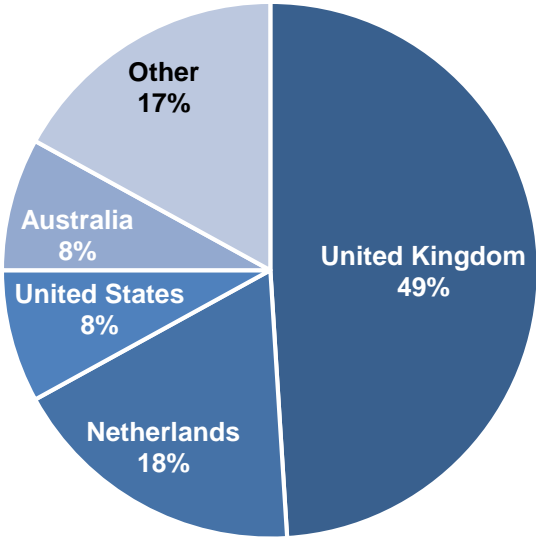
(Answers in percent)

Figure 11 below confirms that the European potential students in our data set seem to prefer pursuing studies within Europe, mostly in Southern European countries

---

[22] A categorization of the countries by the regions used in the table is available in the annex.

(49.99%), followed by countries in the western sub-region (44.27%) and Northern Europe (43.43%). Europe as a first preference is followed by institutions based in Asia in second and Northern America in third position.

Figure 11: European sub-region of interest by continent of origin

(Answers in percent)
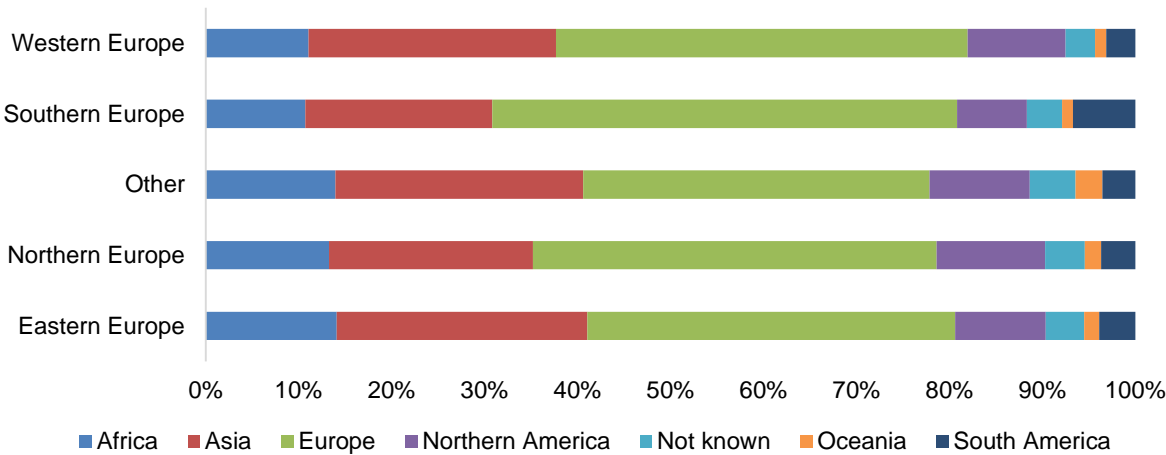
In terms of preferred subject, the figure below shows that the potential distance education students in our dataset browsing on the StudyPortals website show a strong preference for business and economics (36.45%). The HEAD Study[23] confirms that increasing attainment levels and improving career prospects are the most significant motivations for adult learners to engage in distance education, which is in line with the present data set. The second most frequently viewed discipline is Engineering & Technology (14.87%).

---

[23] European Commission, 2013.

Figure 12: Disciplines of interest

(Answers in percent)
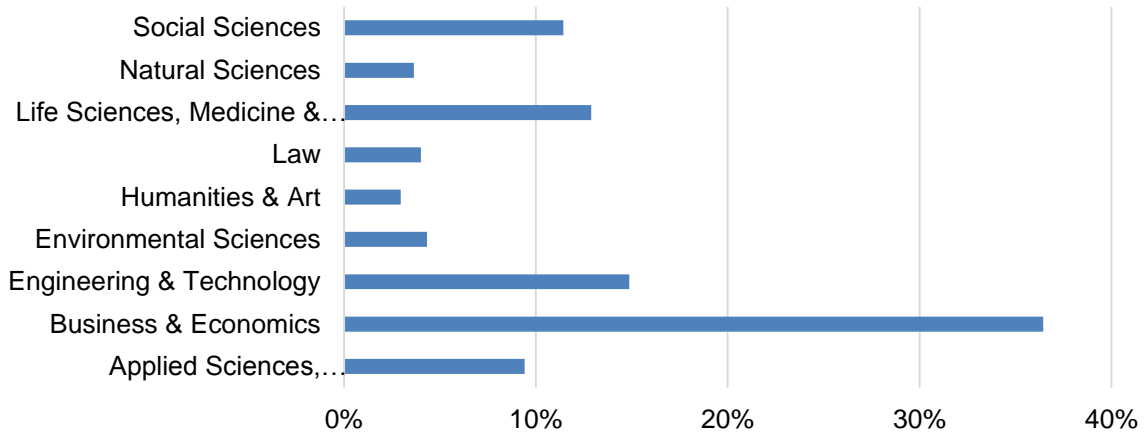
The figures below show that all the tracked page views when grouped by continents portray a strong tendency towards considering studies in business and economics (36.45%). Another interesting trend is shown in the figure below, which portrays the origin of potential students worldwide and their choices regarding discipline. Business and economics remain the main choices.

Figure 13: Continent of origin vs discipline

(Answers in percent)
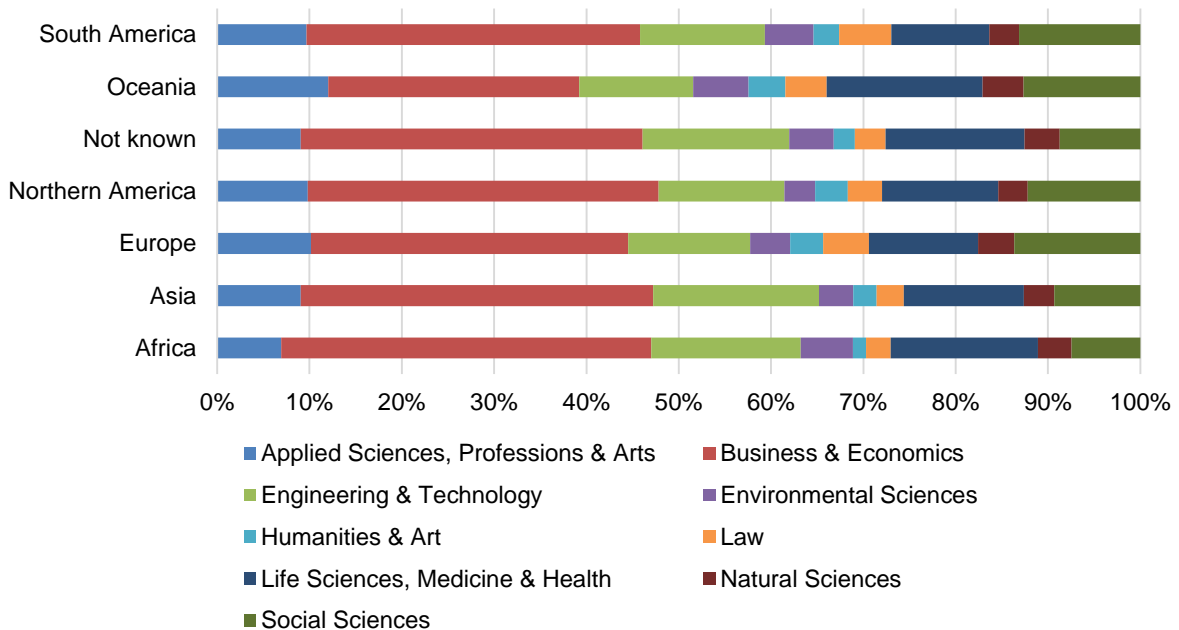
Interest in disciplines in the European sub-region showed similar tendencies. An interest in business and economics is apparent in three out of four European regions. However, the Eastern European potential distance education students preferred Social Sciences. As our data has already shown, the flexibility of distance education provides an attractive environment for pursuing specifically post-graduate studies. The following figure provides an overview of the preference of European students cross-tabulated with choice of discipline.

