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Flexible Learning Pathways in Higher Education

International Policy Forum
July 6-8, 2021



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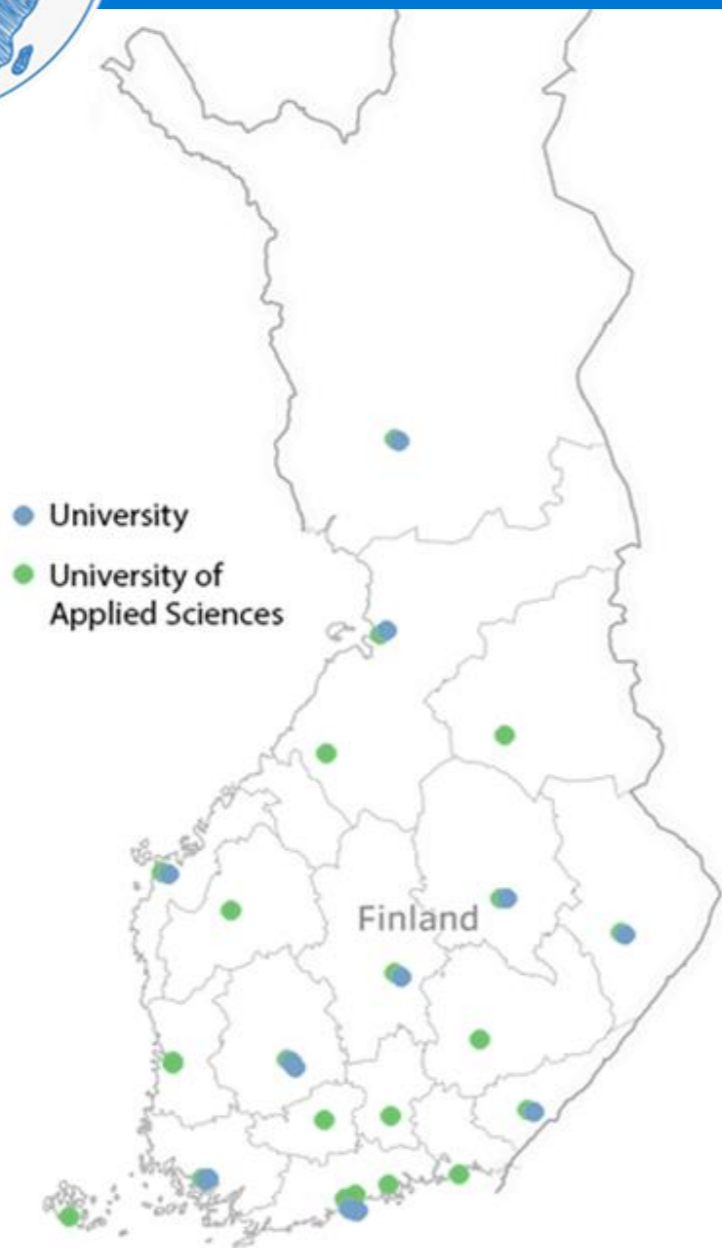
13.11.2020



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Open Studies Pathway in Finland

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Open Studies Pathway in Finland



- Context
- What are Open Studies Pathways?
- Aims
- National support
- TRY project
- Institutional perspectives
- Enablers/Challenges

Photo: Riitta Supperi/Keksi/Team Finland

Finnish Context for Flexible Learning Pathways (FLPs)

- FLPs – on policy agenda for approx. 10 years
- HE system has undergone consistent reforms = changing demands and needs of society
- Reform of student admissions = development of open studies pathway



