

MegaTrends in e-Learning Provision Report on Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and Czech Republic

Estonia

The establishment of the necessary infrastructure for open and distance education started in Estonia in 1994. By now Estonian universities are well prepared for distance education: a lot of experts who are familiar with educational concepts, good contacts with universities, distance education centres and research centres in other countries, co-operation between Estonian universities.

The statistics for July 2006 show that there are just over 1000 e-courses on offer in Estonian universities. Annual growth is expected to be about 20%. One third of the total numbers of students has participated in at least one online course. However, this is important to note that large majority of these courses are offered in a blended form as support to ordinary face to face sessions. Distance education programmes are offered mostly by the Open University offices within traditional universities in Estonia. There are currently no programmes in distance education that can be fully completed online. The major providers of distance education are the following:

- University of Tartu
- Tallinn University of Technology
- Tallinn University

University of Tartu

The Open University was established in 1996 to provide an opportunities for life-long learning for all those who are interested in it without causing serious disruptions in their every day lives.

The mission of the Open University is

- to improve access to education
- to diversify study opportunities
- to make the education more student-centred, taking the student's needs into greater account
- to provide high quality education under maximum flexibility, with course offerings being independent of time and place

Today the Open University is a successful hallmark of the University of Tartu, covering both [degree education](#) and [continuing education](#) programmes through distance education or other "unconventional" learning environments.

Training under the trademark of the Open University is provided by the standing faculties and colleges of the University of Tartu. The activities are co-ordinated by the Open University Office.

There are currently 135 online courses with approximately 5000 students on offer in distance education programmes.

Tallinn University of Technology

About 120 courses are currently available online in a blended form to support the studies of on-campus students. No significant online initiatives are available in distance education programmes.

Tallinn University

There are about 350 active online courses listed in the university's own learning management system IVA. Most of them are blended courses for on campus students but about 50 of the courses are offered in distance education programmes.

Latvia

Distance Education as a study form is being developed since 1993 in Latvia. A certain structure of ODL was created due to PHARE projects in the country. Universities and other higher educational institutions widely offer continuing education, different courses to update the knowledge and skills.

The main areas targeted by distance education:

- continuing education
- continuing professional development
- community education
- academic education

e-University of the University of Latvia

The University of Latvia with more than 29 thousand students (23% of Latvian higher education market) is the largest university not only in Latvia, but also largest in Baltic states. The development goal of the e-University initiative was to use ICT – to improve, diversify and extend university's services; to be more effective and efficient; to be more attractive and competitive in a local and global market.

As a result more than 300 faculty members (35% from total) from all of 13 faculties developed and used approximately 400 e-courses in WebCT environment to facilitate their face-to-face classes. Every term more than 7 thousand students were registered and used econtent to facilitate their face-to-face classes. That means that approximately 40 students at average used every of 220 e-courses in fall 2004 and every of 171 e-courses in spring 2005.

Riga Technical University Distance Education Study Centre

The Riga Technical University (RTU) Distance Education Study Centre (DESC) was founded within the framework of the PHARE "Multi-Country Co-operation in Distance Education" project. The Centre is a structural unit of RTU and was established in May 1997. The objective of the Centre is to develop distance education in Latvia using innovative applications of information and communication technologies. The Centre's mandate is to organise the development and adoption of distance learning courses as well as the delivery of courses, involving academic staff from RTU and other Latvian higher education establishments. Its target users are both adults who wish to develop basic skills and eLearning professionals. The Centre trains about 800 people annually, who obtain an RTU certificate at the end of their studies. Currently the centre has 279 courses with 5853 students listed in their learning management system.

Lithuania

The Governmental Programme Information Technologies for Science and Studies (ITMS) 2001-2006 concerns important spheres of the information society - science and studies, and includes the principal modes of their computerisation. The main goals of the ITMS programme are the following:

1. Concentration of data on science and studies, and its employment in activities of different institutions for representation of the Lithuanian science and studies in the global computer networks.
2. Assistance to scientists, teachers and students in obtaining the information.
3. Use of information technologies in education and training of the population.