Figure 14: European sub-region of origin vs discipline

(Answers in percent)
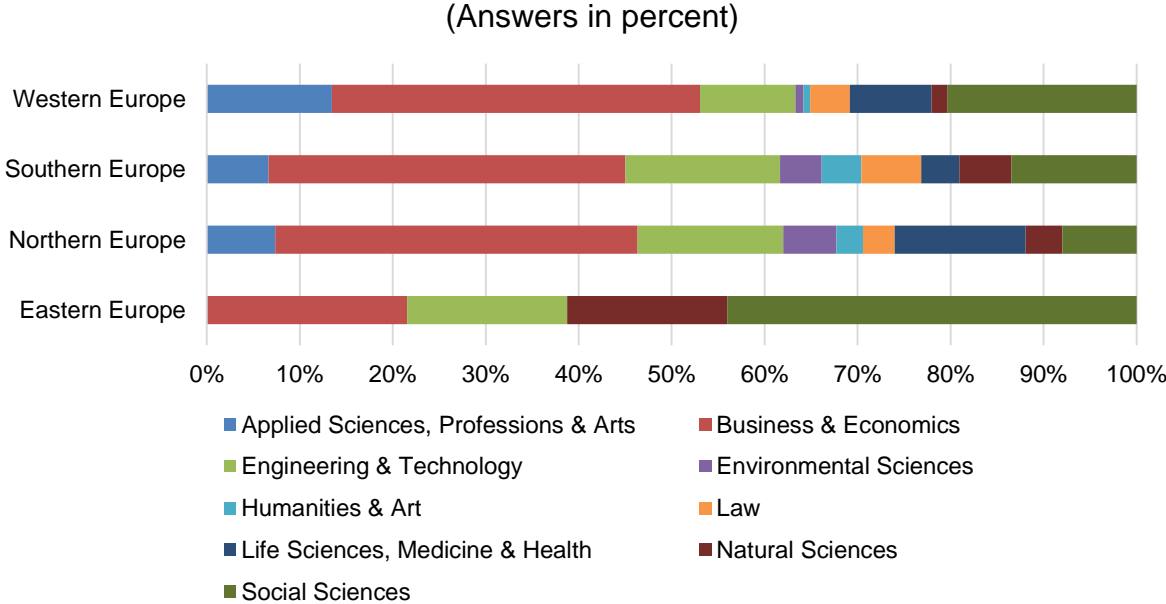
A summary of the data retrieved from the study choice analytics tool reveals the following overall trends. The discipline of greatest interest to potential students is Business & Economics (36.5%). 48.6% of potential students are interested in courses hosted in the UK. Most potential students also come from this country (11.5%). The vast majority of potential distance education students are looking for a master's degree (69.24%). Eastern Europe offer also does not include Applied Sciences, Humanities & Art, Life Sciences or Environmental Sciences, as students may prefer to search for these programmes within their own country, and study at an institute they are familiar with, or one comparable with previous institutes they have studied at.

The country case studies

To complement the analysis of the quantitative data gathered in the whole IDEAL project, five experts have been asked to take a closer look at five countries, analysing existing research on distance education. Guidelines were developed which should assist the authors of the country case studies to develop mutually comparable national reports. The case studies are available for download at http://idealproject.eu/.

However, it should be noted that the national reports provide information on both potential *and* already enrolled students. Opportunely, these country reports can provide insights about national frameworks. Before looking into the key questions on profile, interest, motivation and barriers, the country reports allow for a closer analysis of the following dimensions:

a) Existing or applied policy framework and overall participation of adult learners in higher education/adult education (EUROSTAT)
b) Definition, terms and types of distance education available
c) Access, entry requirements and recognition of prior learning

Table 7: Summary of case studies

Country	a) Existing or applied policy framework and overall participation of adult learners in higher education/adult education (EUROSTAT)	b) Definition, terms and types of distance education available	c) Access, entry requirements and recognition of prior learning
Finland	No specific policy on distance education in higher education No separate open or distance teaching universities In 2000, 54% of the adult population (18–64-year-olds) had participated to adult education. In 2006 the proportion was 52% and in 2012 it had remained the same 4% of the 18-64-year-old population participate in adult education in higher education institutions (2012)	Online-and blended education Web-based learning	No specific access or entry requirements Status of degree student can be obtained after pursuing courses in open university
Germany	No specific policy on distance education in higher education. 13 out of 16 states mention distance education 16 laws but none with specific section about distance programmes 28% of adults participate in adult education According to data on adult learners in higher education, the report	Web-based learning Conventional campus-based learning with usage of new media Fernstudium	Highest degree from the school system (e.g. Abitur) or degree from vocational sector Recognition of degree from vocational training through special new policy [24]
Greece	'Education and Lifelong Learning" policy 11.7% of adults (25-64 years) participated in education and training activities in 2011 34.9% of students participate in tertiary education (2013)	E-learning classrooms Stand-alone distance education (Pure) distance education courses	Graduation from secondary education No systematic procedure for recognition of prior learning or work experience
Hungary	No specific policy on distance education in higher education At master's level, no distance education at all No laws mentioning e-learning 3.9% participate in adult education According to data on adult learners in higher education, the report did not display any numbers.	Distance learning with electronic support system	School leaving examination certificate and enough entry points No alternative admission No systematic procedure for recognition of prior learning or work experience
UK	No specific policy on distance education in higher education but laws that indirectly influence it Common quality assurance (QA) framework for higher education ISCED5A 3.9% (theoretically based) ISCED5B 0.76% (practically based)	Distance education courses for international students Blended and online courses	'Access Diplomas' (programmes helping to access higher education) Recognition or credit transfer from equivalent level of study elsewhere Accreditation of (Prior) Experiential Learning (A(P)EL)

---

[24] Deutsches Zentrum für Hochschul- und Wissenschaftsforschung, 2015.

a) Existing or applied policy framework and overall participation of adult learners in higher education/adult education (EUROSTAT)

Finland

In Finland there is currently no specific national distance education policy for higher education, despite the fact that distance education is widely used within the Finnish higher education institutions. On the more general level, ICT is seen as essential to education, working life and the general functioning of society. ICT is thought to offer the possibility of more flexible and individual studies. However, a recent document on the future of education from the Ministry of Education and Culture states that digitalization would change the functions of society. Within higher education, digitalization promises to support the development of science, raise skills levels, accelerate the usage of resources and enhance accessibility.

