

Action plan Zone

'Making education more flexible'

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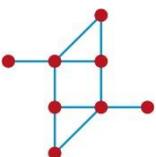
Starting position of the zone Flexibilisation

A conversation about making education more flexible often leads to confusion, because the concept is interpreted in different ways. Flexibilisation is possible in various dimensions, such as pace, location, or content, and combinations thereof. Each dimension brings its own set of challenges and each institution chooses its own alternatives that match the *couleur locale*. Flexibilisation is a multidisciplinary issue that must be supported simultaneously by educational, organisational, and technological solutions. A lot of experiments have been conducted and elaborated in recent years. In this action plan we integrate existing projects and build on results that have already been obtained.

The acceleration team consists of 17 participating institutions with various notions and projects in the field of flexibilisation. Every institution has its own dynamic and chooses its own focus. Some institutions work primarily from pedagogical-didactic issues, where others choose logistics as a starting point. There is also a difference in the extent to and the way in which these institutions aspire to flexibilise education. The members of the team differ in background and position within the institutions. The team includes both managers and logistics experts, education experts, programme leaders, and innovators. For the plan of action for this zone, this starting position means that a multi-change strategy is used where every participating institution can bring and achieve something. We look integrally at user-friendly, personal, and flexible education. We work on issues related to didactics and organisation and do not shy away from new and known obstacles.

Since the kick-off in November 2018

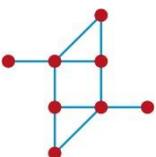
In two intensive design sessions, we worked under the guidance of a change expert on describing our ambitions and the way in which we want to realise these ambitions. We have developed four prototypes of flexible *student journeys* that resonate within the institutions. These can serve as a guide for experiments taking place in the study programmes such as a living lab, to make the fluid concept of flexibilization more tangible. At the same time, the team wants to work on publications with available knowledge about flexible education and enriched with current insights and results from pilots and experiments within the institutions. Existing monodisciplinary toolkits for designing either didactics or logistics are being renewed, enriched, and connected. At the same time, work done on didactics, operational management and regulations to achieve greater flexibility.



Four prototypes of flexible student journeys

Agile Studying	Flexibilisation in time and pace
<p>The student is studying at one institution within one programme, but can follow the programme at their own pace (accelerated or delayed). This is currently possible to a certain extent, but there are obstacles we want take away for students. This allows the agile student – similar to the programmes for top athletes – to combine studying with important others activities such as working on a start-up, joining a student board or informal care. Important ingredients for the realisation of agile studying are, among other things, offering (partly) time and location independent courses (online/blended education), assessment independent of course of study, flexible enrolment and scheduling, and recognition of study components followed elsewhere (micro credentials and edubadges).</p>	
Mobile Studying	Flexibilisation in place
<p>Within the <i>Mobile Studying</i> prototype, we are looking for ways to promote student mobility. This means a student can follow a (substantial) part of their study programme at another study program, faculty or even institution without experiencing practical barriers. Student mobility between universities of applied science and universities should be a prominent part of this. ‘Kies Op Maat’ is an existing platform for the exchange of minors and seems a logical starting point. To the prototype of Mobile Studying it also applies that following education flexibly is easier when the programme is (party) time and place independent. This means it is easier to follow courses at different institutions.</p>	
MyDegree	Flexibilisation in the programme
<p>With <i>MyDegree</i>, the idea of a predetermined programme is abandoned. It is not the programme that determines the student's development, but the student's development determines the form and content of the programme. The student compiles their own programme based on their (professional) development that they are going through. This development can be initiated by an employer, but can also arise from the need to work on a start-up or to work on a <i>challenge</i>. The student is given a number of years to complete their programme and is given the space to combine working and learning.</p>	
Modular Studying	Flexibilisation in time, pace, location and programme
<p>The enrolls for educational units or modules and not for the entire <i>degree</i>. The learning outcomes of a module include relevant competences for the labour market. The modules individually are part of an existing programme that guarantees added value and quality. Lateral flow into the programme of the module followed, is of course possible, but not required. An interesting question here is to what extent the completion of several modules - possibly at different institutions – make a full <i>degree</i>. This “collecting modules” could be completed with a thesis that has clear requirements.</p>	

NB. These prototypes are developed with the agile method and are therefore subject to change.



Agile design and development of flexible education

Because the participating institutions are in different stages of designing and implementing flexibilisation and vary in ambitions, the team leads of the Acceleration team Flexibilisation have chosen a multi-change approach. Within the team, members collaborate on papers, tools and practices; design criteria and tools provide direction in the experiments. Time, pace, and content of these projects is determined by the institutions and/or cross-institutional partnerships.

