

IDEAL

Impact of Distance Education on Adult Learning



Distance education in European higher education -THE POTENTIAL-

Germany case study

Distance education in European higher education – the potential Germany case study

Report 3 (of 3) of the IDEAL (Impact of Distance Education on Adult Learning) project.

Project number: 539668-LLP-1-2013-1-NO-ERASMUS-ESIN

Authors: Angela Owusu-Boampong, Carl Holmberg

Published in 2015 by

International Council for Open and Distance Education

Lilleakerveien 23

0283 Oslo

Norway

UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning

Feldbrunnenstrasse 58

20148 Hamburg

Germany

StudyPortals B.V.

Torenallee 45 - 4.02

5617 BA Eindhoven

The Netherlands

©UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, International Council for Open and Distance Education and StudyPortals B.V.

The content of this report does not reflect the official opinion of the European Commission. Responsibility for the information and views expressed in therein lies entirely with the authors.

Acknowledgements: The authors would like to thank the project team members and colleagues as well as the IDEAL project advisory board for their valuable input and feedback.

The IDEAL project is supported by:



(Project number: 539668-LLP-1-2013-1-NO-ERASMUS-ESIN)

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.

Authors¹:

Joachim Stöter, Dipl. Psych.

Carl von Ossietzky, University of Oldenburg

¹ Contact: Faculty of Educational and Social Sciences, Center for Lifelong Learning (C3L), Ammerländer Heerstr. 138 (V 03), 26129 Oldenburg, Phone: (+49) 0441/798-2052, Email: j.stoeter@uni-oldenburg.de



Table of Contents

Introduction	7
Regulatory framework for distance education	11
Basic facts about higher education in Germany	17
Conclusion: Advancement through education: opening the higher education systems	28
References	30

Introduction

This case study was conducted in the context of the project 'Impact of Distance Education on Adult Learning'² (IDEAL) and examines the situation of distance education and distance learning in Germany. It is based on a review of empirical data presented by European and national institutions and authorities, an analysis of national and regional policy documents, and a review of the literature on the characteristics, needs and expectations of students who are interested or enrolled in online study programmes. In order to structure this extensive topic, the case study follows one major question:

Has distance education increased the openness of higher education institutions in Germany and if so, how?

The structure of this study is based on an analysis of the regulatory framework for distance education/learning in Germany because the German educational system is greatly determined by regional policies and is still in the process of adapting to the changes initiated by the Bologna-process³. Although the implementation of the bachelor and master system is largely complete⁴, the lack of social mobility in the German educational system remains a challenge:

'In Germany, only 24% of adults (non-students) have attained a higher level of education than their parents, the second smallest proportion among OECD countries (the average is 38%)' (OECD, Country-Note Germany, 2014, p. 7).

The case study does not provide a general overview of the German educational sector, as an extensive description is available in the country report section of the HEAD-study⁵ in the third chapter of the Country Report Germany (Banscherus and Spexard, 2012, p. 138). However, the second chapter provides an overview of the regulatory

² <http://idealproject.eu/> [12.10.2014]

³ <http://www.ehea.info/> [10.10.2014]

⁴ 85% of programmes in 2012: <http://www.tagesschau.de/inland/bologna-prozess100.html> [17.10.2014]

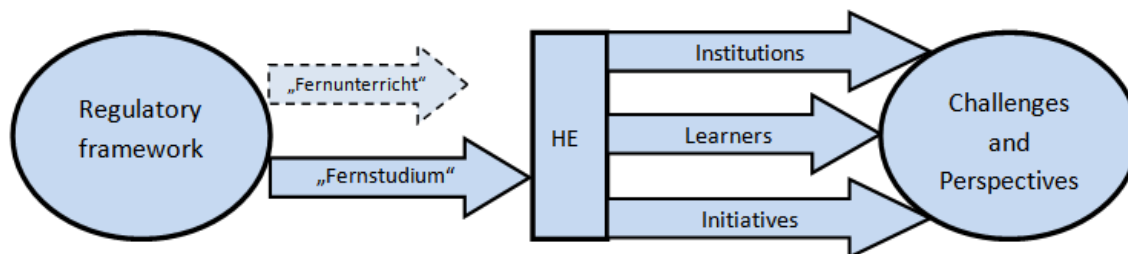
⁵ http://ec.europa.eu/education/library/study/2012/adult-learning-g_en.pdf [18.10.2014]

framework for distance education in the 16 different federal states and on the federal level. In order to focus on the higher education system in depth, two essential concepts of learning at a distance in Germany need to be distinguished. While 'Fernunterricht' is largely focused on non-academic programmes and does not lead to an academic degree, the term 'Fernstudium' refers to a programme at a higher education institution, offered either in the private or public sector. The second part of the chapter summarizes the key differences between these two approaches. In this report, the focus is on programmes leading to an academic degree; 'Fernstudium' is therefore translated as distance education. A summary of important governmental initiatives regarding the opening of the higher education system over the past 15 years is presented at the end of the following chapter. The emphasis is on already implemented projects, which have in turn partly influenced the projects that are currently running.

Basic facts about higher education in Germany are presented in the third chapter, including the institutions offering distance education, learners' needs and characteristics, and a summary of the barriers in the higher education sector. Recent studies about learners' needs and expectations of distance learning are presented. In order to outline the recent developments in distance education in Germany, this chapter also highlights current initiatives for the opening of higher education. This chapter also provides major statistical findings and highlights research carried out over the past 15 years. It is worth mentioning that most studies in the last decade mainly emphasized aspects of the usage of new technology for learning processes (Allmann, 2004) rather than the learning format itself. Until the year 2010, there remained a serious lack of knowledge of the development of study formats suited to heterogeneous target groups, which still constitutes a challenge for these programmes (Klumpp and Rybnikowa, 2010). Through the various projects initiated by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung (BMBF)) since 2011, these topics are now being intensely addressed.