Since both undergraduate and continuing education in Finland are loosely regulated, the only limiting framework is perhaps the one focusing on access to undergraduate programmes at universities (HEAD [25]). There are no separate open or distance teaching universities in Finland, but as in most other Nordic countries, the HE institutions in Finland utilize different forms of distance education. In 2012, 4% of the 18–64-year-old population (125,000 people) had participated in adult education in higher education institutions. When looking at participation on higher education, the 'Mathew effect' is evident (understood as the cumulative advantage of a certain group or elite). Hence, adult entrants to degree programmes at universities were more educated and more often in white-collar positions than the population on average.

Germany

In Germany each of the 16 states has authority over its educational system. Nevertheless, the similarities are much greater than the differences. At least 18 different laws influence the development of distance education in higher education: the German Higher Education Framework Law (Deutsches Hochschulrahmengesetz,

---

[25] European Commission 2013.

HRG), the University Laws of the Federal States (Landeshochschulgesetze, LHG) and the Law of the Protection of Participants in Distance Learning (Gesetz zum Schutz der Teilnehmer am Fernunterricht - Fernunterrichtsschutzgesetz - FernUSG). Out of the 16 states, 13 explicitly mention distance education as a possible way to structure programmes. These statements, however, tend to be rather short and generally mention that the 'possibility of distance education should be used'. None of the laws has a specific section about programmes entirely offered at a distance at universities.

The laws of three states (Berlin, Lower Saxony and Hesse) do not even mention anything comparable. The proportion of tertiary-educated adults in Germany (28%) is lower than the OECD average (33%) and raising it to the European 2020 Strategy goal of 40% will be a difficult goal to reach if expansion remains at current levels (only +6% since 2000). Looking at younger (25-34 year-old) and older (55-64 year-old) adults with tertiary attainment, the numbers differ only slightly: 29% and 26% respectively. Some of these differences are due to the longer tertiary programmes and significant internal variations in attainment levels, due to the federal system. Others are linked to the vocational system: 'Due to the well-established and highly recognized upper secondary vocational programmes (dual system) with low unemployment rates, the incentives for tertiary attainment might be lower in Germany compared to other countries'. The report does not provide data on participation in distance learning.

Greece

In Greece the Operational Programme 'Education and Lifelong Learning' (2007-2013), co-funded by the European Social Fund (ESF), was the main national policy regarding distance learning. It concerned all of the nation's 13 regions, so as to meet the 'Convergence' and 'Regional Competitiveness and Employment' goals. It was based on the goal of the National Strategy for education to increase the quantity, quality and effectiveness of 'investments in human capital', in order to upgrade the Greek educational and vocational training system.

The Programme was centred on strategic goals and thematic priority axes. Priority axes 7, 8 and 9, 'Enhancing lifelong education for adults' (the names and purposes of

the three axes are not specified in the report) focused on the development of distance learning by designing and implementing a series of distance education programmes. This is associated with special objectives on enhancing the system of lifelong education and promoting equal access, as well as increasing participation by establishing special incentives.

Tertiary education in Greece is divided into the University and Technological sectors. Based on Eurostat (2012), students participating in ISCED 5 and 6 in Greece comprised 30.5% of students in all levels of education (26.1% aged 25-64 and 12% aged 20-24 (almost double the respective numbers in the EU27)). The University sector (ISCED 5A & ISCED 6) includes the Universities, the Technical Universities, the School of Fine Arts and the Hellenic Open University. The Technological sector (ISCED 5B) includes mainly the Technological Education Institutions (TEIs) and the School of Pedagogical and Technological Education (ASPETE). All these institutions with statistical information available are public owned, as the relevant legislation (Art. 16) dictates that '…tertiary education is exclusively delivered by self-administered institutions that are considered legal bodies of public interest …'.

Hungary

The concept of e-learning is not mentioned in any law in Hungary, despite the fact that distance learning and both synchronic and asynchronic distance learning support have almost completely been shifted to electronic platforms. Electronic tools and devices are only mentioned in the context of educational administration. Although distance learning appears in documents on the national ICT strategy, no detailed principles are provided. Distance learning is available in a rather low proportion of educational programmes; at master's level there is no distance education at all.

The low implementation of distance education in Hungary is due to legal regulations, which according to the author turned out not to be favourable to modern distance education using e-learning solutions. As a result, better-known correspondence programmes were favoured, despite low efficiency. While 73% of full-time and 27% of part-time students receive state subsistence, those participating in distance learning

are not eligible. The total number of students in higher education is 338,467 / 3.43 % (2013/2014), out of a total population of 9,877,365 (2014). Of these, about 233,678 / 69.04% are full-time students whereas 104,789 / 30.96 % are non-full-time students. The non-full-time students refer to the students who are in correspondence, evening or distance learning, or who study in another HEI.

United Kingdom

There are no explicit national policies concerning distance education for any of the separate nations of the UK. However, a range of factors and policies have a bearing on distance education. For example, the recent tightening of visa approvals processes and immigration control has encouraged universities to pursue selling distance courses which international students can complete in their home nation. The British Accreditation Council has responsibility for quality assurance of the independent further and higher education sector. The Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) makes no distinction between on-campus and distance provision.

According to data from EUROSTAT on tertiary students (ISCED 5-6) by field of education and sex[26] the percentage of the population reaching ISCED 5A/B and beyond has remained relatively static over the last decade (2004 to 2012). Participation rates have increased amongst younger adults as a result of national policies to increase and widen participation in higher education. The report does not provide data on participation in distance learning.

---

[26] See: http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=educ_enrl5&lang=en

b) Definition, terms and types of distance education available

Finland

Online- and blended education are established, normal ways to organize teaching for adults. Elements of distance teaching are widely used in different kinds of courses. During the last decade, web-based learning has become part of teaching in all areas of higher education.

Germany

'Fernunterricht' refers to non-academic programmes which do not lead to an academic degree, whereas 'Fernstudium' denotes programmes at higher education institutions which are offered either in the private or public sector. The development of distance education and e-learning at German universities was influenced by a variety of factors. Some universities have been providing their courses at a distance from the beginning; other conventional, campus-based universities have recently begun to implement new media to enrich class lectures and reach more students with their own online programmes. While more than 90% of universities have digital learning material and up to 80% offer interactive courses, only 23 institutions (representing 16% of universities and universities of applied science) have specific distance education courses.