Photo: Sakari Piippo

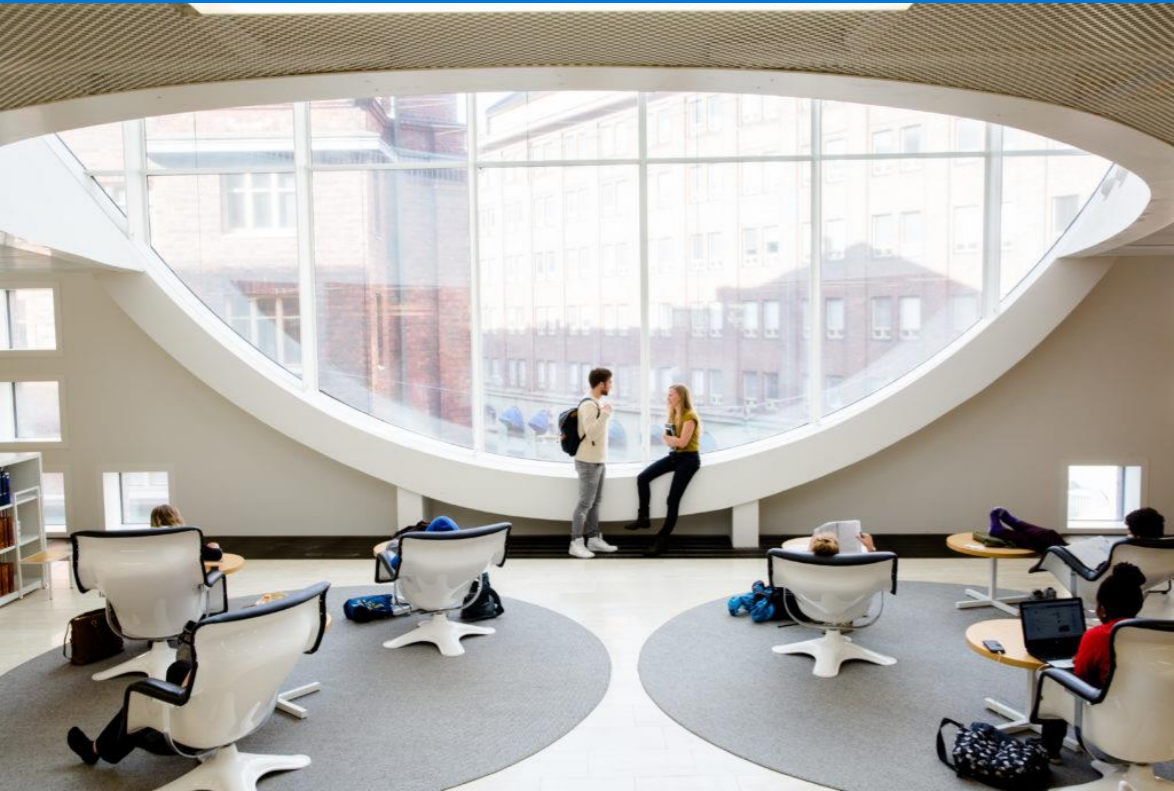


Photo: Sakari Piippo

What are Open Studies Pathways?

Open path to degree programs:

- Available to anyone
- No entrance exams
- Flexibility: modes of delivery and when courses are offered
- HEI decides on quota/criteria (courses required) needed to apply to a degree programme
- Open studies: 15-60 ECTS (each degree program/HEI requirement varies)
- Fees: 15 EUR for 1 ECTS

Open Universities and Open Universities of Applied Sciences = typically independent institutes


“The national policy is to enable several entry ways to the higher education for both young and adult applicants.”

(Ministry policy expert, in-person interview)

Aims of Open Studies Pathway

1. 'Third route' into higher education (HE)
 - Two traditional routes: student selection based on certificates and entrance exams
2. Continuous learning
 - Study units/competence modules for working life know-how

Vision of Higher Education and Research 2030



Education and Learning,
Knowledge,
Science and Technology
for the Benefit of People
and Society

National Policy Objectives Supporting Open Studies

No explicit national policy objective for open studies, but:

- Increase access to HE: over 50% of all young people (25 to 34-year olds) will complete a higher education degree by 2030.
- Flexible studies: Flexible & personalised study paths & degrees that enable lifelong learning in different life situations.

Source: *Vision of higher education and research in 2030*
(Ministry, 2017)



Photo: Ulkoministeriö

National Policy Instruments Supporting Open Studies

1. National funding: 2021-24 funding model – increased funding (9%) for continuous learning modules (including more funding based on ECTS taken in open studies)
2. Government key projects: Funding for projects to further develop HE (2016 & 2017)
 - TRY project (Toinen reitti yliopistoon; alternative path to university)

“...we aim to revise the existing Open University route so that an increasing number of applicants would be admitted to university degree studies and that the admission criteria for study options could be predicated more accurately.”
(TRY Project)

TRY (alternative path to university) Project (2018-2020)

Aim: develop the idea of open university studies as a credible application method for degree studies

- Increase number of students admitted to degrees via open studies;
- Develop routes for students and for the needs of working life;
- Develop guidance and counseling services related to open studies.

Method: Tested various path alternatives with path pilots, which were monitored from the beginning of path studies to admission.

TRY Project Results

Critical Points for Students in the Open University Path



- Three paths designed:
- Scheduled path
 - Flexible path
 - Work-life oriented path

- Service path designed:
- Communications
 - Guidance
 - Counselling

Overall increase of paths!

“...I had tried the entrance exam four times and didn’t pass. In my case, I had really poor high school grades. I was desperately trying to get into university, and this (Open University) was my last hope...”

(Open University alumna, focus group)

Case Study: University

- Open University working closely with faculties to develop courses and pathways.
- Faculties made admission decisions and created quotas.
- Guidance and counselling also included in Open University coursework.
- Still under development – time of interviews in 2019.

“...The timetable [of studies] has adapted to all of my wishes. There are no empty slots [in my studies]. The studies are progressing faster than I expected.”

(UAS student, focus group)

Case Study: University of Applied Science (UAS)



- In Bachelor's degree path, Open UAS studies is usually 30-60 ECTS; in Master's degree path, Open UAS studies is 15-30 ECTS.
- Admissions process occurs twice a year.
- After the applicant applied for a study place, the degree programme assessed their open UAS study performance and interviewed them.



Photo: Elina Manninen

Enablers

- Improved status of open studies pathway in the admissions system = positive pressure on HEIs.
- Increased funding based on open studies ECTS completion.
- Trust and cooperation between HEIs.



Photo: Elina Manninen

Challenges

- Need to further develop open studies pathway (TRY funded 2018-20).
- Fees are an obstacle for some students.
- Institutional autonomy leads to fragmented pathways quota and criteria. Not all degree programmes can be accessed via open studies.
- Limited data and research on open studies.



**Thank you
Kiitos**



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