The perspectives and challenges in removing the barriers are the topic of the fourth and final chapter. The basic structure of the report is illustrated by the following figure.

Figure 1: Structure of case study Germany, HE = higher education (illustration by the author)



Social mobility in the German higher education system

Germany is often a quarter below the other Western countries when it comes to new or graduated students (Klumpp and Rybnikowa, 2010). Students from socially disadvantaged families in particular do not have the same opportunity to reach a tertiary degree as students whose parents already hold such a degree. The likelihood for enrolling at a higher education institution is twice as high for children of highly qualified parents than for children of low or medium qualified parents.⁶ Furthermore, a higher educational qualification decreases a person's chances of being unemployed and increases their earnings from work: in 2012, German workers with lower secondary education earned 84% of what their peers with an upper secondary or post-secondary non-tertiary education earned, still significantly above the OECD average of 76%⁷ (OECD, 2014, p. 4). The social upward mobility of younger people in Germany is among the lowest of all OECD countries, with 24% of young adults up to 34 years

⁶ Education at a Glance, OECD, 2014: <http://www.oecd.org/berlin/presse/bildung-2014-deutschland.htm> [13.10.2014]

⁷ <http://www.oecd.org/edu/Germany-EAG2014-Country-Note.pdf> [13.10.2014]

having a lower qualification than their parents, compared to an OECD average of 16%. These findings can partly be explained by the established and well-recognized upper secondary vocational programmes (dual system) and the comparatively low unemployment rates (6.5% overall and 4.3% for people under 20 years⁸). The incentive for tertiary degree attainment might therefore be lower in Germany than in other countries. Nevertheless, these findings are of major concern in the public debate about how to open higher education institutions to new target groups and to develop a system for the recognition of prior learning, especially towards qualifications obtained in the vocational/dual system. The development of dual study programmes is hence a political goal, even though only a small percentage of students (3.3%) is actually enrolled in these programmes, as the Wissenschaftsrat (regarded as the most important German scientific advisory board) pointed out in 2013.⁹

⁸<https://www.destatis.de/DE/ZahlenFakten/Indikatoren/Konjunkturindikatoren/Arbeitsmarkt/arb210.html>
[19.10.2014]

⁹ <http://www.wissenschaftsrat.de/download/archiv/3479-13.pdf> [18.10.2014]

Regulatory framework for distance education

An excellent summary of the German educational system is provided in the Country Report Germany (Banscherus and Spexard, 2013, p. 138). This chapter will therefore concentrate on presenting the regulatory framework which exists for distance education in Germany. All 16 German states have authority over their respective educational systems, although their similarities are much greater than their differences. At least 18 different laws need to be taken into consideration, all of which influence the development of distance education in higher education: in particular, the German Higher Education Framework Law (Deutsches Hochschulrahmengesetz, HRG¹⁰), the University Laws of the Federal States (Landeshochschulgesetze, LHG¹¹) and the Law of the Protection of Participants in Distance Learning (Gesetz zum Schutz der Teilnehmer am Fernunterricht - Fernunterrichtsschutzgesetz - FernUSG¹²). Although the latter generally focuses on aspects of Fernunterricht (see previous chapter for a detailed description of the law), in special cases it may also be applicable to courses at universities and similar institutions. It has not yet been finally decided whether this law has to be applied to these courses. In recent years, alongside the universities' growing activities in the field of further education, the introduction of the ISO 29990¹³ as an international quality standard for learning services has also influenced the debate on quality standards in distance education.

¹⁰ http://www.bmbf.de/pub/HRG_20050126.pdf [19.10.2014]

¹¹ http://www.gew.de/Landeshochschulgesetze_3.html [19.10.2014]

¹² <http://www.gesetze-im-internet.de/fernusg/> [19.10.2014]

¹³ <http://www.beuth.de/cmd%3Bjsessionid=0B92CB9A7F9AB17AF64CEDF69C8F64D5.3?workflowname=infoInst antdownload&customerid=&docname=1728212&orgdocname=&contextid=beuthneu&servicerefname=beuth&Log inName=&ixos=toc> [12.10.2014]

National policies in the 16 German states

All states have different laws with respect to continuing and distance education. The University Laws of the Federal States (Landeshochschulgesetze) were therefore analysed to describe the regulations defined therein. Whereas Germany is organized as a unitary state, its 16 states have 'independence in cultural and educational matters'. This entitles them to make their own decisions regarding educational matters within their respective political boundaries (Kappel, Lehmann and Loeper, 2002). The German educational system is therefore not centralized, but multi-centralized. Each federal state has its own Ministry of Education, Art and Culture, making them responsible for their own educational system; administrative regulations regarding fees and the organization of such matters as approaches to distance education may vary. The predominantly uniform school system in Germany results from the coordination between federal states which is negotiated through the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the Länder in the Federal Republic of Germany (Kultusministerkonferenz or KMK).

The aim of the following analysis was to gather data on how the respective states outline the organization of distance education within their higher education systems. Additionally, the Framework Act for Higher Education (Hochschulrahmengesetz, HRG), which defines a framework for the organization of higher education throughout Germany, was consulted to compare these findings to the federal laws. The University Laws of the Federal States were screened to find out whether they incorporated key statements or at least references about distance education, such as statements about the organization of continuing education. Out of the 16 documents, 13 explicitly mention distance education as a possible way to structure programmes. These statements, however, are rather short and generally only mention that the 'opportunity of distance education should be taken'. None of the laws has a special section about programmes entirely offered at a distance at universities, etc. Three documents do not even mention anything of the kind (Berlin, Lower Saxony and Hesse). Hesse has a specific law regarding the organization of a network for distance education at

universities of applied science with two other states ('Gesetz zum Staatsvertrag über Fernstudien an Fachhochschulen'¹⁴).