Greece

In Greece distance tertiary education is undertaken mainly by the Hellenic Open University, which offers undergraduate, post-graduate and vocational courses exclusively through distance learning. Apart from the stand-alone distance education HOU, many other Greek universities offer (pure) distance education courses, most of which focus on professional development (vocational training). The courses they offer typically exploit modern technologies. Over the past few years, many universities in Greece have developed 'e-learning classrooms' furnished with the necessary infrastructure to enable students to support synchronous online learning and presentation activities. Moreover, many universities in Greece use online platforms so

as to support traditional undergraduate and postgraduate courses, mostly with the aim of providing educational content to the student. However, these platforms do not qualify as distance education material, as they are too basic.

Hungary

In Hungary distance learning services provided by universities are generally combined with electronic learning support services, mainly as a consequence of the organization of part-time (correspondence and evening) courses. Every Hungarian higher educational institution operates some kind of electronic learning support system. Distance learning is defined as a form of training based on the interactional relationship of instructor and student and the student's self-study, using special information-technological and communicational educational devices, knowledge transfer/learning methods and digital course materials, in which the number of contact teaching hours amounts to less than 30% of the contact hours of full-time training.

United Kingdom

The UK regulatory framework does not draw a distinction between different modes of higher education (e.g. between on-campus and distance provision). Nevertheless, the majority of distance learning is devoted to academic subjects and only a small proportion to vocational ones. Additionally, the terms 'distance learning' and 'online learning' are often used interchangeably; however, a distinction in meaning is not offered in the UK report. According to a study conducted by White et al., distance learning courses outnumber online learning courses by almost 50 per cent.

c) Access, entry requirements and recognition of prior learning

Finland

University admissions in Finland have been under discussion for several years and are currently being reformed. The aim of the reform is to promote the enrolment of 'young applicants' to the universities. Adults who need to upgrade their education level or deepen their knowledge are directed towards separate admission channels parallel to

the main entrance track, or to professional further education courses not leading to a degree. Participation in open universities is not restricted according to previous education, age, occupation, or any other characteristic of the potential student; it has the aim of equalizing access to higher education. The polytechnic sector features a similarly open system (which originally focused on adult learners). Institutions have separate bachelor programmes for young and adult students; adults are also allowed to attend programmes aimed at young students. These programmes for adults therefore offer more flexibility to the student. After pursuing a certain number of open university courses, a student is able to transfer to the status of degree student (this process is called open university gateway). The polytechnic sector is more open towards adult students than other universities as they offer more programmes for adults and have tailored teaching for meeting their needs.

Germany

In 2009, the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the Länder in the Federal Republic of Germany (Kultusministerkonferenz or KMK) released an enactment (ANKOM - Anrechnung beruflicher Kompetenzen auf Hochschulstudiengänge[27]) that opened universities to people with a degree from the vocational sector. Previously, a school-leaving certificate (Abitur) had been a requirement for entrance to higher education (Hochschulzugangsberechtigung). The report further states that this was changed by e.g. recognizing work experience/competences in order to access higher education. With regard to open access policy, the report uses a citation by Wolter (2013) who wrote that 'non-traditional access routes have played only a very marginal role up to now' (meaning open access), and that therefore the level of participation is very low.

Greece

Recognition of prior learning is not mentioned by the legislation in Greece; however, there are plans to change this in the near future. The report mentions: 'The only relevant legislation in place at present is a mechanism for linking accredited VET

---

[27] See: http://ankom.his.de/

[Vocational and Education Training] programmes to formal higher education programmes through the recognition and transfer of credit points'. In order to enter HE, adults must either have graduated from secondary education and possess a certificate, or follow a procedure (second chance schools) to obtain the lower secondary certification. Even if work experience is welcome or in some courses a prerequisite for attending a study programme, no systematic procedure for recognition of prior learning or work experience exists at the HOU[28].

Hungary

In Hungary access to HE is formally open to any adult with a school leaving examination certificate and enough entry points in the entrance examination for bachelor or master's programmes. No alternative admission is available. The only exception is the field of short non-degree courses: programmes for adults who want to upgrade their knowledge and skills in special continuing education for lifelong learners. New requirements from the education administration have made it more difficult for adults who left school long ago to access HE: they must now take advanced level school-leaving examinations for bachelor programmes or intermediate level language examinations for master's programmes. The Hungarian report mentions that those living with physical disabilities are strongly represented among distance education students, but would not provide concrete numbers. The country report concludes that higher education institutions in Hungary continue to provide quality education based on attendance, combined with e-learning methods. The report concludes by evaluating distance learning provision as an alternative to campus-based learning, and finds that the distance education on offer in Hungary has so far been unable to enhance the openness of higher education or involve new target groups in education. This is mainly due to the gaps in provision and national regulations already described.

United Kingdom

The main mechanism for recognition of prior learning in the UK is recognition or credit transfer. Some existing programmes help to facilitate access to HE, such as 'Access

---

[28] European Commission, 2013

Diplomas', Access to Higher Education Diploma courses (offered in England and Wales), or (in smaller numbers) the Scottish Wider Access Programme or the Access Certificate in Foundation Studies in Northern Ireland. There are also preparatory foundation courses (an extra year within the undergraduate degree) which feature Accreditation of (Prior) Experiential Learning (A(P)EL).[29]

Social profile, motivation and perceived barriers

Analysis of the country reports should answer the three initial research questions from a country perspective. The following table therefore provides information on a) Social profile, b) Motivation and interest, and c) Perceived barriers.

---

[29] European Commission, 2013

Table 8: Social profile, motivations and perceived barriers by country

Country	a) Social profile	b) Motivation and interest	c) Perceived barriers
Finland	Older than 'traditional' students (average 36 years) Slightly more educated and higher income than 'traditional' students Employed Majority are women Having more children than 'traditional' students Living in cities	Self-fulfilment Flexibility Development of vocational skills	Costs Lack of feedback and support Lack of face-to-face meetings Isolation Insufficiency in self-directed learning Family and work responsibilities Difficulties in network connections Change in one's life situation Difficulties with technology Lack of support from employer Lack of education
Germany	Older than 'traditional' students (average 34.8 years) Lower socio-economic background Only 29% younger than 25 years	Flexibility	Costs Lack of feedback and support Lack of face-to-face meetings Isolation Lack of adjusted programmes Lack of formal regulations
Greece	Older than 'traditional' students (30-37 years)	Development of vocational skills Career opportunities	Difficulties with technology Negative image of distance education programmes Negative learning experiences Absence of a system for recognition of prior learning and work experiences
Hungary	Between 30-40 years No considerable gender difference Two-thirds are married 58% have children Employed Higher income than 'traditional' students Good computer knowledge and access	Development of vocational skills Career opportunities Flexibility	Costs Difficulties with technology Lack of relevant course content Negative learning experiences Insufficient self-directed learning skills Negative image of distance education programmes

UK	Between 25-29 and 30-34 years 60% female	Career opportunity Self-fulfilment Personal interest/enjoyment (50+)	Costs (compared to increased higher education fees - otherwise seen as general advantage) Doubt about return on investment Difficulties with technologies Family and work responsibilities Lack of support from employer Disability

a) Social profile

Finland

In Finland, the educational background of students has changed remarkably. Whereas in 2000 only a marginal number of students enrolled at open universities had a master's degree, in 2012, the proportion had increased to one third (the report does not provide specific numbers of enrolled students). Previously the open universities were more often used by young matriculated students who had not gained a study place at a 'proper' university, but nowadays students are more often adults in professional positions who want to enhance their qualifications, skills and competences. According to a survey conducted in 2006, many of the participants were in their thirties, with an average of 12 years' work experience. As these programmes are aimed at people with a bachelor's degree, the students were highly educated. Students on web-based courses were older than students on face-to-face and multi-form courses. Students on web-based courses also had more children than the rest of the students. They were highly concentrated in the southern parts of the country, especially near the capital and other cities, rather than rural areas. There were some hints that students in web-based courses were slightly better educated and were more likely to be employed in prestigious positions than the students in other forms of education. They also tended to have a higher income than others. Although students are a heterogeneous group with varied social backgrounds and work/life experiences, an average student would be a 36-year-old woman with at least secondary level education, working in a white-collar occupation and living in a city.

