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EUA LEARNING & TEACHING TPG REPORT

Flexible learning and teaching

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Background: the EUA L&T TPGs

- Active since 2017
- Groups consisting of 8-10 EUA member universities
- Each dedicated to a different topic in the areas of learning and teaching
- Exchange of challenges and institutional practice
- Final report outlines key take-aways and way forward

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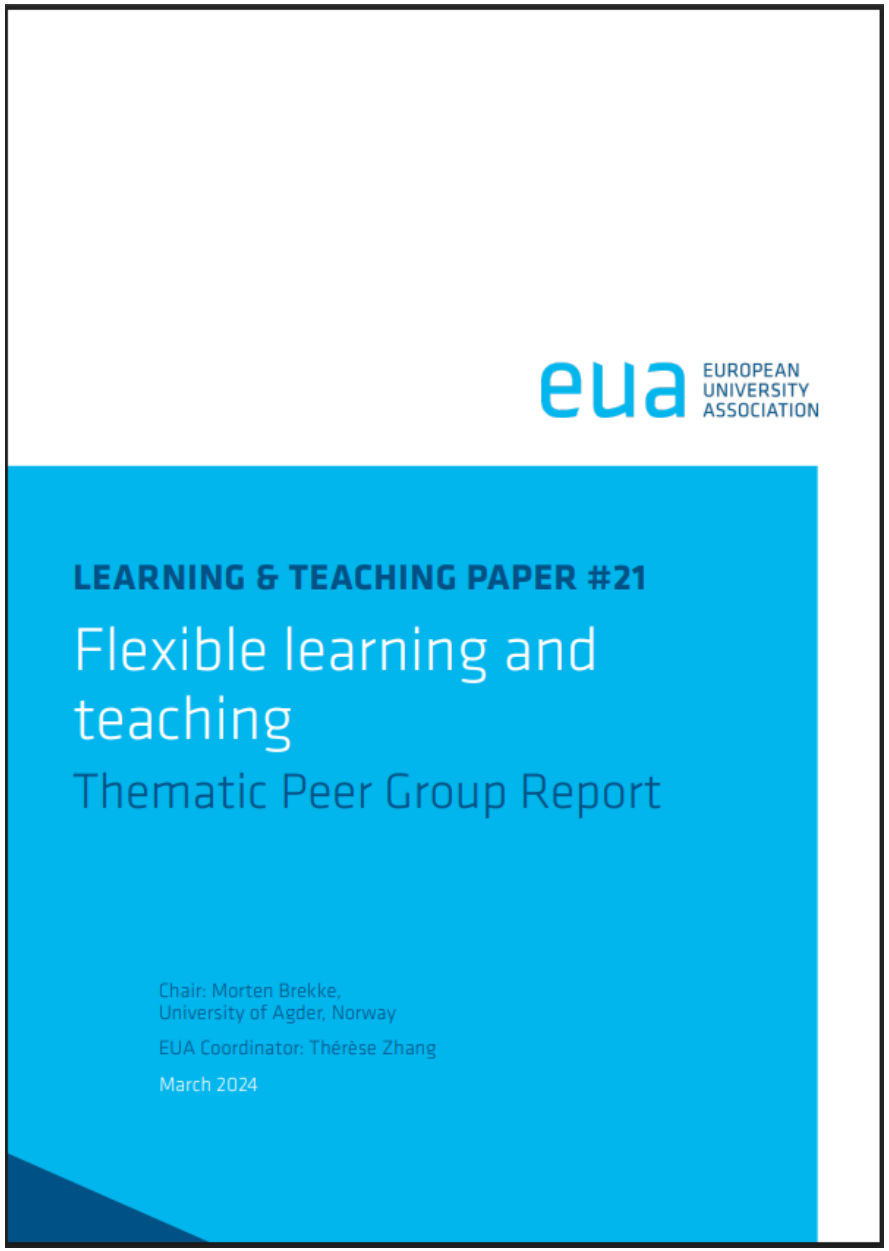
2023 TPG "Flexible learning and teaching"



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What is “flexible learning and teaching“?

- It means “to provide learners with autonomy over when, where and how they learn”
  - flexible **ways to achieve a study programme’s learning outcomes** (in terms of time-to-degree, workload, obligation for students to be on-site, etc.);

  → flexible learning and teaching approaches used (synchronous/asynchronous modalities, hybrid learning, assessment of student learning, etc.);
  - Flexibility of **students’ individualised study paths**
- Implications for use of time, instructional content and approach, entry requirements, delivery, assessment, resources and support.