The Berlin law at least makes some references to distance education in the context of continuing education. The general starting point for all laws is the traditional campus-based programme: distance education is therefore seen as an additional offer or variation which does not replace campus-based programmes. Most universities therefore use a blended learning design as a framework for their online offers. The Framework Act for Higher Education essentially includes the same statements, but also mentions that universities can recognize a distance education course for their traditional undergraduate and graduate degree offers (Section 13, paragraph 2). Obviously, most statements on distance education at universities and universities of applied science are closely linked to aspects of continuing education programmes. Only in some laws are they explicitly related to the general courses. These findings fit well with the general development of universities, which have only in recent years started to adjust their programmes to target groups other than the 'traditional' student.

Other relevant documents which may encourage the universities to increase their efforts as regards distance education programmes are the objective agreements (Zielvereinbarungen) between each university and their state and the indicator-based allocation of funds (leistungsorientierte Mittelvergabe). The latter defines the objectives a university has to meet in order to receive additional funding through their state. Both regulations are agreed between each university and the regional state in order to govern the development of the universities through the state. None of these regulations includes any form of direct motivation for the universities to enhance their efforts as regards distance education. Instead, they focus on the numbers of students enrolled and the acquisition of third-party funds (Drittmittel). They do mention efforts regarding continuing education programmes, but these are somewhat marginal (Kretschmer and Stöter, 2014).

¹⁴http://landesrecht.rlp.de/jportal/portal/page/bsrlpprod.psml?pid=Dokumentanzeige&showdoccase=1&js_peid=Tr efferliste&documentnumber=1&numberofresults=1&fromdoctodoc=yes&doc.id=jlr-FHSchulFStStVtrGRPPStaatsvertrag-Artikel8&doc.part=X&doc.price=0.0 [14.10.2014]

Basic distinction between 'Fernunterricht' and 'Fernstudium'

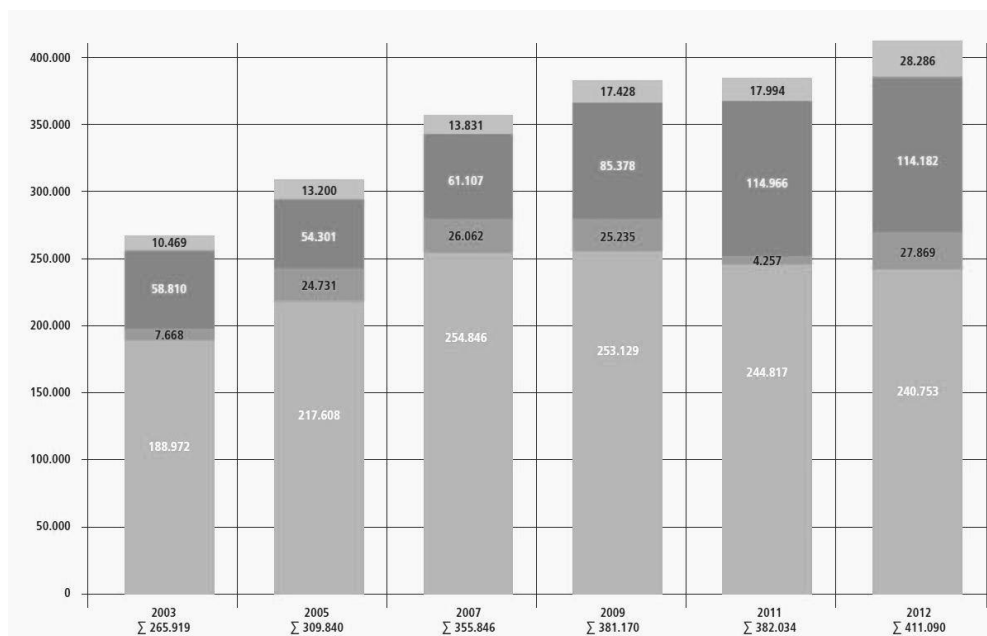
Since 1977, all programmes provided at a distance and not leading to an academic degree have been regulated by the Law of the Protection of Participants in Distance Learning (Gesetz zum Schutz der Teilnehmer am Fernunterricht - Fernunterrichtsschutzgesetz – FernUSG), which defines special registration requirements that a programme has to meet. It is embedded in the laws for consumer protection and is therefore obligatory. 'Fernunterricht' is hence defined as 'the procurement of knowledge and skills with teacher and student mostly having non-direct contact and with the teacher controlling the learning outcome' (FernUSG § 1 Abs. 1). This law is not applicable to higher education institutions providing an academic degree, except when there is an extra fee for a course. In fact, there is an ongoing debate on whether these restrictions have to be applied to universities and similar institutions.¹⁵

'Fernstudium' or distance education is traditionally provided by institutions of higher education and culminates in the award of an academic degree. These institutions can, however, also provide programmes of 'Fernunterricht'. The following table provides an overview of the distribution of participants in these two fields.¹⁶ The bars are to be read from top to bottom for the following participant groups: Distance students at campus based universities; distance students at distance learning universities; business clients in 'Fernunterricht'; private participants in 'Fernunterricht'.

¹⁵ Critique and reply on the Law of the Protection of Participants in Distance Learning: <http://www.zfu.de/Mitteilungen/Kerres%20ZFU%20Kritik%20230701.pdf> [21.10.2014]

¹⁶ [http://fdlmedia.istis.de/files/Fernunterrichtsstistik/FDL_Fernunterrichtsstatik_2012.pdf](http://fdlmedia.istis.de/files/Fernunterrichtsstistik/FDL_Fernunterrichtsstistik_2012.pdf) [10.10.2014]

Figure 2: Participants in Distance-Learning 2003-2012 (Forum Distance-Learning, Fernunterrichtsstatistik, 2012, p. 16)



With 268,622 participants in 2012, most of the students are enrolled in the sector described as 'Fernunterricht'. Only a small proportion of students (28,286) are in the sector distance education at traditional campus-based universities, although distance education universities have become more significant since 2003 and today educate 114,182 students. Of the 2,466,512 students enrolled in universities and universities of applied science in 2012¹⁷, an estimated 6% is enrolled in a distance education programme. It is worth mentioning that campus-based universities are not very successful in attracting participants for continuing education courses: this field accounts for only 3% of students and this number has not increased since 1991 (Holm, 2013, p. 108).

