

Flexible Learning Pathways in Higher Education

International Policy Forum
 July 6-8, 2021



JPT | DEPARTMENT
 OF HIGHER
 EDUCATION



BACKGROUND

The world is facing an unprecedented crisis today with – at its peak – more than 220 million students affected by university closures or the move to remote teaching and learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Increasing evidence suggests that Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) offering flexible approaches in delivery mode and admissions have been better equipped to respond to the pandemic. Breaking institutional boundaries of learning, and offering the possibility to acquire knowledge through multiple modalities, have proven to be key components of resilient higher education systems.

In addition to the challenges caused by the pandemic, HEIs have undergone tremendous transformations in recent decades. In under 20 years, global enrolment in higher education more than doubled, reaching 227 million students in 2019. This situation has led to a greater diversity of learners entering the system, such as working adults in need of skills development. In this context, higher education is increasingly expected to adapt to different learning needs. This requires **flexible learning pathways** as part of a permeable higher education provision.

The 2030 Agenda encourages countries to develop well-articulated education systems that provide flexible learning pathways for all students, in the form of entry points and re-entry points for all ages and all educational levels, strengthened links between formal and non-formal structures, and recognition, validation, and accreditation of the knowledge, skills, and competencies acquired through non-formal and informal education.

To respond to this need, the UNESCO International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP-UNESCO) launched an international research project in 2018, entitled [SDG 4: Planning for flexible learning pathways in higher education](#). The project aims to produce knowledge and provide evidence-based policy advice to ministries of (higher) education in different development contexts in which building or strengthening flexible learning pathways are being considered as an area of reform. The research includes a stocktaking exercise of good practices in the field, an international survey, and eight in-depth country case studies from Chile, Finland, India, Jamaica, Malaysia, Morocco, South Africa, and the United Kingdom. The country studies analysed existing policy frameworks and practices, both with regard to their effective implementation at the institutional level, and their effects on national equity groups.

OBJECTIVES

The three-day online International Policy Forum is an opportunity to discuss the findings from IIEP's global research with national and institutional policy-makers at an international level. The event reflects IIEP's vision that all higher education systems need to become more inclusive of diverse learners' needs, and be better prepared for crises beyond the current pandemic. By bringing

complementary evidence from IIEP's research on international policies and institutional practices, and with the input of international experts in the field, IIEP hopes to encourage the sharing of best practices among the participating countries in designing flexible higher education systems.

The Policy Forum will address issues related to policies and practices for alternative access (e.g. RPL), flexible delivery (e.g. digitalization, MOOCs, micro-credentials), flexible progression (e.g. transfers and credit systems) and the role of governance mechanisms to support flexibility.

PARTICIPANTS

The Forum aims to create a dialogue among policy-makers, researchers, and practitioners. Participants will include national and institutional higher education policy-makers, renowned experts, and researchers who have contributed to IIEP's findings. Representatives are expected from Africa, Asia and the Pacific, Europe, the Arab States, Latin America and the Caribbean. All UNESCO Member States will be invited to nominate a delegation to represent them at the Forum.

OUTCOMES

The following outcomes are expected from the International Policy Forum:

- **Shared evidence** on effective policies, good practices, and institutional experiences in flexible learning pathways;
- **Enhanced dialogue** between national and institutional decision-makers, representatives of national quality assurance agencies, and researchers;
- **Increased consensus** on the way forward for flexible learning pathways as a means to respond to diverse learner needs and skill requirements.

FORMAT

The Forum will be highly interactive and include panel discussions based on the eight national case studies, and workshop sessions on specific elements of educational policy that are central to the construction of flexible higher education systems.

Videoconferencing tools, such as ZOOM and YouTube, will be used to facilitate access to the online discussions.

The presentations will be made in English, with simultaneous interpretation into French and Spanish. The debates after the presentations will be held in English, French and Spanish with simultaneous interpretation.

The Forum sessions will take place on Tuesday, 6 July 2021 (12:15–16:00 CEST), Wednesday, 7 July 2021 (12:15–16:00 CEST) and Thursday, 8 July 2021 (12:15–17:00 CEST).

PARTNERS

The Forum is organized jointly by IIEP-UNESCO, the [Commonwealth Tertiary Education Facility](#), the [Malaysian Ministry of Higher Education](#), the [Department of Higher Education \(JPT\)](#), the [Universiti Sains Malaysia](#), the [Malaysian Qualifications Agency](#), and the [Malaysian National Commission for UNESCO](#).

CONTACTS

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