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WHAT THE LITERATURE SAYS

The group reviewed a selected number of publications available in scientific and practice-based literature (see list in Annex 2), and identified the following common points of interest:

- The Covid-19 pandemic has accelerated the demand for flexible learning in higher education, emphasising the importance of the adaptability of education systems.
- Flexible adult learning provision is essential in supporting individuals, enterprises and societies to adapt to labour market changes and manage disruptions. HEIs are well placed to provide it.
- Financial support, but also policy frameworks and lifelong learning policies, can facilitate the implementation of flexible learning paths and encourage participation, especially among low-skilled adults.
- Flexible learning entails a "multi-modal" provision (online, onsite, hybrid, blended learning), hence it does not mean online learning only. It relates to how HEIs manage digital learning and organise part-time education.
- Teachers play a crucial role in making flexible learning a success, and teacher training courses should consider pedagogical aspects to make flexibility a reality, as well as approaches to inclusive education, to address the needs of students from diverse backgrounds.
- High-quality student support, such as career guidance and study orientation services at HEIs, is essential in helping individuals navigate flexible learning options and make informed choices. More generally, support from HEIs' administrative services and their adequate training are crucial in making the students' learning experience truly flexible: it is a matter not only of teaching, but also of how teaching is organised.

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Challenges for HEIs

Managing it as an institution

- Achieving a shared vision that meets expectations, and resourcing it
- Centralised vs decentralised models of LLL/Continuous Educ
- Organisational issues
- Enabling regulatory frameworks (nationally)

Designing flexible modes and supporting teachers

- Learning design, organisation
- Cultural shift
- Managing time and infrastructure
- Advocating for the value of each learning mode
- Staff "fatigue" and resistance should

Managing expectations and demands from society

- Pressure vs lack of appropriate resources
- Immediacy of skills demands vs curriculum/course design obligations
- Competition with other actors: advocate for the added value of university LLL

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Flexible learning and teaching

Trends 2024

Download the dataset: https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.13768235