In fact, these total numbers have been growing since 2000, with the group of private participants consistently being the largest (Allmann, 2004). Since 2007 a trend is being observed according to which campus-based and distance learning universities attract more and more students while the proportion of private participants in 'Fernunterricht' is slowly declining. Various factors are responsible for these tendencies, especially the changed regulations regarding university entry. In 2009 these were expanded so that

¹⁷ National education report, 2014, p. 128: http://www.bildungsbericht.de/daten2014/bb_2014.pdf [21.10.2014]

examinations other than the traditional 'Abitur' (the highest degree conferred by the German secondary school system) and a few others (Z-Prüfung, zweiter Bildungsweg) gave the right to study. University entrance is now also possible based on specific vocational degrees. Political developments and projects in this context are summarized as 'Studieren ohne Abitur'¹⁸ and are described in detail in the following chapter. Due to the lack of adequate distance learning programmes at the campus-based universities, the distance learning universities have grown much faster. These universities provide programmes which are especially tailored for the new target group of working professionals.

¹⁸ 'Studieren ohne Abitur': http://www.studieren-ohne-abitur.de/web/information/ueberblick/#para_2 [11.10.2014]

Basic facts about higher education in Germany

The OECD Report 'Education at a Glance'¹⁹ states that, in 2014, 53% of young people in Germany are expected to enter academically-oriented tertiary programmes (tertiary-type A) in their lifetime (OECD average: 58%), while in 2000 that proportion was only 30%. In the tertiary-type B programmes an additional 22% of young people (15% in 2000) are expected to enter shorter, more vocation-oriented tertiary programmes, while the OECD average was 18% in 2012 (16% in 2000) (OECD, 2014, p. 4). In general, the vocational sector is a widely accepted approach to learning. 48% of upper secondary students in Germany are enrolled in pre-vocational or vocational programmes (dual system) that combine school and work (OECD average: 46%). More than half (55%) of 25-64 year-olds have attained a vocational qualification at either upper secondary or post-secondary level (OECD average: 33%) and 86% of them have obtained at least an upper secondary qualification (OECD average: 75%). With an estimated 95% of today's young people graduating from upper secondary school during their lifetime and enrolling in further education programmes, only a small proportion of young people leave school without any degree²⁰:

'Due to the high incidence of vocational qualifications, and the fact that a general degree (mostly Abitur) is dedicated to further education and not to direct entry in the labour market, only 3% of adults attain a general upper secondary or post-secondary qualification as their highest degree, one of the smallest proportions among OECD countries (OECD average: 12%)' (OECD, 2014, p. 1).

¹⁹ Education at a Glance: Country -Note Germany: <http://www.oecd.org/edu/Germany-EAG2014-Country-Note.pdf> [19.10.2014]

²⁰ <http://www.bpb.de/nachschlagen/zahlen-und-fakten/soziale-situation-in-deutschland/61656/bildungsstand> [20.10.2014]

The proportion of tertiary-educated adults in Germany (28%) is lower than the OECD average (33%) and raising it to 40% until 2020 will be a difficult goal to reach if the current level of expansion does not change (only +6% since 2000). The difference between younger (25-34-year-old) and older (55-64-year-old) people with tertiary attainment is rather small: 29% and 26% respectively. Germany's longer-than-average tertiary programmes and the large internal variations in attainment levels due to the federal system may explain some of these differences as well as the specific 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' (OECD, 2014, p. 5).

The post-secondary non-tertiary degrees (ISCED 4) in the vocational sector are of major relevance in the German educational system and account for fully 43% of degrees obtained in Germany, meaning that the European 2020 Strategy goal of 40% was already met in 2012.²¹

Nationwide initiatives to open the universities

The following chapter summarizes some national initiatives from the last fifteen years which were launched to increase the universities' efforts in the field of distance and continuing education. The aim here is not to provide an in-depth description of these projects, but rather to highlight the main topics that were addressed in these years. In fact, many German universities did not develop a specific strategy for lifelong learning or specific distance education programmes. Universities' efforts are mostly driven by external motivations linked to special projects funded by the government or EU (Hanft and Maschwitz, 2012). Without such third-party funding they lack the resources for own development (Kerres, Hanft and Wilkesmann, 2012). Due to the indicator-based granting of funds described earlier, universities depend on the acquisition of third-party

²¹ National education report, 2014, p. 42: (http://www.bildungsbericht.de/daten2014/bb_2014.pdf) [21.10.2014]

funding. They are therefore very interested in projects that promise to deliver such funds, although their interest is mainly driven by the funds themselves rather than the actual theme of the projects. Hence it is not surprising that universities finance their continuing education programmes mainly through participation fees (Graeßner, 2007). This also holds true for the few distance education programmes at campus-based universities, while studying in general is free of charge and students only have to pay a small administrative fee (around € 50-400/semester).²²

Neue Medien in der Bildung (Volume: unknown / 2000-2004)

The aim of this project was the wide and permanent integration of new media as a tool for teaching, learning, working and communication, as well as an improvement of the programmes already on offer through media usage. Structural change and enhancement of teaching and learning through new media were also aspired to.²³

This project has led to the development of several bachelor and master programmes which are still offered by its successor oncampus GmbH²⁴, which takes place at one of the involved universities of applied science. Several such universities are grouped together in an organization called Hochschulverbund Virtuelle Fachhochschule²⁵ and distribute their courses together through oncampus GmbH. The general aims of the project were integration of the possibilities of multimedia and the internet into higher education and concentration of active institutions in one project.²⁶

