

BOLDIC – LATVIA REPORT OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING IN LATVIA

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I Country Profile

1.1. Size and Population

Latvia is a member of the Council of Europe and an associate member state of the EU. Both the EU and NATO membership were the strategic goals of Latvian foreign policy since regaining independence in 1991. This goal is reached and in 2004 Latvia is becoming member of NATO and EU. Main data on Latvia provided here are based on [1].

Latvia is located in Northeast Europe, at the coast of Baltic Sea. Country area is 64589 square km. Latvia shares a border with Estonia, Lithuania, Russia and Belarus. Population of Latvia is 2,424,150 (in 2000) distributed among urban and rural in proportion 69% to 31%. Capital city is Riga with 788,283 inhabitants (Jan, 2000).

Traditionally there were many ethnic groups living in Latvia, but after intense migration during the Soviet occupation situation is now critical for Latvians. As from data in 2000 there are: Latvians – 55.8 %, Russians - 32.3%, Belorussians – 3.9%, Ukrainians – 2.9%, Poles 2.2% Lithuanians – 1.3 %, Jews - 0.3%, others – 1.5%. Just to mention that in 7 largest cities Latvian population is a minority. In capital city Riga Latvians are 37%.

Main religions in Latvia are Lutheran, Roman Catholic, and Greek orthodox

Official language is **Latvian**. Latvian language is neither Slavonic nor Finno-Ugrian. It is an Indo-European language, together with the Lithuanian language it falls into the Baltic language group.

Local currency is Lats, worth 1.54 Euro (you pay 1.54 EURO for 1 Lats). GDP (*per capita*, 1999) is 2689 EUR. Inflation according to official statistics is relatively small - (Dec 1998/Dec 1997) 2.8%. Average monthly salary (Last quarter of 2000) is 156.5 Lats = 279.7 EUR

Politi Latvia is a parliamentary republic, with the *Saeima* (parliament) elected by general elections. The Saeima elects the president. The government cabinet is nominated by the leading coalition and approved by the parliament.

1.1. ICT Infrastructure in Latvia

In 1999 Government of Latvia adopted National Program Informatics as a guideline for development of ICT infrastructure in Latvia and related services. From official statistics published by Ministry of Economics of Latvia [12] there were 15.3 PC's per 100 inhabitants in Latvia (2001) compared to EU average figure 30.4. According to these data average PC usage in companies in Latvia (2001) was 46.5%, but in companies with more than 10 workers even 77%. About 35% of all computers in Latvia are belonging to households. In a study year 2001/2002 in Latvia there were in average 3.4 PC's per 100 pupils and 4.7 PC's per 100 students.

At the same time review made in Madona region of Latvia [7] shows that 59% of population never used PC. Some 24% have experience of playing games and using text editor. At the same time in age group 15-19 only 19% have never used PC. These data show large diversity and fact that Digital Divide is a problem among population.

State supported Latvian Education Informatization System (LIIS) project [9] started in 1997 and covered the whole information grid: education content, management, information services, infrastructure and user training at several levels – schools, school boards and Ministry of Education and Science. The main results of LIIS project as at 2002 have been:

- developed teaching aids are being used (workbooks, interactive software, tests etc), approx. 20% of the total amount of secondary school program can be taught using information and communication technologies,
- about 1000 sites are using school management software,

- 66% of all teachers were trained on ICT usage,
- 97% of schools have dial-up connection to the Internet in year 2002 (44% - permanent connection),
- number of pupils per computer has decreased from 67 (year 1997) to 20 (year 2002).

Similar project just for Riga city schools started in 2000. It includes provision of computer classes and training for teachers. In 2002 there was a Questionnaire distributed among teachers of Riga city schools. Answering to question ‘ ‘ Why computers still are very rarely used in teaching?’ ’ were mentioned several reasons:

44%	not enough time
36%	lack of specialized premises
44%	lack of knowledge
34%	lack of knowledge how to organize teaching in this way
44%	no motivation and stimulation (including financial)

According to recent survey made by Latvian Internet Association [8] percentage of Internet users among economically active population of Latvia reached 38% or 450000 persons in mid 2003. These last figures show fast growth but still we are well behind more advanced countries. According to dates from beginning of 2003 (same source) these figures were accordingly 26% and 310000. At the same time in Estonia the percentage of Internet users was 45% and in Lithuania 23%. According to [11] in Latvia just 2% of population is using Internet at home. In this indicator Latvia is at the last position in Europe together with Romania. It could be explained partly by high telecommunication tariffs established by monopoly Lattelekom. Hopefully this situation will change as from 2003 monopoly of Lattelekom is canceled, but still problem of high interconnection tariffs dictated by former monopoly is not solved.

