



FINNISH EDUCATION
EVALUATION CENTRE



UNIVERSITY OF JYVÄSKYLÄ
FINNISH INSTITUTE FOR
EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH

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Flexible learning pathways (FLPs) in higher education

Finnish national case study results for the
IIEP-UNESCO project

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Data for the Finnish country case study

- **Primary data: Interviews conducted in Sept.-Nov. 2019**

Levels	Inter-viewees (N)	Students (N) in focus groups
National level interviews	11 experts	
Case UAS interviews	8 experts	13 students and alumni
Case university interviews	9 experts	2 students and alumni

- **Secondary data**

- National-level statistics
- Policy, research and evaluation documents
- Complementary consultations with lawyer specialised in the higher education legislation, national ECTS expert, and expert from the Network of Universities Study Affairs Units.

Finnish case study: two main purposes

1

National purpose:

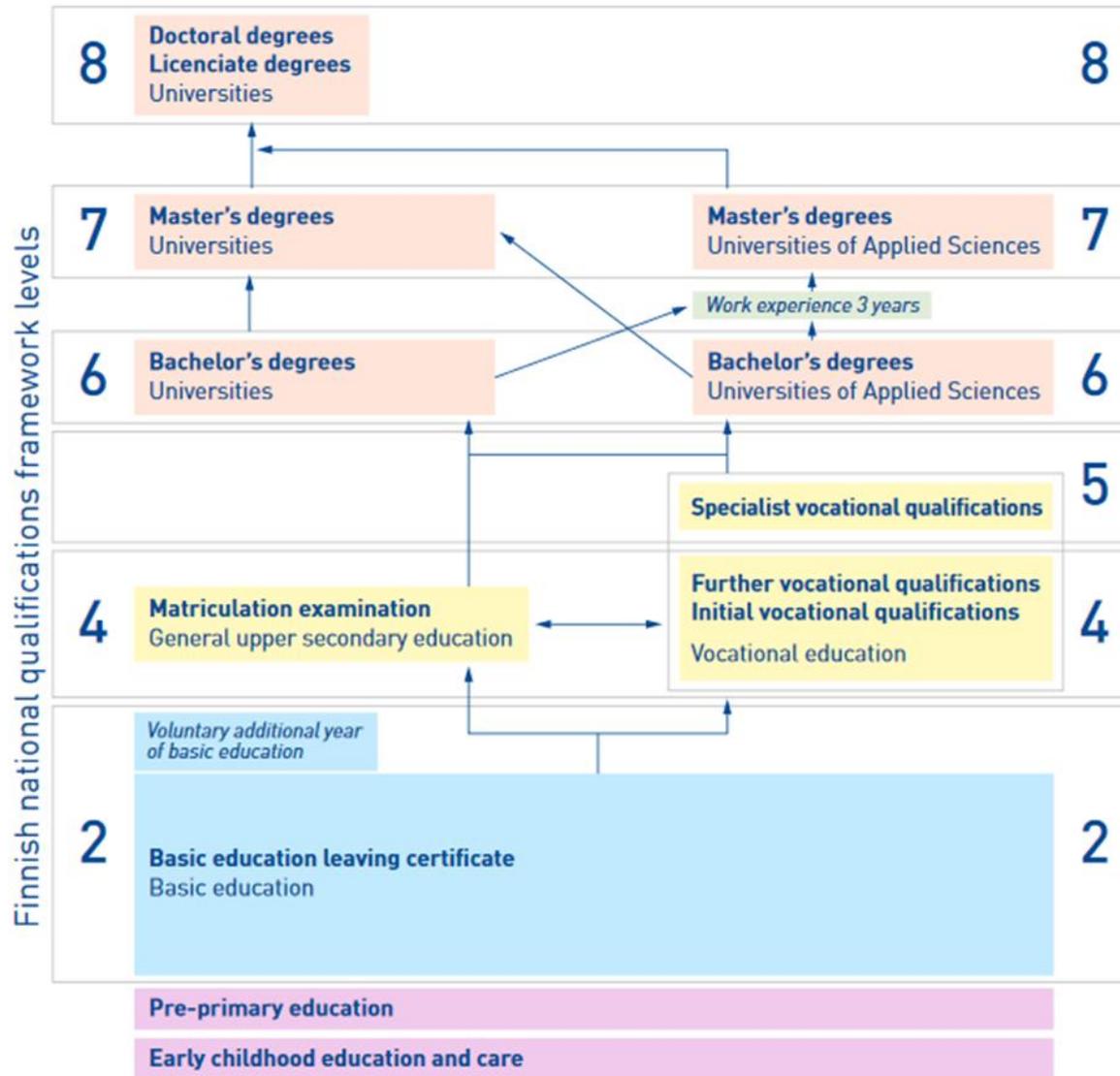
- provides a **holistic picture of FLPs** in Finnish HE and **conclusions and recommendations** for the MinEdu and HEIs
- **informs the drafting of**
 - a. the Government Education Policy Report to Parliament and
 - b. the National Plan of Accessibility in HE

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International purpose:

- **facilitates international benchmarking** of best practices

EDUCATION SYSTEM IN FINLAND



Getting into HE and FLPs within HE

No dead ends

- when proceeding from one educational level to another

High level of institutional autonomy

- the legislation defines the general eligibility criteria and regulates the national joint (*online*) admissions system *studyinfo.fi*
- the HEIs define the procedures for student selection and availability and quota for alternative pathways



Conclusion 1.

