

# Flexible Learning Pathways in UK higher education

**What can Finland learn from the UK?**

**And what can the UK learn from Finland?**

John Brennan

# Two Systems

## **Finland**

- A binary system
- Free courses
- National bodies – fund & decide
- Institutional collaboration

## **UK**

- A large and diverse system of largely autonomous universities in a competitive market.
- Courses paid for by student fees
- Vertically stratified system
- National bodies – advise

# FLP UK project – some findings

- Is there a UK HE system? Possible answers: there are 4; there are 0.
- A lot is decided at institutional levels.
- National bodies tend to ‘allow’ rather than ‘require’.
- 131 universities, with 49 created since 2000
- Over 700 ‘other providers’
- ‘Higher education’ today part of ‘Post-18 education’
- Diversity can provide and prevent flexible learning pathways

# FLP in the UK: Within and beyond institutions

- **Within**

- Admissions: Contextualised offers of places
- Teaching: Blended learning (face-to-face and online)
- Curriculum: single/multi/ inter-disciplinarity; + workplace
- Full-time and part-time

- **Beyond**

- Credit transfer arrangements between institutions
- Limited use of credit transfer: because of a) costs, b) diversity
- Market competition limits institutional collaboration
- More flexibility for international students?

# FLP UK and FLP Finland: two-way learning

## **From Finland to UK**

- Personal study plans
- Studification of work
- Universities reward for collaboration
- National Platform (Information)
- Articulation

## **From UK to Finland**

- Institutional autonomy can support innovation & diversity
- FutureLearn

# FutureLearn: supporting lifelong learning

- An organisation established by the UK Open University, now jointly owned with an Australian university
- Courses currently provided by over 80 universities, around 30 in UK
- Over 13 million students worldwide enrolled on those courses
- Teaching is online
- Courses range from 2 year masters degrees to 6 week (part-time 5 hours per week) courses to obtain microcredentials.
- Over time, micro-credentials can be accumulated to gain a degree
- Students can change what, where, when and how they study

# FLP: Some questions?

## **National bodies**

- Controlling or facilitating FLP
- Funding methods can support or limit FLP
- Providing users and suppliers with information to help them choose the right pathways at the right time

## **Institutions**

- Competition or collaboration?
- More or less autonomy? More or less diversity?
- What to learn and how to deliver it? And how to recognise/certificate it?

# Enablers and Obstacles: national differences between Finland and UK

## Finland's enablers

- Shared vision (*UK 'no'*)
- Enabling and not too restrictive legislation (*UK 'yes'*)
- Free education (*UK 'no'*)
- New funding models rewarding cross-institutional studies (*UK 'no'*)
- Trust & cooperation (*UK 'yes'*)
- Existing practices related to FLPs ( Yes)

## Finland's obstacles

- Development of continuous learning in silos (*UK 'yes'*)
- Expenses of individualisation of student selection methods (No)
- Continuous reforms & the amount of policy goals (*UK ?*)
- Better information systems needed (*UK 'yes'*)

# Message from Boris Johnson, UK prime minister

Some comments from the PM ( a few days ago)

“My message today is that at every stage of your life, this government will get you the skills you need.”

“Higher education loans will be made more flexible, allowing adults and young people to space out their study across their lifetime, and support people to retrain for jobs of the future.”