The ITMS programme consists of three basic and closely linked sub-programmes, dealing with the formation of following systems:

- Development of Distance Education in Lithuania (LieDM).
- Lithuanian Academic Libraries Network (LABT).
- Lithuanian Science and Studies Information System (LieMSIS).

In the process of its implementation, the ITMS programme will be supplemented with new sub-programmes.

Development of Distance Education in Lithuania (LieDM) sub-programme executes following priorities:

- Co-operation among higher education institutions in distance education development.
- Higher education infrastructure based on modern telecommunications, information, and video conference technologies.
- Virtual universities and enhancement of eLearning.
- Lithuanian distance education system.

Research on eLearning carried out under the sub programme is focused on specific areas:

- Methodological research on organisation of studies and preparation of courses in the synchronous distance learning systems.
- Educational institutions in distance education development.

The Distance Education Council of Lithuania was formed under the Ministry of Education and Science. Main goal of the State Programme of Distance Education Development, adopted on 14 August 2001, is to increase possibilities for adults to attain the academic and professional qualifications, develop creativity and skills. The development of distance education will ensure universal access to educational services, and increase educational possibilities of the rural population.

Kaunas University of Technology Distance Education Centre

Distance Education Centre was established at Kaunas University of Technology in 1996. Mission of the Centre is to promote and develop higher and further education system supported by information communication technologies. Distance Education Centre (DEC) at Kaunas University of Technology aims at improving the quality of distance education services with respect to a demand for education services in the region and regional priorities. DEC has a good quality learning infrastructure and tutors for DE purposes. Distance education Centre has all in all 2 Master Degree programmes, 1 vocational 1 year programme for the teachers, 108 distance education modules (4 credits) and around 15 distance education vocational training courses (2 credits). Approximately 12 000 students are registered students. Currently the Distance Education Centre has 55 fully online courses with 3500 students.

Main Research Areas:

- The Centre aims at improving the quality of distance education services with respect to a demand for education services in the region and regional priorities. To accomplish these aims the Centre:
- collects and disseminates information about distance education events, projects and methods in order to ensure distance education efficiency;
- explores regional supply and demand for studies and courses in the field of re-qualification, vocational education, high and higher education;
- collaborates with public information providers and disseminators, other institutions and enterprises, persons concerned;
- organizes distance education courses, carries out efficiency researches and other applied distance education researches in regional study and study support centres, other institutions;
- creates and updates database of open and distance education courses;
- while organizing competitions, provides regional study institutions with a possibility to take part in projects developed by the Centre and Lithuanian Distance Education Study Centre;
- organizes workshops, seminars, conferences for distance education tutors and organizers;
- takes care of the preparation, adaptation and improvement of distance education programs;

- disseminates information about distance education development in the world, Europe, Lithuania;
- carries out researches in the field of distance education organization, management and academic affairs;
- informs University, Lithuanian Distance Education Study Centre and other partners about significant distance education events;
- takes part in the development and management of the videoconferencing network.

Lithuanian Distance Education Network

Lithuanian distance education network is founded in consonance with program "Information Technologies for Education and Training (2001-2006)" (further termed as ITMiS) supported by the dictate of Education Minister No 115 for the date of January 30, 2001. Program consists of three main interrelated parts - Lithuanian Information Systems for Education and Training (LieMSIS), Lithuanian Distance Education Network (LieDM) and Subprograms for Development of Lithuanian Academic Library Network (LABT).

The objective is to generate and coordinate higher education studies and continuous training system based on information and telecommunication technologies in order to ensure Lithuania developing features of the information society.

LieDM in 2005:

- 9 MSc study programs are available.
- Over 20 000 students in 2004 have studied in the separate courses using LieDM recourses.