The national governance has supported development of FLPs at all levels of the HE system and all stages of study.

However, policy monitoring of FLPs should be improved.

National level conclusions

Strengths

- FLPs on the agenda for 10 years
- Several policy objectives for FLP
- Wide commitment to policy objectives
- New funding models reward cross-study and open study ECTS
- Legislation and funding models have been revised in parallel
- Previous Government key projects have significantly supported FLPs



Current policy objectives for FLP:

- 50% of young people to complete a HE degree by 2030 (now 41%)
- Reforming student admissions
- Cooperation with secondary level
- Developing recognition of prior learning
- Updating the transfer procedures
- Reforming continuous learning
- Drafting a national plan for accessibility in HE
- Improving guidance and career services for students

National level conclusions

Challenges

- A risk of overload of policy objectives and lack of an explicit national definition for FLPs
- Underutilised data on FLPs (e.g. Virta, Koski databases)
- Implementation of models and tools created in key projects

Recommendations

- Draft a more consistent policy approach to FLPs; including a national definition for FLPs
 - *Improve utilisation of existing tools: FiNQF and QA*
- Develop national monitoring, research and evaluation of the impact of FLPs
 - *E.g. follow-up of alternative study paths, data on transfers and indicators for continuous learning*
- Draft a meta-analysis of the achievements of the key projects and a plan for continuation
 - *Make the outputs available at one (national) website*

Conceptualisation of FLPs for this case study

Aspects of FLP in Finnish HE

Co-operation with secondary level:

- Introduction courses
- Applicant guidance

Flexibility in admissions:

- Reform of student admissions
- Open studies pathway
- Transfers
- Other alternative pathways (e.g. MOOC)

Flexibility during studies:

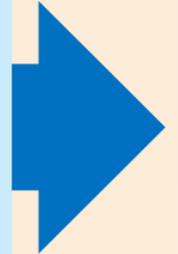
- Flexibility in degree structures: minors, specialisations
- Flexibility in modes of study
- Cross-institutional study: universities-UASs, HEIs-secondary level

Flexibility towards graduation and employment:

- Internships
- Work-based (informal) learning

Continuous learning

- Open studies
- Thematic and competence modules



Tools supporting FLP:

- Recognition of prior learning (formal and informal)
 - Study and career guidance
 - ECTS, QA, FINQF

(Source: Moitus, Weimer & Välimaa 2020)



Conclusion 2.

Flexibility in admissions (open pathway, transfers, MOOCs) is progressing.

However, students are not always aware of transfer possibilities.

Conclusions: open pathway

- Contributed by *Toinen reitti yliopistoon* project, the open pathway in universities is increasing (see figure 1.)
- Earlier the share of open pathway of all admissions was 2-4%, now many HEIs aim for 10%
- ECTS requirement for open path vary in different HEIs from 30 to 60 ECTS
- Fee: 15 € per ECTS
- **Recommendation: Continue to develop the open pathway, widen the field offerings, utilise follow-up data and research**