II Educational and Training Structure

2.1. Overview of an Education Structure in Latvia

Education structure is well described in [1]. Education in Latvia begins at seven years of age. The compulsory (*basic*) education lasts 9 years. The number of pupils at basic school level in the school year 2000/2001 was 344822. Upper secondary education is available both as general upper secondary education aimed mainly at preparation for university studies, and as vocational secondary education, aimed mainly at labour market. In 2000/2001 50215 students were involved in general upper secondary education and 48625 in vocational upper secondary education. Structure of education levels is shown in Fig. 1.

Higher education institutions offer academic programs leading to bachelor and master degrees, as well as professional higher education programs. The total number of students in Latvia within the recent years has changed drastically.

After a decrease from 46'000 students in 1990 to 39'000 students in 1993, a rapid growth of student number begun in 1995 which has lead Latvia to 110500 students in 2001/2002 – i.e. to more than a double of the student number compared to 1990 when Latvia gained independence. In the early 1990's, when a choice between academic and professional studies had just been introduced, most students chose academic programs to acquire bachelor and master degrees. The importance and usefulness of professional studies has been understood by the society later and that lead to a rapid increase in the number of applicants for professional study programs.

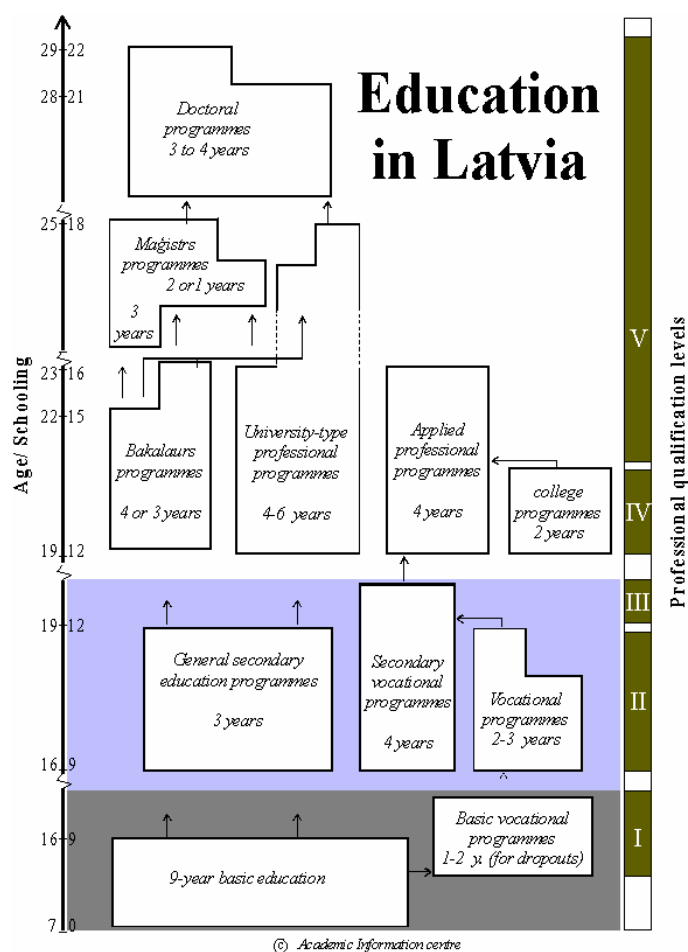


Fig. 1. Education system diagram.

