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Research on student profiles – open university students developing their working life competences

In Finland, open university studies are open to everyone, and there are no entrance requirements or examinations. Students' backgrounds, objectives and academic skills consequently vary considerably. At the Open University of the University of Jyväskylä, feedback is collected yearly from students who complete a study module and order a certificate. In 2018, the response rate was 46%. The feedback questionnaire includes both quantitative and qualitative questions, and its background variables are, for example, age, gender, education and professional field. Based on the questionnaire, it is possible to define profiles for students who have completed a study module. A typical such student is a woman between 35 and 44 years of age with a master's degree. She works in the field of education and teaching and aims at developing her competences and supplementing her education.

Many of our students are thus adults and already have a master's degree and extensive work experience. Precisely students who develop their competences while employed were the focus of our study, and we aimed at identifying how open university studies meet their needs and wishes. The study mapped the students' goals, challenges and expectations from the education provider. Eight students from different subjects were interviewed in the study. Based on these interviews, four student profiles were created, each with a different orientation towards studies. We describe these profiles in more detail in our presentation.