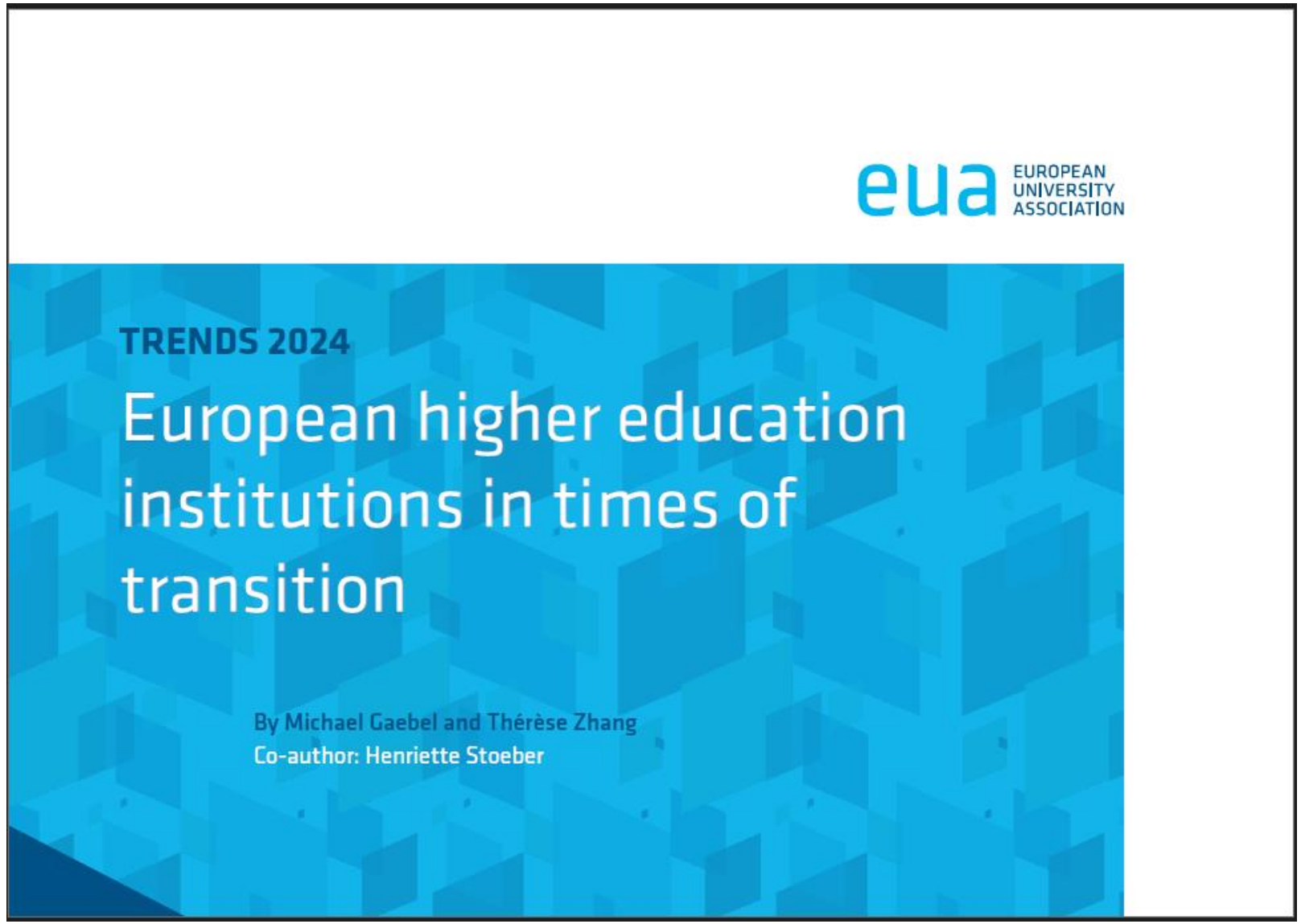

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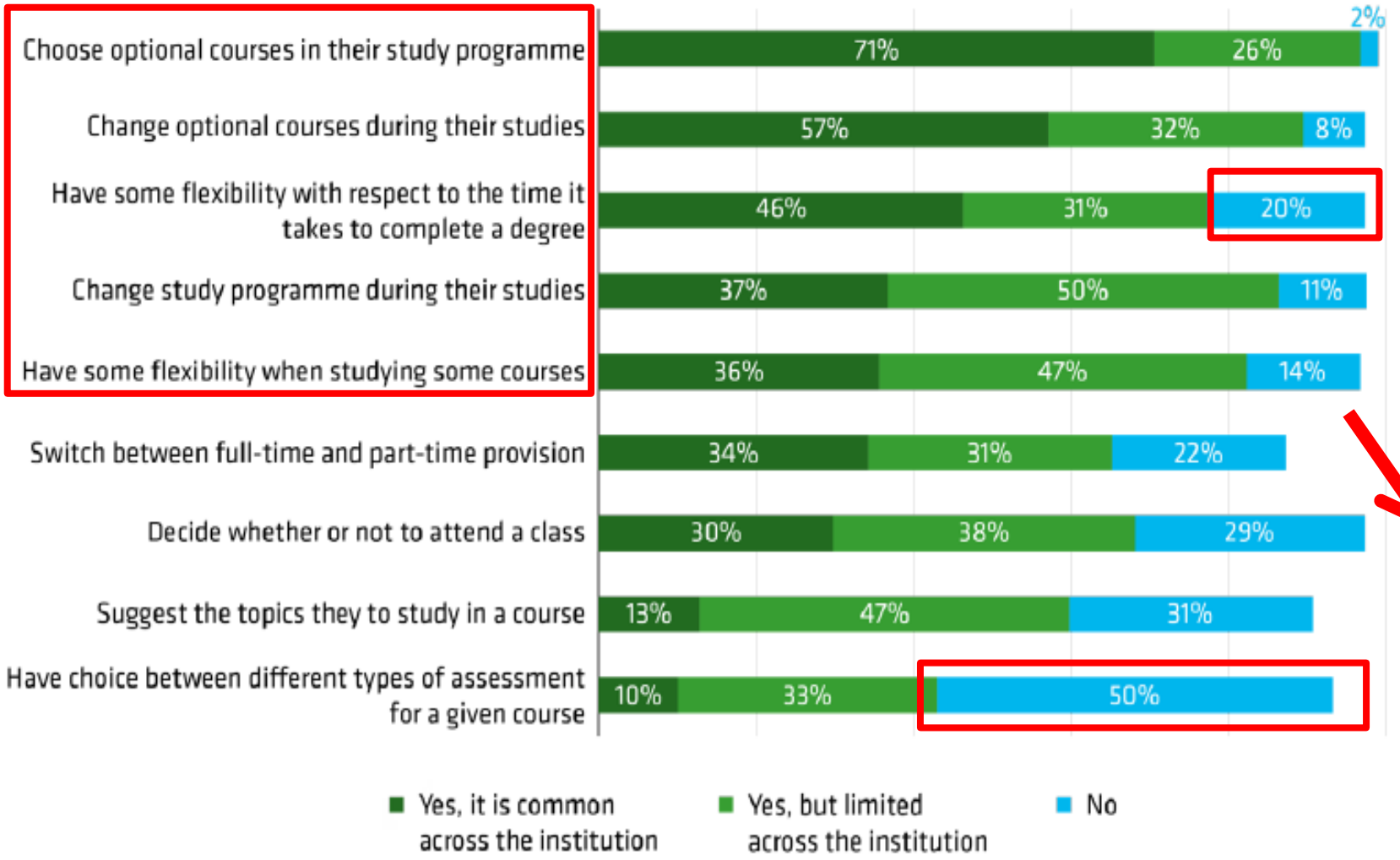
Figure 29: Flexibility for students