Similar situation as in professional education was observed in part time studies (correspondence and evening classes). In 1993 correspondence education existed in 11 (of 18 possible) higher educational establishments in Latvia. However, in 1994 three of those institutions have stopped enrolment based on the assumption that this kind of education lacks any future. If we consider the number of correspondence students enrolled at the three largest Latvian higher educational establishments, we are confronted with the fact that the amount has more than halved within a few years. In 1988 correspondence students made up 28% of the total number of students, while in 1993 they were only 9%. As after 1993 number of students enrolling higher educational institutions started to raise the same happened in part time education. In 1996 percentage share of correspondence students in total number increased to 26%. Now part time students make up of about 40% of all students in higher education. Adult education in Latvia has long traditions. Very popular were Folkschools, Folk Universities and learning circles. During the Soviet occupation all these traditions found some kind of expression in education formats existing in that time. After 1990 free organisational forms of adult education were restored in Latvia. Today adult education has several organisational forms. These are evening classes, correspondence education and continuing education courses at universities, other higher, secondary and professional education institutions. There are also adult education centres offering general education courses, courses for professional retraining and courses of public interest. Adult education centres are very diverse. There are centres organised by State

Department for Employment, Municipality Training Centres, Trade Union Training Centres, Entrepreneurship Support Centres, Agriculture Consulting Centres, NGO Training Centres and many more. There are also private training centres, Folkschools, Folk Universities and Adult Education Centres organised under the umbrella of Latvian Association of Adult Education [7]. This organisation has extensive contacts with adult education associations in Nordic Countries, Germany, UK and other countries. They are participation in international projects supported by several EU programmes.

Adult education courses and programmes are almost 100% in face-to-face. In recent years new pedagogical approaches are being gradually introduced through international projects. At the same time ODL (Distance Learning) philosophy and methodology is not well accepted in traditional adult education.

2.2. Legislation in the Field of Education and ODL

Law on Education (1991) was one of the first laws adopted upon the restoration of independence. It introduced a number of substantial changes and oriented education in Latvia in the direction many educational systems are currently developing in Europe and beyond. The Law provided autonomy to institutions of higher education. It introduced bachelor and master level as well as professional study programs instead of the 5-year diploma studies. It also opened opportunities to establish private education institutions at all levels and tuition fees. Law on Higher Education Establishments was adopted in 1995. It set the relations between the state and higher education institutions and laid down regulations for opening, closing and re-organisation of higher education institutions, institutional governance and staff selection. As well, it introduced a higher education quality assurance system in Latvia as well as the rules for recognition of foreign qualifications. The amendments to law on Higher education Establishments adopted in 2000 additionally established regulations for election of professors after the turn to one-tier system of doctoral degrees in 1998 and introduced professional bachelor and master degrees.

The 1998 Law on Education is a frame law replacing the law of 1991. This law contains definitions of all kinds and levels of education and lays down the general principles and competence of governing bodies of different levels in both governance and financing of education.

Law on General Education introduces an important new principle in general upper secondary education and came into force from September 1, 1999. Program principle is introduced which replaces the previous system where students were allowed to freely choose seven out of at least twelve subjects at upper secondary school.

Law on Professional Education, which is in force since September 1, 1999, as well, brings several important changes to that kind of education, which prepares students to the world of work. The main principles introduced by this law are the following. It legislates involvement of social partners in formulating occupational standards, drawing up education programmes and assessment of students' skills. The law harmonises vocational education levels in Latvia with the five-level classification of vocational qualifications, used in the EU. It provides legal basis for upgrading of the existing post-secondary vocational training programmes to first-stage higher professional education programmes.

Law on Adult Education is still not accepted. Such law is mentioned already in the Law on Education accepted in 1998. Law on Adult Education was developed in 1999 but is still waiting for acceptance.

ODL or "talmaciba" in Latvian is just mentioned in the Law on Education as a sub-form of correspondence education ("neklatiene" in Latvian) with specially structured study materials, individual pace of study and specific organisation of evaluation of achievements as well as

application of electronic communication and other technologies. No study support is mentioned in relation to ODL.

Statistical review on usage of e-learning in Latvia [11] show that only 9% of employed population use e-learning in work related learning compared to 15% average in EU.

This situation can be explained as a result of low level of awareness on adult education, lifelong learning and ODL among top political, administrative and academic personnel.

2.3. Financing of Education in Latvia

The State budget allocated for education in 1999 was 7.2% of GDP, making 262.7 million Lats (412 Meuro) or 15.1% of the Total State budget spending. Although the share of education funding in both GDP and in State budget is appreciable, a need for more funds is felt at all kinds and levels of education.