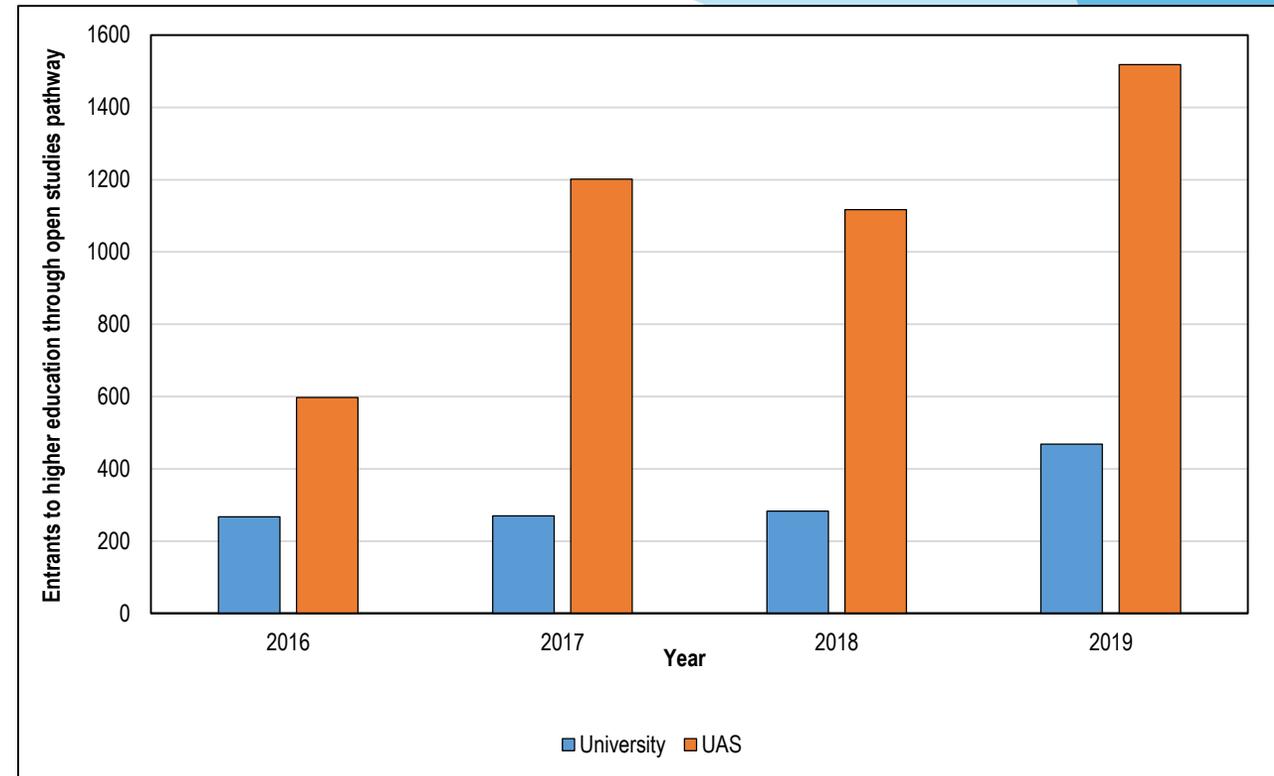


Figure 2. Entrants to higher education through open studies pathway. In 2019, N= 2,000 applicants were admitted via open pathway: 1,500 in UASs and 500 in universities. (Source: Virta database)

Conclusions: transfers

- 2016 - transfers (transferring one's study right to a different HEI or study programme) became possible
- Case university - identified the need to develop transparent criteria, policies and quota for (internal) transfers.
- Case UAS - the number of open transfer study places was highly dependent on vacant study spots.
- **Recommendation: Development of transfers could be supported by national projects.** Transfer pathways might enable students to make choices as part of their current study paths, instead of applying for a second study right.

Transfers:

- In 2019, there were about 1,000 transfers (268 in universities and 618 in UASs) via the Studyinfo.fi online platform.
- In 2018, the majority of UAS transfers concentrated within the field of social and health care; while in universities the majority were from humanities to other HEIs or similar fields.
- In addition to external transfer registered in the Studyinfo system, there are internal transfers within HEIs that are not included in national statistics.



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I think transfer opportunities and success stories of transfers should be better communicated to students.

(Interviewed student)



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Conclusion 3.

There are many forms of flexibility during studies.

Students need to be informed and supported in their choices.

Flexibility during studies

Flexibility in studies takes many forms:

- Flexibility in degree structures (minors, electives and specialisations)
- Flexibility in study modes and course completion (e-learning, blended learning)
- New cross-study initiatives (universities – UAS; secondary – tertiary)

Flexibility is supported by recognition of prior learning (RPL) and study guidance

Recommendation: Guidance and counselling services intentionally inform students of available FLPs based on their needs.

"In our curricula, there are 60 ECTS that are optional, students choose what courses to take.

We encourage them to take courses from other faculties, based on their personal study plan.

We consider it important for the students to build their own pathway to graduation."

(University faculty dean)



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Conclusion 4.

Integration of work-based and informal learning in HE studies is increasing, RPL plays a key role.

Flexibility towards graduation and employment

Combining work and study in degree programmes

- Competence-based curricula
- Work-based learning
- Integrating work periods, internships into curricula

Study and career guidance

- Personal study plans

Continuous learning

- Thematic modules, open studies offerings

Recommendations: HEIs continue to build relations with the working life.

Inform and support students.

TOTEEMI project – Learning about work and for work 2017–2019
18 universities and UASs

Aim: to create structures and practices to support higher education students' entry into the labour market

Achievement: conceptualisation of work and study approach and models for student support, career counselling and workplace co-operation



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Conclusion 5.

In the context of drafting the national plan for accessibility to HE, equity and FLP policies should intersect.

Equality, equity and FLPs

Conclusions

- The new Government will draft a *National Accessibility Plan of Higher Education* which will identify equity groups and obstacles to assessing higher education.
- HEIs have some procedures to support equity groups in FLP, e.g. preparatory courses for immigrants.

Challenges

- However, the case HEIs focus on offering FLPs to all students and treating all students the same (equality principle)
- Lack of objectives for equity groups at the national and institutional level.



Recommendations:

- National equity objectives and indicators should be set for underrepresented groups.
- Institutional implementation of equity objectives should also be supported and followed.

In future, a more strategic and competency-based approach to FLPs may pose solutions to challenges Finland is facing.

- E.g. demographic and equity aspects and competence renewal

How do You see future flexibility in HE?

What are the most important conclusions for your work?



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