Q20. (partial). Is it possible for students to do the following, without any negative consequence (additional cost, time-to-degree, etc.)? Please select one option per line. N= 485.



This raises questions on:

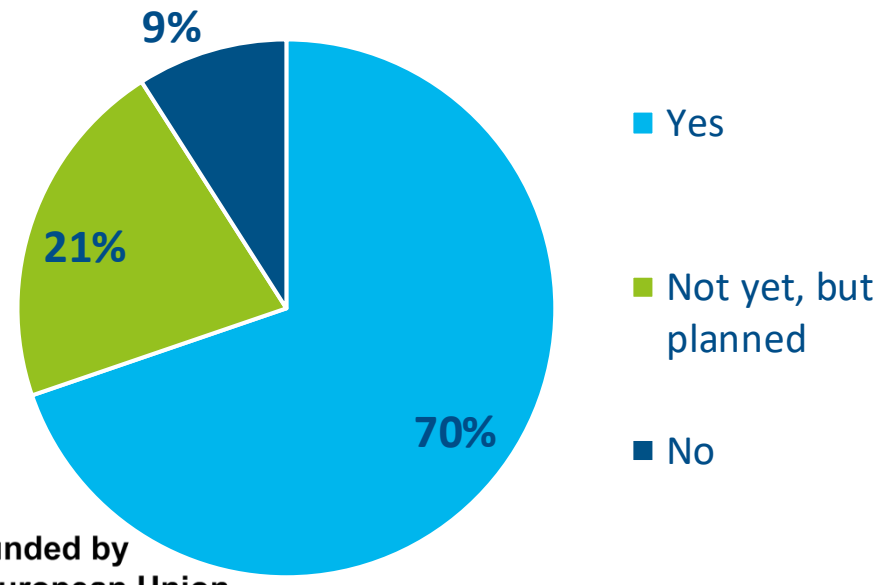
Strategic and organisation capacities at HEIs to manage flexibility

Student agency to "manage flexibility" (autonomy, responsibility, systematic partnership)