Studieren ohne Abitur (Volume: n.a. / since 2009)

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 that opened the universities to people with a degree from the vocational sector. Whereas until that year the highest degrees from the school system

²² Fee for studying: <http://www.bachelor-studium.net/studiengebuehren-kosten.php> [21.10.2014]

²³ For further information refer to: http://www.dlr.de/pt_nmb/Foerderung/Bekanntmachungen/eLearning.pdf
Bundesleitprojekt Virtuelle Fachhochschule (Volume: 21 Mio. € / 1999-2004)

²⁴ <http://www.oncampus.de> [21.10.2014]

²⁵ <https://www.vfh.de/> [21.10.2014]

²⁶ For further information refer to: http://www.bmbf.de/pub/Abschlussbericht_Bundesleitprojekt_VFH-Kurzfassung.pdf and http://fhge.opus.hbz-nrw.de/volltexte/2003/11/pdf/Die_Virtuelle_Fachhochschule_VFH.pdf

(such as the Abitur) were required to embark on a higher education entrance qualification (Hochschulzugangsberechtigung), this is now no longer the case.²⁷

ANKOM - Anrechnung beruflicher Kompetenzen auf Hochschulstudiengänge (Volume: unknown 2005-2011) / Übergänge von der beruflichen in die hochschulische Bildung (Volume: unknown 2012-2014)

These projects were developed in order to define regulations for the recognition of prior learning in the higher education system. Until then (and even today), each university used its own regulation about which competencies and degrees should be recognized. In 2002 and 2010, several enactments were released by the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the Länder in the Federal Republic of Germany (Kultusministerkonferenz or KMK) stating that competencies acquired outside the higher education system could replace up to 50% of a study programme. The premise for this recognition is that these competencies can somehow be defined as equal to courses at university.²⁸

MOOC Production Fellowship: Lehren und Lernen im Web (Volume: 250.000 € / in 2013)

The Association for the Promotion of Science and the Humanities in Germany (Stifterverband für die deutsche Wissenschaft²⁹) and iversity³⁰ granted ten fellowships for the development of concepts for Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) in order to give the organizational development of higher education in a time of 'digital transformation' a significant boost.³¹

Aufstieg durch Bildung: offene Hochschulen (Volume: 250 Mio. € / 2011-2020)

As one of the largest funded projects, the intention of this project is by definition to open the higher education sector to new and more numerous target groups. The 73

²⁷ For further information refer to: http://ankom.his.de/pdf_archiv/2009_03_06-Hochschulzugang-erful-qualifizierte-Bewerber.pdf and <http://www.studieren-ohne-abitur.de/web/service/ueber-das-projekt/>

²⁸ For further information refer to: <http://ankom.his.de/> and <http://www.bibb.de/ankom>

²⁹ <http://www.stifterverband.info/> [13.10.2014]

³⁰ <https://iversity.org/> [13.10.2014]

³¹ For further information refer to:

http://www.stifterverband.info/bildungsinitiative/quartaere_bildung/mooc_fellowships/

projects and several hundred institutions involved develop different courses especially targeted at adult learners wishing to return to university after a phase of working in a profession or to combine study and work. Most of these projects plan and develop courses in a blended learning design to meet the needs of this target group. The whole initiative is focused on these 'non-traditional students' and therefore incorporates the results of several further projects, like Ankom, Studium ohne Abitur, Neue Medien in der Bildung and others.³²

Digitale Medien in der Beruflichen Bildung (Volume: 60 Mio. € / Start 2015)

The objectives of one of the next projects from the Federal Ministry of Education and Research are to develop media-based training opportunities as part of a nationally recognized training occupation or of regulated training; to carry out research on the potential of digital media to support structural reforms in vocational education; and to stimulate the market for professional development and the use of Web 2.0 technologies and mobile applications, in order to increase the efficiency of these new media in the vocational and continuing education.³³

Institutions offering distance education

The following chapter provides a brief overview of several institutions providing distance education courses and outlines which motivations, policies and organizational aspects influence their participation in distance education.

As a result of pressure towards greater access, the German HE system has seen a considerable expansion in recent years. Although the number of university students nearly doubled between 1980 and 2001, the budgets in HE only increased by 56% (Baker and Lenhardt, 2008). The universities still focus on their 'traditional' target groups; their programmes are designed with these groups in mind and are in general

³² For further information refer to: <http://www.offene-hochschulen.de/> <http://www.bmbf.de/de/23052.php>
http://www.bmbf.de/pubRD/BMBF_UB_QID_2013.pdf <http://www.wettbewerb-offene-hochschulen-bmbf.de/>

³³ For further information refer to: http://www.dlr.de/pt/desktopdefault.aspx/tabid-3162/4875_read-7021/ and http://www.dlr.de/Portaldata/45/Resources/dokumente/BMBF-neue_medien_in_der_beruflichen_bildung.pdf

campus-based. Only a few institutions have developed special centres for their distance education programmes, which are chosen by only a very small number of students. The only real public distance education institution is the FernUniversität Hagen³⁴, which also happens to be the largest German university. In the last term, 88,168 students were enrolled. Although the FernUniversität was launched to reach other target groups than the traditional, campus-based universities, it is not and never was an open university in terms of entrance requirements. Of the 81 providers of distance education university programmes, 59 are public universities or universities of applied sciences and 18 are private providers.