Germany

The German report also reinforces the impression that distance education students (by the example of the FernUniversität Hagen are older than 'traditional' students, with an average age of 34.8 years. Only 29% of the participants in distance education were younger than 25 years. In general, students at the FernUniversität (where 88,168 students were enrolled last term) share a lower socio-economic background than 'traditional' students. It could therefore be argued that the FernUniversität is the university for 'non-traditional' and/or adult students.

Greece

The largest distance education institution in Greece, the Hellenic Open University (HOU), was used as the major source to describe the country's practices. HOU students are older on average than students of other universities. The average student in distance education is between 30 and 37 years old and married. They often find it difficult to participate in face-to-face activities or to devote the required amount of time to their studies in campus-based learning. Distance learning offers the opportunity to combine family life and work with education.

Hungary

The majority of adult learners in Hungary are between 30 and 40 years of age, with no significant difference according to gender. Adult students with previous higher qualifications tend to have heightened motivation for further learning. Two thirds of adult learners are married or live in a partnership and 58% have children. Most either have a job or are on parental leave. More than half of the students in adult education carry out some kind of intellectual work. They have a higher than average income as well as good computer knowledge and access.

United Kingdom

The UK population has a greater proportion of students than the other countries surveyed. The age groups 25-29 and 30-34 are expanding most rapidly as a proportion

of the total Open University population. Proportions of students declaring a disability have increased rapidly over the last 3 years; proportions of students with non-HE qualifications have also increased. 60% of students are female. 92% of part-time higher education entrants in the UK in 2012/13 were aged 21 or over. 75% of over 25s study part-time.

b) Motivation and interest

Finland

Finnish students enrolling in distance education are motivated by the chance to develop vocational skills, the possibility of self-fulfilment, and the flexibility to combine study with work and family.

Germany

The German report shows that flexibility (i.e. the possibility of balancing study with career, family and other responsibilities) is a strong motivation for choosing distance education.

Greece

Like in other countries, distance education students in Greece are older than other typical students. Their main motivation for taking distance education is improving professional skills and career opportunities. Through distance education they try to get their practical knowledge recognized. Like in Hungary, Greek students seem to have a negative image of distance education degrees. The report states: 'Many students did not see any improvement in their career opportunities immediately after obtaining their degree. This may be due to employers' negative perception of the distance education degree, as well as the fact that most students were already working and chose distance education simply in order to obtain a tertiary education degree. Over the long term, however, students' career opportunities did improve.

Hungary

In Hungary like in other countries, the greatest motivation for distance education is improvement of career prospects. However, students in distance education tend to take longer to complete their training than those in traditional forms of teaching/learning. The 'freedom' of distance education demands a lot more independence and self-discipline, which according to the author makes it less suitable for students with lower qualifications.

United Kingdom

In the UK adult learner motivation for embarking on HE study is often closely related to employability aspirations – whether to gain a job, change to a better job, make a 'late' career change or improve career prospects in a present job. For adults coping with a disability, returning to study can be about an aspiration to 'give something back' and help others as they have been helped. A little-studied employability motivation was also uncovered: for adult students living in rural isolation, often with extensive caring responsibilities, returning to study was about gaining confidence and the self-organization skills to become self-employed. For older learners (50+), personal interest/enjoyment becomes a more significant motivation.

c) Perceived barriers

Our data within the overall IDEAL research shows that perceived barriers to distance education do not differ significantly from perceived barriers to higher education in general (see section (i) of online questionnaire).

Finland

The Finnish country report draws attention to the lack of personal feedback and counselling in distance education. The fact that online education requires more independence and responsibility can also be seen as potential barrier.

Specific barriers mentioned include:
- the high costs of the network connections

- 'too much freedom' making it difficult to complete studies on time
- isolation and loneliness, the unfamiliarity of web-based discussion, and lack of communication and face-to-face meetings
- difficulties in network connections
- lack of personal feedback and counselling
- unexpected changes in students' life situation (causing them to drop out)
- from the teacher's point of view: students' lack of time management skills and unrealistic impressions about studying on a web-based course
- problems in combining work and education; lack of time due to family responsibilities
- lack of support from employers

Germany

In the German case study the perceived barriers are as follows:
- costs
- lack of feedback and teacher contact
- lack of student support and services
- alienation and isolation
- lack of experience/training
- lack of adult-adjusted programmes
- lack of specific support structures for adult students, especially in formal regulations

Greece

The Hellenic Open University (HOU) supports students through instalments, reduced prices and increased scholarships. Particular attention is paid to 'mature students', i.e. those over 23 years of age, during the selection procedure. Accordingly, mature students are given preference at the public electronic draw. Family and professional obligations affect the drop-out rates in distance education, especially for women. The main barriers in Greece are:
- difficulty in using electronic media (particularly for women)
- negative image of distance education degrees

- past negative learning experiences and strong ties to 'traditional' learning
- absence of a system for recognition of prior learning and work experience[30]

Hungary

Today, university distance learning programmes in Hungary are all fee-paying and participation in such training is not subsidized. Students in Hungary do not necessarily choose distance learning for 'traditional' reasons; rather, they look for the least possible face-to-face attendance, according to the author. The main barriers to distance education are:

- lack of home internet access and/or sufficient IT structure
- presumed lack of competence in ICT and foreign languages
- costs (correspondence training is subsidized by the state; modern distance education with e-learning is not)
- lack of the courses/content that people really need in their localities
- previous negative learning experiences
- 'too much freedom': students in distance education tend to take longer to complete their training than those in face-to-face education due to insufficient self-directed learning skills (e.g. time-management)
- lack of trust in the quality of distance education programmes as opposed to 'traditional' forms of teaching/learning (students tend not to trust the qualifications of an instructor they do not know personally)
- students find distance education 'faceless'

United Kingdom

While costs were mentioned as a barrier in all the other country studies, in the UK the lower cost of distance education was seen as advantage when compared with the costs of 'traditional' higher education courses/programmes. However, given that tuition fees vary greatly, costs can still be considered a barrier in selected cases. Since 2013 part-time students are ineligible for maintenance loans or grants, which strongly affects distance education students. To qualify for student loans (as full-time students do),

---

[30] European Commission, 2013

part-time study must be at a minimum of 25% intensity of its full-time equivalent, and learners must be 'enrolled on a named qualification'.