Financing of different kinds and levels of education is organised in different ways. Local governments own general education schools at both primary and secondary levels. At these schools the wages of teaching staff are allocated as state donations while the maintenance and infrastructure costs are covered through the local government budgets.

As regards the secondary vocational education sector, the schools are owned by the State. It is foreseen to pass them over to local governments after the regional reform is completed. So far the schools remain State-owned and they are financed through four different ministries – Ministry of education and Science, Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Welfare and Ministry of Culture. The total budget of vocational education sector in 2000 was 30.0 million Lats or 11% of the whole education budget.

In 2000 there were 17 State and one municipal higher education institutions. The State budget allocated for higher education in 1999 was 25.1 million Lats and the total higher education budget (including student social support) was 58.1 million Lats (1.5% of GDP). The Council of Higher Education sets the number of State-funded study places in each field of studies.

Tuition fees are charged to these students who meet the entrance requirements but fail to be admitted to the state-financed places, if they wish to study covering tuition fees themselves.

As well, there are 14 private higher education institutions, which charge tuition fees from their students. All-in-all, in the academic year 2000/2001 state financed the studies of 34129 students and 67141 more students studied, covering their study fees themselves.

All kinds of part time studies (ODL, correspondence, evening classes, adult education courses) are not financially supported by state. It means that there are no state-financed study places. Even more, those students choosing part time studies are not entitled to receive study or social loans from the state.

About 20 million Lats (30 MEuro) from the state budget are annually devoted to adult education. These are mainly grants for training of unemployed in vocational further education but still just 37% of demand for retraining is satisfied [2]. According to data from interviews [11] 41% of adults in Latvia had participating (in last 4 weeks) in Lifelong Learning courses compared to EU average figure 41%. At the same time 97% of companies in some way provide or support training of their employees. Larger companies (Lattelekom, Latvian Railway, Latvenergo etc.) have their own training centres, smaller ones send employees to courses. Besides state supported retraining and company supported one, many people pay for education from their own resources.

There is given very little financial support for ODL development at the state level. Much more is invested in development of ODL in Latvia by universities themselves and from international projects. ODL courses are paid by learners themselves or fee is covered from some project funds at the stage of course piloting. Most of ODL course development is also covered from local and international projects. First ODL courses were developed in the framework of Phare

Multi-Country Programme for Distance Education. These courses are still running and mentioned by experts as those of good quality.

2.4. Development of Distance Education and National Policy

Correspondence education has long traditions in Latvia and it was a part of the USSR educational system. An exact translation of the term from Latvian ‘‘neklatiene’’ is ‘non-face-to-face’. If we look in the essence then it is equivalent to English ‘correspondence education’ and is classified as the consultation model by Keegan [4]. It is based on printed study material (usually books) and consultations. It still exists in the Latvian secondary vocational and higher education system. There are enrolment examinations or qualification demands similar to those for regular students. It is impossible to study separate course just full programme is available. It is based on studies at home with assignments, which must be sent to tutors. Twice a year or in weekends students have sessions of on-campus instruction. There are some lectures on each subject, practice or laboratory work, consultations and exams.

Information about the modern, entirely different approach to distance education reached Latvia in 1992. In 1993 representatives from Latvia took part in several international conferences on the subject. At the beginning of 1994 Board of Distance Education was officially created at the Latvian Ministry of Education, Science and Culture.

Several meetings and seminars were held in Riga in October, 1993 in relation to TEMPUS proposal on development of distance education via satellite television. These were organised by professor Janerik Lundquist from the University of Linköping. Representatives from three Baltic States, Sweden and Ireland took part. Later on another satellite TV based project coordinated from Upsala University called ‘‘Baltic University’’ was launched

In 1993 feasibility study on introduction of modern distance education in Baltic States was carried out on the initiative of EDEN. The study was sponsored by the Nordic Council of Ministers. Feasibility study recognised favourable conditions for the development of distance education in Latvia and other Baltic States.

The course Distance Education Methodology with Applications, organised by University of Linköping (professor Janerik Lundquist) took place in 1994 in Latvia and other Baltic States. There were 4 seminars in the course and 53 representatives from Latvian schools and universities took part.