Nearly all of the latter offer their courses exclusively at a distance. Of 268,622 participants in 2012, 80% took their courses at distance education universities and only 20% at campus-based universities. 71% of students were enrolled at public universities and only 29% at private institutions. The significantly higher fees (between 11,000 and 13,000€³⁵) for private courses could have potentially influenced this distribution as well. These results are further explained by the impact that the FernUniversität has on the German distance education sector: nearly 30% of all students enrolled in distance education courses in Germany are studying at the FernUniversität. Other providers connected to the public sector are the Virtuelle Hochschule Bayern (vhb)³⁶ and the Virtuelle Fachhochschule (VFH).³⁷ Whereas the latter provides its own programmes, the former functions more as a centre for the Bavarian universities and provides courses for the campus-based students at these universities.

Since 1990 the first steps were taken to enhance the development of distance education courses (mainly in a blended learning design) at campus-based universities (Hanft and Knust, 2009). The development of distance education or e-learning in general at universities was influenced by a variety of factors: from distance education universities providing their courses at a distance from the beginning through to

³⁴ <http://www.FernUniversität-hagen.de/> [19.10.2014]

³⁵ Fees for selected private universities <http://www.bafoeg-aktuell.de/studium/fernstudium/kosten.html> [23.10.2014]

³⁶ <http://www.vhb.org/> [16.10.2010]

³⁷ <http://www.vfh.de/> [16.10.2010]

conventional, campus-based universities implementing new media to enrich class lectures and in order to reach more students with their own online programmes (Zawacki-Richter, 2001).³⁸ A study from 2007 (Keil, Kerres and Schulmeister) analysed the digital tools that universities provide in their institutions. While more than 90% of universities had digital learning material and up to 80% offered interactive courses, only 16% of universities and universities of applied science offered specific distance education courses. Another study analysed the reasons why universities use e-learning tools (Kleimann, 2008). The three major reasons were: improvement of student satisfaction (77%), enhancement of reputation (63%), and increase of study success (60%). The next important aspect was opening access for new target groups (56%), which appeared significantly more important than support for the lecturers (37%).

An international comparative study by Hanft and Knust (2009, p. 133) revealed that the majority of continuing education programmes at campus-based universities were offered face-to-face (from 67.57% up to 97.49% depending on the duration of the programmes). Although some offers were designed in blended format (up to 25.68% if the programme was longer than one year), the proportion of exclusively online programmes was nearly non-existent (2.5%).

Focusing on the student – profiles and needs

A great deal of research has been carried out in recent years to define the new target groups of 'non-traditional' students or adult learners, and to explore their needs and expectations with regard to university programmes. An international literature review by Zawacki-Richter, Bäcker and Vogt (2009) covering the many aspects of distance education revealed that 16% of the papers included in the review (N=695) examined learner characteristics.

³⁸Olaf Zawacki (2001). Zum Verhältnis von Online Lehre und Fernstudium: <http://www.c3i.uni-oldenburg.de/publikationen/gmw01.pdf> [22.10.2014]

Learner characteristics, expectations and needs

In the discussion about ‘non-traditional students’ a lot of literature is available on how this target group can be defined within the German context: see for example Banscherus and Spexard (2012) or Teichler and Wolter (2004). The share of this group in German HE is rather small (4% in 2008). Nevertheless, the following aspects are often mentioned when describing this target group: ‘delayed enrolment in post-secondary education, attended part time, financially independent, worked full-time while enrolled, had dependants other than a spouse, was a single parent, did not obtain a standard high school diploma’ (Horn and Carroll, 1996, p. 2). A fairly recent study at three German universities revealed the following socio-economic facts about students in Germany:

Figure 3: Survey of undergraduate students at three conventional German universities (N=3,687) (Wilkesmann, Virgillito, Bröcker and Knopp, 2012, p. 64)

	Total N=3,687	UDE N=1,300	TUD N=1,397	UOL N=990
age	22.9	22.8	22.7	23.4
proportion of women	47%	40%	45%	61%
migration background	27%	32%	31%	16%
parents without higher education degree	63%	63%	62%	66%
second chance education	10%	10%	8%	12%
without general qualification for university entrance	5%	6%	3%	8%
own children	3%	3%	3%	4%
caring for family members	7%	9%	6%	5%
apprenticeship + work experience	16% 40%	12% 36%	13% 33%	26% 53%
employed	60%	62%	60%	58%
>15 hrs/week	12%	15%	10%	8%
de-facto part-time student (< 25 hrs/week)	24%	29%	22%	18%
wish for part-time study	19%	22%	18%	15%

Many of these students from campus-based universities share characteristics with students enrolled in distance education programmes. Conversely, the students enrolled at the FernUniversität differ significantly from students at campus-based universities, as the following figure shows:

Figure 4: Socio-economic status of distance education students (FeU, 2011; N=1,681) compared with students at conventional universities (HIS, 2009; N=16,370) (Stöter, Bullen, Zawacki-Richter and v. Prümmer, 2014, p. 440)



In general, students at the FernUniversität come from 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. The most important reasons reported by students for studying at a distance at the FernUniversität was the flexibility that the distance programme offered (cited by 80-90% of students). Most of the other reasons given were closely linked to this one because all of them had to do with the students’ work or family commitments (Stöter, Bullen, Zawacki-Richter and v. Prümmer, 2014, p. 443).

Between 2004 and 2006 the drop-out rate from German universities had declined from 24% to 20% (Heublein et al, 2008). Until 2012 these rates then increased to 28%,

ranging from 5%-51% across the various programmes.³⁹ A closer look at distance education institutions reveals that their drop-out rates are similar or even higher: 70% at the FernUniversität (2010) and between 20 and 35% at private universities in the same year.⁴⁰ The high drop-out rates at institutions providing distance education may be due to the higher average age of the students. The average age for students at the FernUniversität was 34.8 years in 2010/2011 (see Stöter, Bullen, Zawacki-Richter and v. Prümmer, 2014, p. 438), while in distance education programmes in general only 29% of the participants were younger than 25 years:⁴¹

‘Older adult students are drawn to distance education because of the need to balance career, family, and continuing education responsibilities conveniently, effectively, and efficiently. When contemporary technologies are integrated into the educational environment, the lack of familiarity with these tools creates barriers to learning. They need clear paths of communication available especially when social inclusion is limited by the online format. These ‘non-traditional’ adult students have competing priorities and struggle with balancing family responsibilities, job obligations, and commitment to the program.’ (Tanner, 2007, Abstract)⁴²

Regarding the usage of new media, Zawacki-Richter (forthcoming) states that younger students prefer these tools for recreational use rather than for their lectures, whereas ‘non-traditional’ students use an array of specific tools specifically for study purposes. These findings are in line with some of the results of the reports by Schulmeister (2009), who found that these older students preferred a moderate implementation of tools, which are explicitly used to enhance their lectures.

