Online degree programmes

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At the end of 2018, the executive board of the eAMK project wanted to contemplate on the opportunities of online degree programmes as a part of the year-round supply of online studies, and this resulted in establishing the Online Degree Working Group. The aim of the Working Group was to formulate a conception of the current good practices of online degree programmes and their application opportunities in the national online degree programme, which could be implemented in the eAMK project's CampusOnline environment according to the principles of cross-institutional studies. As the eAMK project was also strongly focused on developing digital pedagogy at universities of applied sciences, the pedagogic viewpoint

has been strongly emphasized also in the work of the Online Degree Working Group.

Online degree programmes provide the opportunity to create novel study paths and flexible possibilities to complete a higher education degree in different situations in life. Higher education institutions can utilize the results of the working group when they are planning diverse and extensive online entities, as the contents of the publication can be applied - in addition to online degree programmes - for example in planning and implementing the online entities of diplomas of higher education or specialization paths. The future visions of the national online degree programme, which are

presented at the end of the publication, may provide food for thought for regional, national and international cooperation between higher education and working life.

In this publication, we present the results of the work, good practices and experiences which are based on the development work of the Working Group. The Working Group's results have earlier been shared e.g. in the online degree programmes' webinar series and in the compilation publication of the eAMK project, Kohti uuden oppimisen ekosysteemiä ("Towards a new learning ecosystem").

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Degree programmes which are implemented fully online are still a rather new form of implementation in Finnish higher education institutions.

# #
THE EAMK PROJECT AND
THE ONLINE DEGREE PROGRAMMES TEAM

The project eAMK - the new ecosystem of learning development, which was funded by the Ministry of Education and Culture of Finland, was carried out in 2017–2020.

The project participants included all 23 Finnish universities of applied sciences, the University of Jyväskylä and the Rectors' Conference of Finnish Universities of Applied Sciences Arene. The central development target of the eAMK project was the enhancement of online cross-institutional studies between the universities of applied sciences and the related digital pedagogy and digital instruction, and reinforcing the working life orientation.

The Online Degrees Working Group worked as a part of the project, with online degree programme experts from seven different universities of applied sciences: Turku UAS, Oulu UAS, Häme UAS, Xamk, Lapland UAS and Humak UAS. The Working Group members represent different roles in the field of online degree programmes, including teacher, tutor teacher, instructor, specialist in online pedagogy, specialist in the technical aspects of pedagogy and planner. The Working Group members have participated in the development work of the team in a holistic manner. In this publication, they have shared their expertise in the different sections of online degree programmes.

Results of the eAMK work at universities of applied sciences

- In 2019 in the CampusOnline portal: 23 universities of applied sciences, over 1,300 courses and 110,000 completed ECTS credits
- The quality criteria for online implementations have been introduced at all universities of applied sciences
- The eOpintopalvelut model of operations is utilized by six universities of applied sciences
- Approx. 160 teachers participated in the national digital pedagogy coaching and over 750 teachers in the universities of applied sciences' own coachings
- Over 500 people participated in the cMOOC course on learning analytics and the course will continue maintained by the APOA project
- Digital start packages for students are utilized at 12 universities of applied sciences
- The digital guidance path and materials are utilized by nine universities of applied sciences
- The models of operation of digital mentoring and the quality criteria for digital mentoring from the viewpoints of students, higher education institutions and working life are utilized at 5 universities of applied sciences
- 6 Open Badges which 5 universities of applied sciences utilize as a part of their own Badges

# #
COMMON STARTING POINTS AS THE BASIS FOR DEVELOPMENT

According to the clarifications of the [Online Degree Programmes team](), the use of the Online Degree Programmes term varies and it is often used alternatively with "blended degrees". Therefore, the team wanted to create clear descriptions for the terms, and as a basis the team studied how online studies are described as a part of blended and online degree programmes. Based on the clarification, online learning in online degree programmes is real-time, present, interactive, instructional and community-oriented (Table 1).

	Online degree programmes		
form of study independent from time	online meetings bound to time, otherwise independent from time		
form of study independent from place	studying takes place at a location chosen by the student; online platforms may be agreed on		
	Online degree programmes	**independent from time**	**independent from place**
Contact teaching	real-time online meetings on an agreed online platform	-	(X)
Distance learning	or group-based online work	(X)	X
Studying online	interactive, instructed studies online	(X)	X
Independent studying	online studies which do not entail group work	X	X
Instructed studying	online studying in which the teacher instructs the learning situation; instructional situations as agreed on online platforms	(X)	(X)
Community-oriented online studying	working and studying in groups	(X)	X

Table 1. Comparison of the concepts often used in connection with online degree programmes and blended degree programmes. Published in the Digipölytys blog. Explanations: x = will be realized, (x) = may be realized, - = won't be realized

(Table 1 continues on the next page)

> Online learning in online degree programmes is real-time, present, interactive, instructional and community-based.