As first notion on modern ODL came in Latvia after attending related international conferences 1993 some policy creation was initiated. In June of 1993 a group of enthusiasts established a social board working on the promotion of distance education in Latvia. Under the Ministry of Education and Science started preparation of Distance Education Board of Latvia. Phare Multi-Country Program on Distance Education facilitated this process and in 1995 – 1996 was created a structure for ODL development in Latvia (Fig. 2).

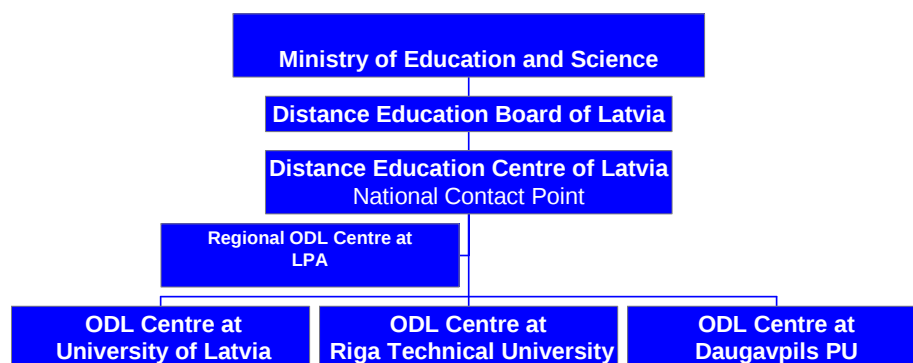


Fig. 2 ODL structure in Latvia created in Phare program.

In 1995 in the framework of Phare Program was developed ODL Development Strategic Program for 3 years. The Program was approved by ODL Board and till the end of Phare program was implemented.

In 1999 was developed next step Strategic Development Program under the title ‘‘Virtual University of Latvia’’. It was approved but not maintained with requested financial support. In 2000 this program elaborated as a project was includes in E-Latvia Program but again without financial support. In December 18, 2001 Cabinet of Ministers (Government) discussed this issue and delegated to Ministry of Education and Science the responsibility to elaborate this project as a Concept of Virtual University.

In parallel to mentioned activities development of adult education, continuing and flexible learning is taking place in Latvia. Law on Adult education is under development for years. In several EU projects strategy of adult education for particular regions of Latvia has been elaborated based on activities of study centres providing non-formal open education for adults in traditional face-to-face format. These centres are organized in Latvian Association of Adult Education [7].

In 1998 – 1999 in the framework Tempus project Flexible Learning Strategy in Latvian Higher Education was developed and published in a booklet. It is aimed to foster development of continuing education and lifelong learning related activities in universities and other HE institutions. In next similar projects some course materials were developed and implemented in learning process.

Concluding this part we can say that there are several state level policy papers on development of ODL but these initiatives have not got appropriate financial support from the state to be implemented. It does not mean that there is no development, but it is not so fast and well coordinated as one would wish.

2.4. Cooperation in the Field of ODL

The main impact to development of ODL in Latvia was given by the Phare Program ‘‘Multi-Country Cooperation in Distance Education’’. This program created conditions for development of local and international cooperation and partnerships. In years 1995-1999 the situation in distance education in Latvia has changed beyond recognition. In 1995 many education experts and managers in Latvia had a vague idea of what distance education is. Before Phare Program there were no institutions in Latvia offering modern distance education courses. Now, besides five distance education centres established with the support of the Phare Programme on Multi-Country Cooperation in Distance Education , there are several institutions offering distance education courses, just to mention few – the Distance Education Study Centre of FernUniversitat Hagen in Riga, RRC College, HE Institution ‘‘Turiba’’. First Phare supported Study Centres at the universities were created in 1996. At the same time several private and other organisations opened Open Distance Learning (ODL) units and started distance courses. Phare Programme was completed in September 1999. Main aims of this Programme were reached:

- ODL infrastructure consisting of five operational centres (3 study centres at the universities) has been created and equipped in Latvia,
- awareness on ODL has been raised tremendously,
- over 200 people have been trained in the basics of distance learning and the main staff of ODL centres even in details,
- 27 ODL course modules in areas of strategic relevance to the socio-economic developments were developed and piloted (6 of them with participation of Latvian institutions),
- long-term strategy for ODL in Latvia was developed,

- international co-operation established.