The Acceleration team sets up working groups in which work will be carried out over the next four years on a common basis on which local development can take place. We build on results already reached within the now ongoing experiments. Together with the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science (OCW) and the Dutch-Flemish Accreditation Organisation (NVAO) we will look at how a framework for further experimentation can be created, possibly also accessible for institutions outside the acceleration zone. Where this proves impossible, the team will at least seek out the limits of the current system with these prototypes. The acceleration team supports the institutions and experiments stemming from working groups that focus on creating vision, toolkits, and frameworks that are worked out in publications. Institutions that do not yet know which line they want to follow can orientate themselves on an approach and sharpen their vision.

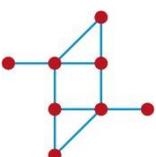
With the implementation of the student journeys we expect to encounter barriers; in the organisation, logistic processes, culture, funding and laws and regulations. Within a number of institutions, issues concerning the harmonisation of an educational catalogue and the organisation of courses will also be important factors. In part, these are issues that are already being tackled by institutions within the context of SURF, but the discussion within the zone speeds up and increases the power to realise this. When (further) developing the already existing toolkits, especially practical applicability and multidisciplinary approach are important. It is expected that experiences gained from experiments will give solid input to nationwide discussion about the system and new frames that offer space to future scenarios for flexible higher education.

How does this ensure real acceleration?

The proposed approach ensures acceleration by choosing the right focus in the right context. Small-scale experiments allow people to experience in practice what works, what doesn't work, and why this is the case. The team discovers bottlenecks in the whole chain that need to be addressed to facilitate up-scaling. All findings - and especially those of the student - are valuable for the discussion about changes in the system. The acceleration team connects the world of the system with the student's world and goes back to the meaning. It is about education of high standard, good usability and high quality that is flexible for students. Co-creation of flexible education demands intensive commitment of all actors, from educational designers and logistics experts to didactic experts, policy makers and of course students.

A multidisciplinary toolkit for designing and developing flexible education ensures that experiments performed in different institutions are easily comparable and results can be easily shared, repeated and scaled up.

The flexibilisation zone seeks alignment with all other zones of the acceleration plan, in particular the zone *better connection to the labour market*. We continue to build on the pilots about flexibilisation of part-time education, and work together with current, relevant initiatives at SURF (such as the open education catalogue, edubadges/microcredentialing and Edu-ID) and with other national initiatives such as *'The Well-Organized School'*.



Results and objectives in 2019

- Commitment of participating institutions to at least one prototype student journey per September 2019; action plan by the end of 2019.
- Constructive dialogue with all stakeholders for expansion of experimental space.
- Organising inspiring design sessions, of course also with students and teachers.
- Inventory and describe available toolkits for designing didactics or logistics.
- Building an active network within the zone that contributes to seminars and conferences (with emphasis on creating a connection between Higher Education Link and the SURF Education Days).
- Writing a vision-developing paper that substantiates the usefulness and necessity of the flexible student journeys, gives direction to valid design criteria and offers tools for organization.

In 2020 and beyond

- Experiments and projects have been started; iteratively working on scalable solutions.
- Clear view of barriers, frameworks, and limitations with appropriate solutions.
- An integrated multidisciplinary toolkit that enables institutions to provide education in an accessible manner to make it more flexible.

Results in four years

There is a multitude of up-to-date, flexible, and personal educational practices at participating institutions and beyond. There are white papers that outline the theoretical framework, roadmaps in which multiple roads 'lead to Rome' and multidisciplinary toolkits that education and support staff can use together. At the political and administrative level, based on the experiences from the experiments and living labs, a discussion is held about the steps required to make flexibilisation possible on an even larger scale .

Conditions for success

In a landscape of flexible education, there is a need for an infrastructure that can make the range of educational programmes accessible to students and make the results transparent to society. The SURF projects that focus on an open educational catalogue, one Edu-ID and edubadges are very important to this.

A continuous dialogue and mutual understanding from an appreciative perspective is essential for cracking this hard nut. Flexibilisation is a tough issue that can only be solved when everyone is invited to the drawing table. Sufficient time and attention are perhaps the most important ingredients. Sometimes it takes a little more time and energy to align everyone. It is important that we take this time. Last but not least , it is all about commitment, decisiveness and courage - at all levels in the institution - in achieving flexible education. You need to be flexible!