Another aspect of learner characteristics analysed in various studies is motivation. In particular, students’ motivation and orientation patterns play an important role when it comes to the acceptance of digital learning tools. It is clear that students with a practical orientation and a focus on career opportunities value digital learning formats highly. However, it is also clear that being familiar with digital learning formats (and

³⁹ <http://www.spiegel.de/unispiegel/studium/studienabbruch-jeder-vierte-bachelorstudent-bricht-studium-ab-a-971349.html> [18.10.2014]

⁴⁰ Drop-out rates in distance education: <http://www.fernstudium-net.de/abbrecherquote-bei-fernstudien-weiterhin-hoch.html> [21.10.2014]

⁴¹ Participants’ age in 2012, p. 21:

http://fdlmedia.istis.de/files/Fernunterrichtsstatistik/FDL_Fernunterrichtsstatistik_2012.pdf [19.10.2014]

⁴² Tanner (2007): <http://dl.acm.org/citation.cfm?id=1535473> [22.10.2014]

therefore having the skill to use them and to estimate their benefits) significantly and immediately increases the assessment of their importance (Mertens, Stöter and Zawacki-Richter, 2014).

Formal barriers regarding access to higher education

The literature names various barriers a student will encounter when planning to enrol in a university programme. This is especially true for campus-based universities, but to some degree also for distance education institutions. **Institutional Access Barriers** can be: lack of equipment and support, scheduling, resource availability, programme costs, instructional concerns and/or technical assistance, while **Student Access Barriers** can be: costs and motivators, feedback and teacher contact, student support and services, alienation and isolation and/or lack of experience/training.⁴³

In the German higher education system, the major barriers are a lack of adult-adjusted programmes and/or specific support structures for adult students, especially formal regulations. Until 2010 about 95% of all new entrants to the higher education sector were in possession of the general entrance qualification (Abitur), including those with a degree from one of the second educational route institutions (2.1%). In the Fachhochschulen sector about 55% had the Abitur and another 35% came from vocational schools (e.g. Fachoberschule). Only 0.6% of all new entrants to universities came via the third educational route, which was the only other way to get into HE before new regulations like Studieren ohne Abitur were in place (Wolter, 2012).

⁴³ Barriers in HE: <http://scholar.lib.vt.edu/ejournals/JITE/v40n1/zirkle.html> [21.10.2014]

Conclusion: Advancement through education: opening the higher education systems

In order to answer the question outlined at the beginning of this case study, a few aspects of current developments will be summarized in key words:

Positive developments:

- Opening HE to new target groups through new regulations since 2009, so that examinations other than the Abitur can permit enrolment in a study programme (Studieren ohne Abitur)
- Recognition of prior learning has been addressed since 2002. Up to 50% of a study programme can be recognized, if competencies acquired outside the higher education system are verifiable (ANKOM - Anrechnung beruflicher Kompetenzen auf Hochschulstudiengänge)
- Development of student support facilities especially for adult learners/'non-traditional' students interested in HE and seeking information and preparatory courses⁴⁴
- Development of programmes for adult learners in blended learning designs (Aufstieg durch Bildung: offene Hochschulen) at campus-based universities and universities of applied science

⁴⁴ Service support centre lower saxony: <http://www.offene-hochschule-niedersachsen.de/> [23.20.2014]

Further developments which need to take place:

- Further opening of HE to all people interested in studying⁴⁵ (Open University Germany?)
- Implementation of distance education programmes at campus-based universities
- Development of adult learner support centres at all HE institutions
- Increasing social mobility (Schulmeister, 2013, p. 20)
- Adjusting study programmes to (adult) learners' needs

The opening of the universities in Germany is mainly driven by national authorities, which support the HE institutions through various projects. Although the institutions value the opening itself, they lack the resources to develop specific programmes and can only do this within a funded project. These projects mainly address adult learners' needs. In the years to come a number of universities will have developed continuing education programmes (Aufstieg durch Bildung: offene Hochschulen) and adult students will have the opportunity to study in a format suited to their needs, although these courses will carry significant fees. The challenge will be to learn from the processes within these continuing education programmes so as to enrich traditional study as well. Nevertheless, other challenges still need to be addressed:

'Most of the political stakeholders agree at least mematically with the strategy for implementing lifelong learning structures in higher education. However, it seems that the general political insight into the necessity of an open access policy has made more progress than the acceptance by and the implementation activities of most of the higher education institutions. This discrepancy has resulted in the still very low level of participation. It is fair to say that the structure of access in German higher education continues to be very Abitur-centered, and non-traditional access routes have played only a very marginal role up to now' (Wolter, 2013, p. 54).

⁴⁵ Kreplin, Seehagen-Marx & Engelhardt (2013, p. 5):
<http://13t.tugraz.at/index.php/LehrbuchEbner10/article/view/95> [19.10.2014]

References

Allmann, B. 2004. *Lernen im Fernunterricht - Eine Untersuchung zur Akzeptanz von fernunterrichtsrelevanten Größen am Beispiel der Fernlehrgänge der BSA-Akademie*. Dissertation zur Erlangung des Grades eines Doktors der Philosophie. Philosophisch Fakultät der Universität des Saarlandes. Available at: <http://scidok.sulb.uni-saarland.de/volltexte/2005/424/pdf/Allmann.pdf> [13.10.2014]

Baker, D. P and Lenhardt, G. 2008. The Institutional Crisis of the German Research University. *Higher Education Policy* Vol. 21, p. 49-64.