Poland

- Distance Learning Centre at Warsaw University of Technology www.okno.pw.edu.pl
- Open and Multimedia Education Centre at Warsaw University www.come.uw.edu.pl Courses offered include: English courses in Survival Polish, Social Change in Poland, English for Conferences and Polish courses in Evaluation in Education and Motivation Psychology
- Distance Education Study Centre at AGH - University of Science and Technology www.oen.agh.edu.pl
- Polish Virtual University (PUW) - joint project of Maria Curie-Skłodowska University in Lublin and Academy of Humanities and Economics in Lodz www.puw.pl. Courses offered include: Sales techniques, Negotiations, How to enter and be active on labour market, Bases of Interpersonal Communication, Polish Language and Culture, Psychology of colour in selling, Information Technology in Teaching, Computers in educational projects, The Internet as a source of school knowledge, Multimedia in a classroom, Business Information Systems, Modern Art History Seminar, Fine Arts History Seminar, Information Systems of the European Union.
- National Bank of Poland (NBP) www.nbpportal.pl offers, free of charge, the 4 following e-learning courses: "Economy around us", "Euro is approaching", "Financial analysis" and "Credits". This portal was launched in November 2003 but it has already ranked among the most popular educational portals in Poland.

Warsaw University Centre for Open and Multimedia Education

Center for Open and Multimedia Education (COME UW) is an independent unit of Warsaw University established in order to support, promote, and organize open and distance education.

COME carries out research on the utilization of modern technology in education, increasing the efficiency of instruction and enhancing the motivation of all students from all geographic and socio-economic backgrounds. Specifically, COME focuses on devising more practical methods of teaching with particular emphasis on those that make use of new information technology.

AGH University of Science and Technology

18.11.2004 Distance Education Study Centre became a Centre of Excellence in e-Learning "CeL"

Centres of Excellence are scientific units conducting research in international cooperation, especially within European Union programmes, with the aim to

develop knowledge in the fields which has been recognized as priority for the economy and the policy of the state. It applies first and foremost to the following fields:

- health and life
- energy, ecology, new materials
- information and communication technology

The aims of the Centre of Excellence in e-Learning "CeL" are:

- conducting scientific research in the field of e-learning
- maintaining contacts with similar centres at home and abroad, as well as with international organizations dealing with the same issue,
- cooperation with enterprises and administration
- lifelong learning
- analyzing effectiveness of e-learning methods

Polish Virtual Univesity

Polish Virtual University (PUW) is a joint project of Maria Curie-Sklodowska University in Lublin and Academy of Humanities and Economics in Lodz.

PUW offers study programmes and extension courses over the Internet. The task is to support traditional lectures and trainings as well as promote modern teaching methods.

PUW is a competence centre for methodology, technology and organisation of eLearning. PUW has the capacity to provide state-of-the-art information technologies and methodological support to all interested institutions, especially to other Universities and Colleges.

Czech Republic

At the beginning of the 1990s, higher education institutions in the Czech Republic gradually learned about the techniques used in distance education. The main reason behind this process was the ever increasing demand for this type of studies on the part of applicants. In the Czech Republic there are no plans to establish an independent open university of the kind that exists in some countries in Western Europe. The trend is to provide distance education simultaneously with full-time programmes, i.e. to develop a kind of “dual” higher education institutions in this respect.

Distance education is based on a system of controlled self-study and requires that the educational institution should have very good technical facilities. This demands a relatively large initial investment in the development of study aids of high quality, in distance study centre facilities and in the training of educational, administrative and other staff. For these reasons, the development of distance education in the Czech Republic has been progressing only slowly.

A major contribution to the development of distance education in the Czech Republic was supported by the EU by means of the Phare Programme – specifically through a multi-country project completed in 1999. Its main outcomes included the establishment of the quite well equipped (technical equipment, Internet access, distance education library) National Centre for Distance Education (NCDE) and four local centres for distance learning (Prague, Liberec, Brno and Olomouc). They form a basis of the distance education network in the Czech Republic. First steps in terms of collaboration with the European distance education network have been taken and support for further development is expected as part of the state long-term.

The Centre for Higher Education Studies

The Centre for Higher Education Studies (CHES) is formed by four departments. Its major task is to conduct research into higher education (Research Department). However it also performs other tasks aiming to make use of the research results. These concern open and distance education (the National Centre for Distance Education), the information about recognition and higher education in the Czech Republic and, where applicable, in other countries (the Centre for Equivalence of Documents about Education Czech ENIC/NARIC), and implementation of European Union programmes in education (the National Agency for Educational Programmes of the European Union – the Socrates programme).