At the end of the Phare Program one can conclude that it's role in development of ODL in Latvia could not be over-evaluated. Now, besides ODL centres established with the support of the Phare Program, there are 15 institutions offering ODL courses and program. Increasing number of articles, broadcast programs, promotional events and ODL related projects is an evidence of successful developments in Latvia. Latvian term for ODL "talmaciba" is very widely used and even misused in the country.

In five years situation in distance education in Latvia has changed beyond recognition. In 1995 many education experts and managers in Latvia had a vague idea of what distance learning is. Now key staff of the some educational institutions recognizes ODL and e-learning as a major tool for development.

At the same time we have to stress that development of ODL and e-learning in secondary and traditional adult education institutions is very slow. But even there could be mentioned good examples.

Regional e-development programs are being carried out in a number of regions. The most successful e-learning development program is going on in Livani District [14] in cooperation of local Business Support Centre with Distance Education Study Centre of RTU. In year 2000 the first e-learning group with 15 participants was organized there. At the end 12 participants completed the business course and now 3 SMEs are running based on the business plans developed during this course. In May 2002 new Computer Classroom and videoconference facilities were set up in Livani. Based on these facilities 4 e-learning courses were provided. Altogether 165 participants completed the courses "Business planning for open markets", "IT for beginners", "IT for users", "Technical Communication". The next project was accepted for craft development. It included the training of 240 participants in 6 e-learning courses (the courses on e-commerce and English language were added to previous ones). Another activity of the project is the development of the knowledge repository in Internet, exploiting the results of 5th Framework project "Hyper-knowledge".

As an example of university-industry co-operation in e-learning should be mentioned cooperation of Latvian Mobile Telephone with RTU Distance Education Study Centre [14]. In spring 2002 the Latvian Mobile Telephone Company "Latvijas Mobilais Telefons" sponsored a large-scale project. More than 4500 Interactive Multimedia CD-ROMs together with printed learning materials were presented (packages sent by surface mail) to all 1247 Latvian schools. A large campaign was organized involving TV, newspapers and popular journals.

III Analysis of Examples

3.1 Summary of Interviews

Significant part of information on ODL for the country Report was collected in interviews with main experts in the field. During the interviews best OLD examples were recognised for more detailed description.

For providing interviews 3 people were involved namely Ilmars Slaidins, Ilze Ivanova and Ineta Kristovska. Two of interviewers - Ilze Ivanova and Ineta Kristovska - were interviewed by Ilmars Slaidins as experts before they made interviews with other people.

Altogether 28 people being in relation to ODL have been asked to participate in interviews. Most of them had no formal education or training in ODL. Just 35 % are been trained in basics of ODL (LOLA course and other). Main organisations and Centres offering ODL and e-learning courses were covered. No one of them was from primary/secondary school group because ODL in Latvia is not used in this education level. Most of experts interviewed were from higher and continuing education field. General adult education is partly overlapping with continuing education and it was difficult to place course according to this classification.

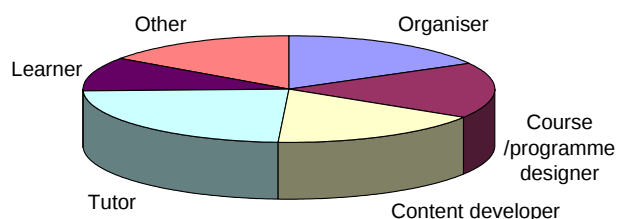
Before interview people were introduced to BOLDIC project aims and the aim of this interview. It was stressed that we are searching for the best practice examples in ODL. Project leaflet was used as an information source and distributed among these experts.

What is your involvement in ODL?

There was first offered an example of possible roles – course developer, tutor, organizer etc. Based on this principle people tried to classify their involvement in quite free format. Many of them have pointed to several roles. Distribution of the roles is the following:

ODL organizer	10
Administrator	2
Course/program designer	10
Course material/content developer	10
Course material editors	3
Tutor	14
Technology expert	3
Quality experts	2
Learners	6

Distribution of the roles of experts interviewed



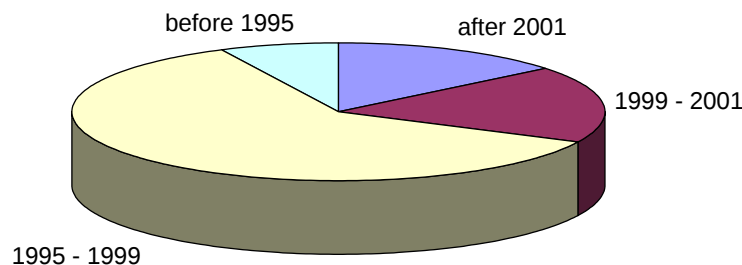
How long have you been involved in ODL?