The UK case study reports the following barriers to participation in education in general:

- social class (the higher your socio-economic position, the more likely you are to take part in learning)
- employment (even a low ranking job gives you a better chance of learning than being out of the labour market entirely)
- age (younger people are more likely to participate)
- disability (a major barrier to participation)
- costs, specifically the fee increase from 2012[31] (a bigger problem for the lower social classes, single parent families, and minority ethnic groups, all of whom are more sensitive to fees rising than young full-time students).
- doubt about return on investment
- difficulties in using new technology
- family/caring responsibilities and work leaving little time for education
- few employers support staff development
- disability (a major barrier to participation)

---

[31] Although not explained in the UK report, we suggest that this is mostly due to the 2010 change in government (from Labour to Cons/LibDem) which removed the cap on tuition fees and in turn enabled universities to charge students up to £9000 per year.

Synthesis and conclusions

The initial questions of the online questionnaire concerned a) profile, b) motivation and interests and c) perceived barriers. From the study choice analytics and the five country reports, the following conclusions were drawn:

a) Student profile

A majority of distance education students are women. Somewhat older than regular higher education students, they often work alongside their studies and have family responsibilities. The average potential distance education student in our data set is between 25-34 years old and in employment. Distance education is sometimes the only possibility for them to continue their studies and to gain or upgrade their qualifications for a new job or position. Another distinct group of distance education students are retired people, who study for self-fulfilment or in order to stay active. Most of them have completed a bachelor's degree (57.04%). Provision of online education as the main mode of distance education responds to most adult learners' request for more flexible learning opportunities.

b) Motivation for distance education and students' interests

Students' motivations to study are highly diverse. Some are motivated by the possibility of career advancement or updating their knowledge; others by the sheer joy of learning. Whilst many students opt for distance education due to time and other constraints in their personal life, it can also be the delivery mode of choice. For example, many distance education students are so-called independent or self-directed students (some of them very young), who prefer distance education because it allows them to study at their own pace. The main reason why students are looking for further education is to improve their career

prospects. They opt for distance education in order to combine their studies with other duties. The level of education potential distance education students were most commonly seeking was a master's degree.

All of these factors (increasing attainment levels, improving career prospects and learning for self-fulfilment) are elements within the vision of lifelong learning, which is considered the major motivation for adult learners to engage in distance education.

c) Perceived barriers

The most common barriers for distance education students are costs and time constraints resulting from work and family responsibilities. As with on-campus education, funding is an important issue for the majority of students. The use of technology can also constitute a barrier. Information on recognition of prior learning and possible alternative access modes needs to be made more transparent: less than 10% of the universities in the survey provided this information.

Annex

1. Study choice analytics overview of country groupings

Region	Country of Interest
Eastern Europe	Bulgaria; Czech Republic; Hungary; Poland; Russia; Romania; Slovakia; Ukraine.
Northern Europe	Denmark; Estonia; Finland; Iceland; Ireland; Latvia; Lithuania; Norway; Sweden; United Kingdom.
Other	United States; China; Australia; Israel; United Arab Emirates; Brazil; Tunisia; Hong Kong (SAR); Canada; Mauritius; Costa Rica; Egypt; Singapore; Philippines; Macedonia (FYROM); New Zealand.
Southern Europe	Cyprus; Italy; Portugal; Serbia; Spain; Greece; Turkey; Slovenia; Malta; Croatia; Cyprus, northern part*; Albania; Armenia; Montenegro.
Western Europe	Netherlands; Austria; Belgium; France; Germany; Switzerland; Luxembourg; Monaco; Liechtenstein.
Continent	**Country of Interest**
Africa	Algeria; Angola; Benin; Botswana; Burkina Faso; Burundi; Cambodia; Cameroon; Cape Verde; Central African Republic; Chad; Comoros; Congo (Democratic Republic of the); Congo (Republic of the); Côte d'Ivoire; Djibouti; Egypt; Equatorial Guinea; Eritrea; Ethiopia; Gabon; Gambia; Ghana; Guinea; Guinea-Bissau; Kenya; Lesotho; Liberia; Libya; Madagascar; Malawi; Mali; Mauritania; Mauritius; Morocco; Mozambique; Namibia; Niger; Nigeria; Réunion; Rwanda; São Tomé and Príncipe; Saudi Arabia; Senegal; Seychelles; Sierra Leone; Somalia; South Africa; Swaziland; Tanzania; Togo; Tunisia; Uganda; Zambia; Zimbabwe.
Asia	Afghanistan; Armenia; Azerbaijan; Bahrain; Bangladesh; Bhutan; Brunei; China; Georgia; Hong Kong (SAR); India; Indonesia; Iran; Iraq; Israel; Japan; Jordan; Kazakhstan; Kuwait; Kyrgyzstan; Laos; Lebanon; Macao (SAR); Malaysia; Maldives; Mongolia; Myanmar; Nepal; North Korea; Oman; Pakistan; Palestinian Territory, Occupied; Philippines; Qatar; Singapore; South Korea; Sri Lanka; Sudan; Syria; Taiwan; Tajikistan; Thailand; Timor-Leste; Turkey; Turkmenistan; United Arab Emirates; Uzbekistan; Vietnam; Yemen.
Europe	Albania; Andorra; Austria; Belarus; Belgium; Bosnia and Herzegovina; Bulgaria; Croatia; Cyprus; Czech Republic; Denmark; Estonia; Faroe Islands; Finland; France; Germany; Greece; Greenland; Hungary; Iceland; Ireland; Isle of Man; Italy; Latvia; Liechtenstein; Lithuania; Luxembourg; Macedonia (FYROM); Malta; Moldova; Monaco; Montenegro; Netherlands; Norway; Poland; Portugal; Romania; Russia; San Marino; Serbia; Slovakia; Slovenia; Spain; Sweden; Switzerland; Ukraine; United Kingdom.
Northern America	Bermuda; Canada; Saint Pierre and Miquelon; United States
Southern America	Anguilla; Antigua and Barbuda; Argentina; Aruba; Bahamas; Barbados; Belize; Bolivia; Brazil; British Virgin Islands; Cayman Islands; Chile; Colombia; Costa Rica; Cuba; Dominica; Dominican Republic; Ecuador; El Salvador; French Guiana; Grenada; Guadeloupe; Guatemala; Guyana; Haiti; Honduras; Jamaica ; Martinique ; Mexico ; Montserrat ; Netherlands Antilles ; Nicaragua; Panama; Paraguay; Peru; Puerto Rico; Saint Kitts and Nevis; Saint Lucia; Saint Vincent and the Grenadines; Suriname; Trinidad and Tobago; Turks and Caicos Islands; United States Virgin Islands; Uruguay; Venezuela.
Oceania	American Samoa; Australia; Cook Islands; Fiji; French Polynesia; Guam; Kiribati; Marshall Islands; Micronesia, Federated States of; Nauru; New Caledonia; New Zealand; Northern Mariana Islands; Palau; Papua New Guinea; Samoa; Solomon; Islands; Tonga; Tuvalu; Vanuatu.

