



What is Flexible Higher Education? Reflections from a National Case-Study on Flexible Learning Pathways.

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Flexible learning

- Flexible learning: “learning and teaching is increasingly freed from the limitations of the *time, place and pace* of study.
- May include choices in relation to:
 - entry and exit points,
 - selection of learning activities,
 - assessment tasks and
 - educational resources in return for different kinds of credit and costs.” (Naidu, 2017, 269).

Flexible pathways



- **Flexible learning pathways (FLPs):**

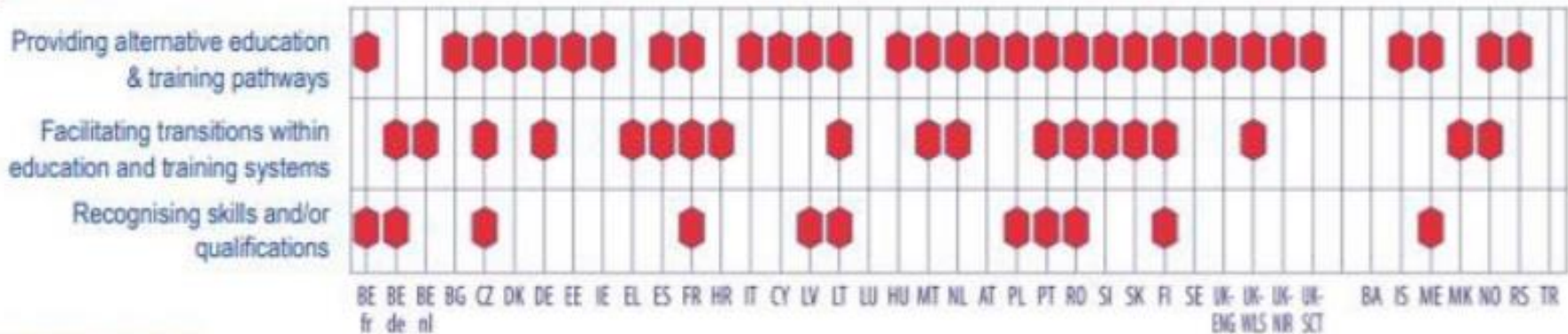
“Entry points and re-entry points at all ages and all educational levels, strengthened links between formal and non-formal structures, and recognition, validation and accreditation of the knowledge, skills and competencies acquired through non-formal and informal education” (UNESCO, 2015, p. 33).

- **Flexible educational pathways:**

*“Measures to implement flexible regimes for study programmes and to enable the **previous educational achievements** of students to be more widely recognized within the higher education system. This allows students to **transfer more easily** between institutions and study programmes as prior achievements can be utilised” (European Commission, 2015, p. 51).*

Flexible pathways in European HE

Figure 3.2: Focus of policies and measures for increasing the flexibility and permeability of education pathways, 2015/16



Source: Eurydice.

Explanatory note

Policies for increasing the flexibility and permeability of education pathways generally seek to minimise the risk of early leaving by offering students a wider choice of programmes or alternative pathways (academic, technical or vocational), as well as providing opportunities for students to change tracks or programmes which do not meet their needs. Other policies are designed to ensure a smooth transition between education levels and programmes (especially from general education to VET programmes). Measures to improve the recognition of skills and qualifications can help students progress to the next level or re-engage in education or training if they have left the system prematurely.

Benefits

- No dead-ends
 - Transferability/permeability: move from programme, levels, and systems (horizontal or vertical movement)
 - Articulation: linkages between programmes, levels, and systems to facilitate mobility
- Solution for early leavers/dropouts
- Enhance equity

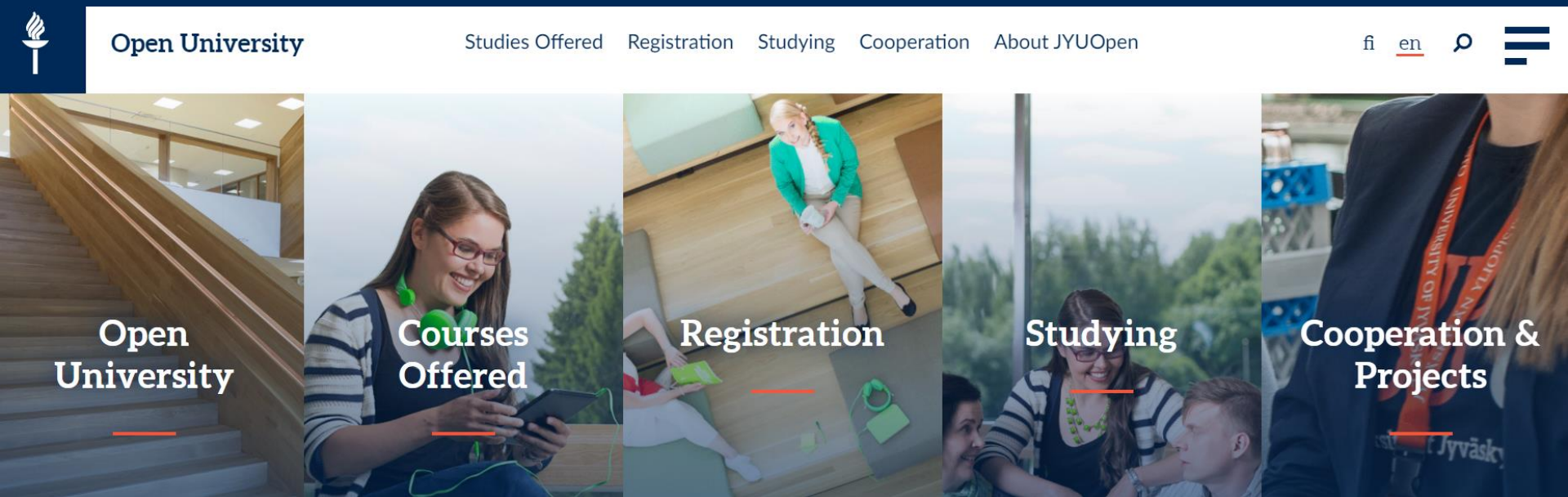


Challenges

- Inconsistent national approach to and definition of flexible pathways
- Lack of national monitoring/evaluation
- Implementing national policy objectives for flexible learning at HEIs
- Too many pathways: too complex for all stakeholders to manage, promote
- Fragmented offerings

An example: flexible pathway

- From Finnish national case study



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Stakeholders

- Policymakers: policy objectives and targets, instruments
- Institutions: policies, practices
- Quality assurance: support flexible HE (how to ensure quality in flexible HE?)
- Guidance counsellors: inform students of alternative pathways
- Student: beneficiary
- And more...

Flexible higher education = value principle?

- “It (flexible learning) is a value principle, like diversity or equality are in education and society more broadly” (Naidu, 2017, 269).
- “Flexible learning pathways are critical in ensuring that higher education systems are equitable and serve the needs of society.” (IIEP UNESCO, 2018).



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