Answers to this question have following distribution:

Before 1995	2
1995 – 1998	17
1999 – 2001	5
After 2001	4

Most of the people started ODL activities in years 1995 – 1998 when PHARE program was active.

How long being involved in ODL?



Please identify examples of “good practice” in ODL

For easier orientation two additional questions were formulated ‘Why are you highlighting this particular example?’ and ‘Why it is considered good?’. Answering to these questions most of interviewed responded to course they are involved in and tried to formulate positive features of the course. Those experts involved in LIIS Program [6] and e-University Program did not positioned themselves as involved in ODL and study resource materials developed in these programs as related to ODL.

Let us just extract some features highlighted:

- Course design relevant to target group and a good organisation/administration was stressed as an important factor to maintain quality and high level of service. Use of well designed study materials and not just text books with added self assessment questions are featured just in few cases.
- Feedback and face-to-face study support in groups and for individuals was mentioned by many experts as very important factor of good practice. It applies to courses using printed study materials, multimedia CD-ROM’s and purely on-line courses as well. As it was stressed in discussion with experts from “Turiba” offering on-line 4 year professional study program on entrepreneurship, that after 3 year experience they added face-to-face component on student request.
- Several experts came to conclusion that in most cases good courses are those developed in the projects with proper management and financial support. Much of such cases relates to Phare program and some other international programs as SOCRATES and LEONARDO.

Several projects are based on local Latvian grants (e.g. LIIS [6]) or internal organization resources (Turība, e-University, BVK).

It was already mentioned that experts interviewed in most cases describe good practice applied in the courses they are involved in. Courses from other organisations were mentioned just in few cases. It demonstrates the fact that ODL organisations and professionals in Latvia have limited contacts, that there are no professional discussion forums and cooperation efforts. Some ODL courses in Latvia are well known and mentioned by other experts more often. These are the courses widely promoted in media and in different events. Often mentioned courses in which experts are not involved themselves but know the course are the following:

- BPOM (Business Planning for open Markets) and other CD-ROM based courses from RTU were mentioned by 5 experts,
- "Turība" on-line study program on Business Administration was mentioned by 3 experts,
- International Correspondence Course was also mentioned as known course provider by 2 experts but as a positive example just by one of them.
- LIIS project courses for schools, e-University courses of University of Latvia [10], course material in Macroeconomics and tests produced by Andrejs Geske and Andris Grinfelds from University of Latvia were mentioned as a good examples just by one expert each.

Own courses mentioned by experts:

- Modern English for Baltic Adults (MEBA) ODL course based on audio cassettes and paper based materials developed in Phare program.
- "Make or Break" Business English course based on audio cassettes and paper based materials developed in Phare program.
- CANDIDUS course for teacher training developed in Phare program.
- Paper based Business Management, Accountancy, Personal Communication and other ODL courses offered by BVK (Business Management College).
- e-Business course, Professional Communication course, IT for Beginners, IT for Users and other interactive multimedia CD-ROM based courses by RTU DESC.
- ADIS course on Computer basics for Disabled developed in Socrates Minerva program.
- Course Information systems for SME's developed in LEONARDO program.

3.2 ODL Good Practice Examples

Business planning for Open Markets

BPOM (Business Planning for open Markets) [15] is a multimedia CD-ROM and Web-based learning course for 40 hours studies. Course materials are in Latvian and English. It was developed in the framework of Phare Program in 1998-1999 by Consortium of organizations including RTU DESC.

Course is meant as a basic level course in business planning for adults and university students, who are not from the specialty of Economics and Business.

Course materials consists of an interactive multimedia CD-ROM and printed workbook.

Student support is provided over the internet. First it was Lotus Notes based virtual environment created in RTU DESC, but now Blackboard LMS is used. Course materials are available also in virtual environment.