2. Online Questionnaire

Hi,

are you a potential distance education student?

Please spare 5 minutes to help universities adapt to your needs.

- ➔ Yes, I will take the survey! *(link to the survey)*
- ➔ No, thank you, I am not interested in the survey. *(closes the window)*
- ➔ No, thank you, I am not a potential distance education student. *(closes the window)*

Thank you for sharing information on your background and your motivation to take distance education!

Your age:

Select:
- 15-19
- 20-24
- 25-34
- 35-44
- 45-54
- above 55

Where do you live:

Drop-down EHEA List

Your current occupation:

Select
- Student
- In employment
- Self-employed
- Registered as unemployed
- On leave (parental leave, etc.)
- Other, please specify:_____

Your highest level of education completed:

Select
- Basic/high school
- Bachelor (or equivalent level)
- Master (or equivalent level)
- PhD (or equivalent level)
- Other, please specify:___

Why are you interested in further education?

Select (multiple possible)
- I want to improve my career prospects.
- I am studying to avoid unemployment.
- I am studying for self-fulfillment.
- Other, please specify:___

I am interested in distance education because:

Select (multiple possible)
- Distance education is easier to combine with my job.
- Distance education is easier to combine with family duties.

- Distance education allows me to study without leaving my home.
- Distance education allows me to study at my own pace.
- Distance education costs less.
- Other, please specify:_____

The biggest barrier for me to take distance education is:

Select 3 (in order)
- Costs
- Time
- Distance education technology
- Language of the programme/course (if not taught in your native language)
- Recognition of my prior qualifications/ alternative access routes
- Other, please specify:_____

Do you agree/disagree with the following statement?

Select line: Strongly agree ---------- strongly disagree

Distance education helps to increase equal access to education

Any other thoughts on why you are or are not considering distance education?

Free text.

Thank you

Glossary

In the IDEAL project, the following terminology is used:

Adult education

'General or vocational education provided for adults after initial education and training for professional and/or personal purposes, and which aims to:

- provide general education for adults in topics of particular interest to them (e.g. in open universities);
- provide compensatory learning in basic skills which individuals may not have acquired earlier in their initial education or training (such as literacy, numeracy) and thus to;
- give access to qualifications not gained, for various reasons, in the initial education and training system;
- acquire, improve or update knowledge, skills or competences in a specific field: this is continuing education and training' (Cedefob, 2008, p. 25)

Adult learners

Learners of any age returning to education after a period of work, unemployment, parental leave etc.

Blended education

A course unit or programme that blends online and face-to-face delivery; a substantial proportion (30-79%) of the content is delivered online.

Course unit

'A self-contained, formally structured learning experience. It should have a coherent and explicit set of learning outcomes, expressed in terms of competences to be obtained, and appropriate assessment criteria. Course units can have different numbers of credits' (European Commission, 2006). What courses have in common with degree programmes is the award of credits.

Degree programme

'A set of coherent educational components, based on learning outcomes, that are recognized for the award of a specific qualification through the accumulation of a specified number of credits and the development of specified competences' (ibidem).

Distance education

A generic term for modes of education in which the student and the teacher are separated in time and space. It includes online education (≥ 80% of the content delivered online) and blended education (30-79% of the content delivered online) as well as modes of education using printed material delivered by post and/or other tools for bridging the distance.

European higher education institutions

For the purposes of this project, only higher education institutions that are on the list of the International Association of Universities (IAU)[32], accredited by their competent national authorities and that are based within the European Higher Education Area[33] (EHEA) are considered.

---

[32] See: http://www.iau-aiu.net/content/list-heis
[33] See: EHEA countries http://www.ehea.info/members.aspx

ISCED (International Standard Classification of Education)

ISCED is the reference classification for organizing education programmes and related qualifications by education levels and fields based on international agreement and adopted formally by the General Conference of UNESCO Member States.

Online education

Most or all of the content (≥ 80%) is delivered via the Internet only. Online education is not synonymous with distance education, even though in many developed countries with extensive Internet access it may be the most widely spread form of distance education.

Bibliography

Barnett, R. (2014). *Conditions of Flexibility: Securing a more responsive higher education system*. HEA, York.

Cedefop, 2008, Terminology of European education and training policy. A selection of 100 key terms. http://www.unevoc.unesco.org/go.php?q=TVETipedia+Glossary+A-Z&filt=all&id=41

Centrum für Hochschulentwicklung. 2014. *Studieren ohne Abitur (Projekt)*. Available: http://www.studieren-ohne-abitur.de/web/service/ueber-das-projekt/

Council of the European Union. 2011. Available at: http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/homepage/

Deutsches Zentrum für Hochschul- und Wissenschaftsforschung. 2015. *ANKOM - Anrechnung beruflicher Kompetenzen auf Hochschulstudiengänge. Übergänge von der beruflichen in die hochschulische Bildung* . Available at: http://ankom.his.de / http://ankom.his.de/pdf_archiv/2009_03_06-Hochschulzugang-erful-qualifizierte-Bewerber.pdf

Distance Learning Portal. 2015. www.distancelearningportal.com

Distum (2000), presented in Holmberg, C. (2001), Towards a new scenario for Distance Education in Sweden. Contribution to the 20th World Conference on Open Learning and Distance Education, in Düsseldorf, Germany 1-5. April 2001.

Education and Lifelong Learning 2007-2013: http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/llp/

EHEA countries: http://www.ehea.info/members.aspx

EHEA Ministerial Conference, Bukarest 2012: http://www.ehea.info/Uploads/(1)/Bucharest%20Communique%202012(1).pdf

EHEA: Ministerial Declarations and Communiqués: http://www.ehea.info/article-details.aspx?ArticleId=80

ERIC - Memorandum on Higher Education in the European Community.: http://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED347940

European Commission, 2006?, Tuning Educational Structures in Europe, Glossary of terms: http://www.unideusto.org/tuningeu/documents/glossary- of-terms.html

European Higher Education Area. 2014. *Bologna Process, Ministerial Conferences* (documents): http://www.ehea.info/article-details.aspx?ArticleId=43

EUROSTAT

European Commission. 2013. *HEAD Study Developing the Adult Learning Sector. Final Report*: [pdf] European Commission. http://ec.europa.eu/education/library/study/2012/adult-learning-g_en.pdf

The Bologna Declaration: www.magna- charta.org/resources/files/BOLOGNA_DECLARATION.pdf

Leuven Communiqué: http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/hogeronderwijs/bologna/conference/

European Union, Europe 2020: http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/index_en.htm

Fernuniversität Hagen: http://www.fernuni- hagen.de/arbeiten/statistik/daten/index.shtml

Gordon, Jean. Editorial of 'Trends in lifelong learning: improving opportunities for adult learning'. European Journal of Education, Vol. 39, No 1, March 2004.

Haltia, N., Leskinen, L. & Rahiala, E. 2014 (accepted to be published) Avoimen yliopiston opiskelijamuotokuva 2010-luvulla: Opiskelijoiden taustojen, motiivien ja koettujen hyötyjen tarkastelua. Aikuiskasvatus.

