

Rapid growth in online & distance education in Europe

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Rapid growth in online & distance education in Europe - Part I

When thinking of higher education, online and distance education is typically not top-of-mind. Nevertheless, distance education has a great potential to contributing to the European objectives on mobility, lifelong learning and equality – while ultimately supporting universities to reach out to even more students and thus benefitting the individuals. Following the revolutionary developments in online learning in the US such as Massive Open and Online Courses (MOOCs), online and distance education is now also getting increasingly popular in Europe. This article provides an insight into distance education, its advantages as well as recent trends in Europe.

Part I - Benefits of online and distance learning

Compared to traditional on-campus learning, distance education has several advantages. Many students are nowadays choosing for distance education because of its accessibility: It enables learners to be less bound by time and location and thus gives flexibility to people who are not able to follow a strict schedule due to personal circumstances, family or work obligations. Distance education is often less expensive than traditional education. Like this it can open up learning opportunities to those who would otherwise not be able to study and facilitates the social inclusion of people with disadvantaged backgrounds (such as economic situation, development regions, disability and so forth).

With way less restrictions on capacity limits, online and distance education also benefits the universities as it allows the institutions to expand their offer - and to reach those who usually would not be able to enrol with them. Typical distance learners are regular students as we all know them, but also parents, physically challenged people, and business men who are looking for ways to enhance their skills next to their busy schedule. Allowing any institution across the world to target anyone interested in their subject while reducing additional obstacles to international studies such as visa requirements, travel

costs and travel time, makes online and distance education the next step to a truly globalized world of education.

Rapid growth in online and distance education in Europe - Part II

Part II - Perception on distance education has shifted

It is for these reasons that the distance learning offer is expanding both in volume as in type: online, open and blended learning; degree or credit programmes; offered by specialist distance learning institutes but also increasingly by (consortia of) traditional universities. With technology getting more affordable and available, the interest of both learners and institutions in this special mode of education is on the rise: While in 2012 student enrolment increased 15-20%, the offer grew with 40% as reported by universities across Europe.

These rapid developments in the field are accompanied by an increasing shift in perception. Today online and distance education has found its way into the agenda of international media. The advent of the MOOCs for instance placed online and distance education in the centre of media attention across the globe. All this fosters public awareness, tackles general misconceptions on online and distance education and makes it an increasingly appreciated option. As the Secretary General of the European Association of Distance Teaching Universities (EADTU) Piet Henderikx puts it 'Open and distance learning has become an important answer to the current educational challenges and will significantly impact our educational landscape'.

<http://www.mastersportal.eu/articles/392/rapid-growth-in-online-distance-education-in-europe-part-i.html>

<http://www.mastersportal.eu/articles/393/rapid-growth-in-online-and-distance-education-in-europe-part-ii.html>