There are 3 face-to-face training and support sessions in the course. In first students are motivated for studies and trained in use of technologies. In second meeting students must present elaborated business idea. In final meeting students defend their business plan, which is a final assessment for the course.

Main concept of the course is flexible combination different formats of study materials and study support. Students can choose among paper based printed workbook and interactive multimedia CD-ROM. Study support is provided face-to-face and in virtual environment. There is a task for student group-work in virtual environment on elaboration of business idea for proposed situation, but business plan must be elaborated individually. Course is evaluated with 2 RTU credit points (3 in ECTS) and successful students receive Certificate of Riga Technical University.

"Turība" on-line study program on Business Administration

This was a first full study programme in online format in Latvia. It was designed and copy rights owned by the School of business administration Turība in 2002. Designers are Oskars Onzevs, Inese Varšlava, Dolorosa Medne, Lasma Sviķe. Content was provided by lecturers from School of business administration Turība. Courses could be found in www.studijas.lv It is professional program in Latvian for 4 year studies. There are altogether 40 study courses and 120 tests during 4 study years of studies. In all courses final examination is face-to-face. Programme covers subjects from the field of Business Administration, Advertisement administration and Financial accountancy. The graduates of Business Administration programme can enter MBA (Master Business administration) without examinations. Study materials are very interactive and there are tests, self-control questions and many examples. Study support is via e-mail or phone, online-seminars, face-to-face consultations. Main course concept is based on online study materials and study support. It provides global coverage. On demand from students face-to-face contacts are available as well. Teachers are experienced in study support, preparation of study materials, examples and self-assessment tests. Students learn themselves, but teachers assist them with the advice and consultations. Study programme is targeted to students in age group 20-45, who need professional knowledge and recognised qualification, but have no opportunity to attend regular classes. Used by also by Latvians living abroad.

3.3 Quality Assurance for ODL in Latvia

Quality issue of ODL in general is unsolved problem in country. Several experts pointed to low quality of some ODL courses. There is observed even wrong application of the term ODL in promotion of courses that do not follow any basic principles stated in ODL.

There are no legally approved procedures on ODL course and service quality evaluation. Some experts point to program licensing and accreditation procedure existing in higher education. There are also legal acts supporting this procedure. Unfortunately this system could not be applied to ODL courses and programs due to great differences in organisation of studies in comparison to traditional face-to-face format. Most of experts supported idea that rules for quality evaluation and licensing for ODL courses and programs must be created and would have legal background.

There is a printed material produced containing a checklist for quality evaluation of ODL courses. The same list of questions has been adapted to create a virtual forum for ODL course evaluation in Web. These materials are open for use but promotion is not active and even ODL experts are not using it for some reasons.

Several experts expressed awareness that ODL methodology for course design and development itself (if followed accurately) is maintaining good quality. Those who had training on ODL basics expressed this view.

It was also common opinion that good quality as a rule is obtained in ODL courses developed in international projects. It was explained in a way that project team has to follow stated rules

in a project planning to receive a grant. Another important issue is that granted financial support is covering course development quality procedures as well. These project grants are also given just to teams having appropriate expertise and technology resource. Such conditions quite often are not a case in ODL course development projects based on local resources. Among good examples of ODL courses developed in international projects are mentioned: BPOM, MEBA, CANDIDUS supported by PHARE, ADIS - Socrates Minerva, Information systems for SME's - LEONARDO.

3.3 Country-specific Issues

It was interesting to notice that experts interviewed are not well informed on activities outside their own institution. All of them with small exceptions stress that there is no legislation supporting ODL development and no state policy on ODL development.

Many institutions are aware of introduction of e-learning and/or blended learning. Even without state support they are developing systems and courses on their own resources and support from international programs. The best examples are e-learning program of "Turība" and "E-university" in the University of Latvia.

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Annexes

Annex 1. The List of Experts Interviewed

First name	Family name	Organization	Expertise areas	Telephone¹	E-mail
Aldis	Balodis	Turiba	Organiser	7622551	aldis.balodis@turiba.lv
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Velta	Vikmane	Ministry of Education and Science	Tutor	7047884	
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Annex 2. Other Experts Mentioned in the Interviews

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