Hiidenmaa, P. 2014. Helsingin yliopiston verkko-opetus. 10 vuotta virtuaaliyliopistostrategian jälkeen. Helsingin yliopisto.

IAU, List of Universities in the World: http://www.iau-aiu.net/content/list-heis

IDEAL project website: www.idealproject.eu

IDEAL Report 1: https://idealprojectblog.files.wordpress.com/2013/11/ideal_report_final.pdf

IDEAL Report 2: https://idealprojectblog.files.wordpress.com/2013/11/social-profile-of-adults-enrolled-in-distance-education.pdf

Eggins, Heather. Globalization and reform: necessary conjunctions in higher education. In Globalization and reform in higher education. Buckingham: SRHE and Open University Press, 2003.

Keil, R., Kerres, M. & Schulmeister, R. (2007). (Eds.). *eUniversity - Update Bologna.* education quality forum, Band 3, 392 pages. Waxmann: New York, Münster.

OECD (1996). Lifelong Learning for All. Paris; UNESCO (1996). Learning: The Treasure Within. Paris.

Lohikoski, S. 2008. Avoimen ammattikorkeakoulun opiskelija: Profiiliselvitys 2006–2007. Satakunnan ammatti-korkeakoulun raportteja B 2. Pori.

McLinden, M (2013) Flexible Pedagogies: part-time learners and learning in higher education. https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/flexible-pedagogies-part-time-learners-and-learning-higher-education (accessed 12 October 2014)

Maguire, D (2013) *Flexible Learning: Wrapping HE around the needs of part-time students.* (HEPI)

Millennium Development Goals (MDGs): http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/

MoEC 2014. Osaamisella ja luovuudella hyvinvointia. Opetus- ja kulttuuriministeriön tulevaisuuskatsaus 2014. Ministry of Education and Culture.

MoEC 2011. Koulutus ja tutkimus vuosina 2011–2016. Kehittämissuunnitelma. Ministry of Education and Culture.

Molnár György PhD: Új módszerek a pedagógiai gyakorlatban - az IKT alapú megoldások tükrében, ('New methods in education practice – in view of ICT-based solutions.) In: Szakképzési Szemle ISSN 0237-2347, XXVII. évfolyam, 2011. Ref, 3. p. 170-177

Nevgi, A. & Tirri, H. 2001. Oppimista edistävät ja estävät tekijät verkko-opiskelussa. In Verkot ja teknologia aikuisopiskelun tukena. Aikuiskasvatuksen 42. vuosikirja. Kansanvalistusseura ja Aikuiskasvatuksen tutkimusseura, p. 117–151.

Nevgi, A. & Tirri, H. 2003. Hyvää verkko-opetusta etsimässä. Oppimista edistävät ja estävät tekijät verkko-oppimisympäristöissä – opiskelijoiden kokemukset ja opettajien arviot. [In search of a good virtual teaching. The advantages and disadvantages to learning in virtual environments – Students' experiences and teachers' evaluations.] Research in Educational Sciences 15.

Niemi, H., Ruuskanen, T & Seppänen, T. 2014. Osallistuminen aikuiskoulutukseen. Aikuiskoulutustutkimus 2012. Tilastokeskus. Koulutus 2008.

Pont, B. (2004) *Improving Access to and Participation in Adult Learning in OECD countries.*

European Journal of Education, 39 (1): 31-45.

OECD-Report Education at a Glance: http://www.oecd.org/edu/Germany-EAG2014-Country-Note.pdf

Population on 1 January by age and sex' (demo_pjan): http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=demo_pjan&lang=en

Rinne, R., Haltia, N., Nori, H. & Jauhiainen, A. 2008. Yliopiston porteilla: Aikuiset ja nuoret hakijat ja sisäänpäässeet 2000-luvun alun Suomessa. Kasvatusalan julkaisuja 36.

Rinne, R., Jauhiainen, A., Tuomisto, H., Alho-Malmelin, M., Halttunen, N. & Lehtonen, K. 2003. Avoimen yliopiston opiskelija: Kokovartalokuvasta eriytyneisiin muotokuviin. Turun yliopiston kasvatustieteiden tiedekunnan julkaisuja A 200.

Schulmeister, R. (2013) (Hrsg). *MOOCs – Massive Open Online Courses. Offene Bildung oder Geschäftsmodell?* Waxmann: New York, Münster. Available at: http://www.waxmann.com/fileadmin/media/zusatztexte/2960Volltext.pdf [21.10.2014]

Stöter, J., Bullen, M., Zawacki-Richter, O., & von Prümmer, C. (2014). From the back door into the mainstream – learner characteristics in the context of lifelong learning. In: O. Zawacki-Richter & T. Anderson (Eds.). *Online distance education - Towards a research agenda*. Athabasca, Edmonton, Canada: Athabasca University Press.

Tertiary students (ISCED 5-6) by field of education and sex' (educ_enrl5): http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=educ_enrl5&lang=en

UIL 2013a. GRALE II *unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0022/002224/222407e.pdf*

UNESCO, 1972, Edgar FAURE, *Learning to be: The World of Education Today and Tomorrow*, Paris: UNESCO

UNESCO. 2009. *CONFINTEA VI.* Available at: http://www.unesco.org/en/confinteavi/

UNESCO, 2002 Open and Distance Learning. Trends Policy and Strategy Considerations, http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0012/001284/128463e.pdf

UNESCO, 2008. Pan-European Statement on Adult Learning for Equity and Inclusion in the Context of Mobility and Competition. [pdf] http://www.unesco.org/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/INSTITUTES/UIL/confintea/pdf/Prepar atory_Conferences/Conference_Documents/Europe_- _North_America/confinteavi_rpc_pan-europe_final_document_en.pdf http://www.unesco.org/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/INSTITUTES/UIL/confintea/pdf/Prepar atory_Conferences/Conference_Documents/Europe_- _North_America/confinteavi_rpc_pan-europe_final_document_en.pdf

UNESCO. 2014a. Education Sector technical Notes: Lifelong learning: http://www.unesco.org/new/en/education/themes/strengthening-education- systems/quality-framework/technical-notes/

UNESCO. 2014b. 2014-2017, 37 C/5: Approved Programme and Budget. [pdf] http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0022/002266/226695e.pdf

UNESCO. 2014c. Muscat Agreement of the Global Education for All (EFA) Meeting, http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0022/002281/228122e.pdf

White, D., Warren, N., Faughnan, S. and Manton, M., 2010. Study of UK Online Learning: Report to HEFCE by the Department for Continuing Education, University of Oxford. Oxford, p.78.

Wolter, A. (2013). Germany: from individual talent to institutional permeability: changing policies for non-traditional access routes in German higher education, in: M. Slowey/H. G. Schuetze (eds.): *Global perspectives on Higher Education and Lifelong Learners*, London/New York 2012, S., p. 43-59.

Zawacki-Richter, O. (forthcoming). Zur Mediennutzung im Studium– unter besonderer Berücksichtigung heterogener Studierender. In: *Zeitschrift für Erziehungswissenschaften Vol. 17, 2014.*