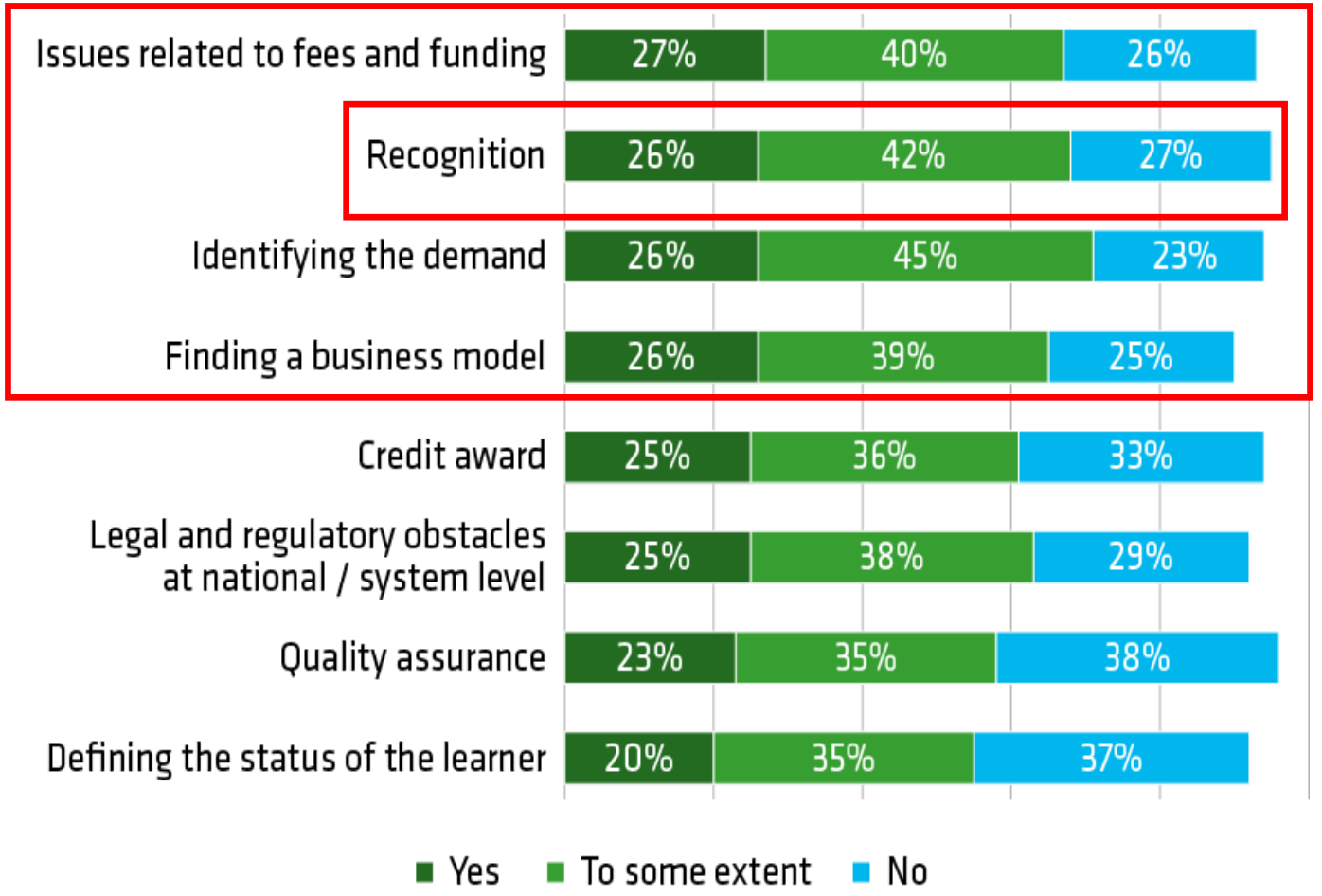
Non-degree education and flexibility

Offer of non-degree programmes or courses

(learning certificates, badges or micro-credentials)



Challenges for non-degree programmes or courses



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TPG report issued recommendations concerning…

- Institutional strategy and capacity building for flexible learning
- Student agency
- Curriculum design and delivery
- Use of flexible support and resources
- Teacher training

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How to do it?

Here are some concrete suggestions for curriculum design and delivery:

Define clear learning outcomes

- Specific, measurable for each course/programme
- Aligned with the goals of flexible learning (why should it be flexible?)

Identify core competences

- Competences and skills that students should develop in a flexible learning environment
- Incl. self-regulation, adaptability, digital literacy, problem-solving skills, etc.

Clear and detailed communication

- About course expectations, learning outcomes, resources and assessment criteria
- Use technology to facilitate communication between staff and students (discussion fora, email, virtual office hours)

Engage students

- Focus groups, surveys, interviews to gather feedback on their expectations for flexible learning
- Student advisory boards regularly meeting to provide input on curriculum design and improvement
- Encourage students to share experiences on what works best for them in a flexible learning context

Continuous improvement

- Regular review and update based on feedback
- Stay attuned to technology and educational practices development
- Use clear metrics for evaluating the success of flexible learning (student retention rates, course completion rate, student satisfaction, employability rate)

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