Banscherus, U. and Spexard, A. 2012. Country Report Germany. LOT 3: OPENING HIGHER EDUCATION TO ADULTS Contract: EAC 2012-0074. Appendix G - Country Reports. Available at: http://ec.europa.eu/education/library/study/2012/adult-learning-g_en.pdf [15.10.2014]

Hanft, A. (with M. Knust) (eds). 2009. *Continuing Higher Education and Lifelong Learning. An international comparative study on structures, organization and provisions*. Heidelberg, London, New York.

Heublein, U., Schmelzer, R. and Sommer, D. 2008. *Die Entwicklung der Studienabbruchquote an den deutschen Hochschulen: Ergebnisse einer Berechnung des Studienabbruchs auf der Basis des Absolventenjahrgangs 2006*. Hannover, Hochschul-Informations-System GmbH.

Holm, P. D. J.-M. 2013. Fernstudium und lebenslanges Lernen. A. Pappmehl and H. J. Tümmers (eds), *Die Arbeitswelt im 21. Jahrhundert* (p. 107-124). Springer Fachmedien Wiesbaden. Available at: http://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-658-01416-2_8 [20.10.2014]

Horn, L. J. and Carroll, C. D. 1996. *Nontraditional Undergraduates: Trends in Enrolment from 1986 to 1992 and Persistence and Attainment among 1989-90 Beginning Postsecondary Students. Postsecondary Education Descriptive Analysis Reports. Statistical Analysis Report*. Washington D.C.: National Center for Education Statistics.

Kappel, H. H., Lehmann, B. and Loeper, J. 2002. *Distance Education at Conventional Universities in Germany*. Available at:
<http://www.irrodl.org/index.php/irrodl/article/view/62/127#1> [19.10.2014]

Kleimann, B. 2008. *Kapazitätseffekte von E-Learning an deutschen Hochschulen. Konzeptionelle Überlegungen – Szenarien – Modellrechnungen*. HIS: Forum Hochschule 6 | 2008. Available at: http://www.his-he.de/pdf/pub_fh/fh-200806.pdf [14.10.2014]

Klumpp, M. and Rybnikowa, I. 2010. *Differenzierte Studienformen: Eine empirische Forschungserhebung in Deutschland*. Bertelsmann, W.

Kreplin, B., Seehagen-Marx, H. and Engelhardt, N. 2013. *Fernstudium an Hochschulen - Aus Perspektive von Lernenden und Lehrenden*. Available at:
<http://3t.tugraz.at/index.php/LehrbuchEbner10/article/view/95> [21.10.2014]

Kretschmer, S. and Stöter, J. 2014. *Weiterbildung und Lebenslanges Lernen (LLL) in Anreiz- und Steuerungssystemen – Ergebnisse einer länderübergreifenden Analyse*. Thematischer Bericht der wissenschaftlichen Begleitung des Bund- Länder-Wettbewerbs ‚Aufstieg durch Bildung: offene Hochschulen‘ (January 2014).

Mertens, A., Stöter, J. and Zawacki-Richter, O. 2014. Predictors of perceived importance and acceptance of digital delivery modes in Higher Education. *Research in Learning Technology* (2014). Available at:
<http://www.researchinlearningtechnology.net/index.php/rlt/article/view/23342/html>

Keil, R., Kerres, M. and Schulmeister, R. (eds). 2007. *eUniversity - Update Bologna*. Education Quality Forum, Band 3, p. 392. Waxmann: New York, Münster.

RANLHE. 2009. European lifelong learning project 2008-10: Access and retention: Experiences of non-traditional learners in HE. *An Overview of National Statistics on Retention and Withdrawal*. Available at: http://www.dsw.edu.pl/fileadmin/www-ranlhe/files/national_stat.pdf [20.10.2014]

Schulmeister, R. (ed.). 2013. *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]

Schulmeister, R. 2009. Studierende, Internet, E-Learning und Web 2.0. N. Apostolopoulos, H. Hoffmann, V. Mansmann and A. Schwill (eds.), *E-Learning 2009: Lernen Im Digitalen Zeitalter*, p. 129-140. Münster, Waxmann.

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

Tanner, L. 2007. *Critical Challenges and Barriers to Online Learning- Nontraditional Adult Students in a Nontraditional Teacher Licensing Program*. Saarbrücken/Germany, VDM Verlag.

Teichler, U. And Wolter, A. 2004. Zugangswege und Studienangebote für nicht-traditionelle Studierende. *Die Hochschule*, Vol. 2, p. 64-80.

Wilkesmann, U., Virgillito, A., Bröcker, T. and Knopp, L. 2012. Abweichungen vom Bild der Normalstudierenden – was erwarten Studierende? M. Kerres, A. Hanft, U.

Wilkesmann and K. Wolff-Bendik (eds), *Studium 2020: Positionen und Perspektiven zum Lebenslangen Lernen an Hochschulen*, p. 64). Münster, Waxmann.

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

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

Zawacki-Richter, O., Bäcker, E. M. and Vogt, S. 2009. Review of distance education research (2000 to 2008): Analysis of research areas, methods, and authorship patterns. *International Review of Research in Open and Distance Learning*, Vol. 10, No. 6, p. 21-50.

Zirkle, C. 2002. *Identification of Distance Education Barriers for Trade and Industrial Teacher Education*. The Ohio State University Journal of Industrial Teacher Education (JITE). Available at:

<http://scholar.lib.vt.edu/ejournals/JITE/v40n1/zirkle.html> [13.10.2014]