(Table 1 continues)

	Blended degree programmes		
form of study independent from time	contact and remote teaching situations as agreed, otherwise independent from time		
form of study independent from place	agreed spaces and online platforms where the teaching and studies take place; other studying takes place at a location selected by the studentt		

	Blended degree programmes	**independent from time**	**independent from place**
Contact teaching	a learning situation taking place in an agreed space	-	-
Distance learning	independent or group-based work as agreed	(x)	(x)
Studying online	independent or group-based, instructed online studying	(x)	x
Independent studying	instructed independent studying	x	x
Instructed studying	studying in which the teacher instructs the learning situation in an agreed space/on an agreed online platform	(x)	(x)
Community-oriented online studying	working and studying in groups online	(x)	x

Based on the mapping, the team made recommendations for the terms online degree programmes and blended degrees. In particular, the perspective of students was considered in the recommendations, and the aim was to describe the terms thus that they provide a correct image of the method of implementing the degree.

01
Online degree programme

The term online degree programme refers to a degree which is completed fully online. The online degree programme may entail real-time online meetings, independent or group-based interactive online work and instructed studying. Some of the online meetings may be bound to time; otherwise the studies are independent from place. Some of the instruction of learning situations may take place on agreed online platforms; otherwise the studies are independent from place.

02
Blended degree programme

A blended degree may refer to a degree in which different forms of studying are combined. A blended degree may contain contact and distance learning bound to time and place and independent or group-based instructed contact and online working and studying. Some of the online work may be real-time online meetings and working on agreed online platforms.

> " Studying in an online degree programme is more flexible than studying on campus, and the learning materials are more easily available. Online group work is also close-knit and efficient.
>
> - Online degree student

WEBINAR SERIES

Joint starting points were developed also with the the help of the Verkkotutkintojen suunnittelu ja toteutus webinar series (webinars only in Finnish). The different parts of building and implementing online degree programmes are described in the webinar series, by including viewpoints, examples and experiences from different higher education institutions. Online degree students, who recounted their experiences on online studying and gave tips to teachers and planners brought added value to each webinar.

01. Good practices from online degree programmes

02. Planning and building online degree programmes

03. Good practices of study modules in online degree programmes

04. Study guidance in online degree programmes

05. Technical solutions in online degree programmes

06. Online peer support? Online degree programme students' tips for new students

07. Well-being of online degree programmes' students

08. Visions and future opportunities of online degree programmes

# #
PLANNING AND
IMPLEMENTATION OF AN ENTITY

In planning online degree programmes, internal cooperation within the organization is important.

Start by investigating the opportunities in your organization in terms of different structures, resources and services. Support from the administration and top management are an essential part of the planning. The online degree programme should be linked to the quality system of the organization and it should be ensured that activities in accordance with the quality system can be organized throughout the entire online degree programme. In addition, it must be contemplated what kind of pedagogic operational methods of the organization affect the planning of the online degree programme and how the implementation is carried out. Internal cooperation is important also in terms of teaching and support services. The needs for training, tools and premises shall be considered concerning both staff and students. Marketing the online degree programme to the target group is also important, in order to provide students a correct image of the online degree programme when they apply for the studies. (Joshi, 2018).

⬤ **At the planning stage of an online degree programme, the following questions may be of assistance**

1. Has a coordinator been appointed/resourced for the online degree programme?
2. Is the degree programme fully online or blended (how much of it is online)?
3. Have the teachers/studies of the first semester been established?
4. Have the teachers completed the online pedagogy and technical training?
5. Are the pedagogic models familiar, utilized in the planning of courses and in the visible implemented contents?
6. What kind of technical and pedagogic support and training do you need (coordinators, teachers)?
7. Have you started preparing the online learning environment?
8. What kind of teaching/learning premises (virtual and physical) are you planning to use in the teaching of your online degree programme?
9. What kind of cooperation do you wish to have with other (online) degree programmes?
10. How does your manager/management support the promotion of the online degree programme?

The internal motivation of the organization to develop the online degree programme is important, and sharing experiences openly enables a joint will to promote the implementation. Training and committing the staff at an early stage is important in order to obtain their trust in the implementation stage.

The planning and implementation of the online degree programme's parts are presented in more detail in the next chapters of the publication. First, the planning and implementation of courses in the online degree programmes is presented, followed by guidance-related perspectives. Next, we will go through the planning and implementation of technical and pedagogic solutions in terms of both online and physical environments and support services. The online degree programme students' perspectives provide tips on issues they have considered important. To conclude, we will examine the visions of the future national online degree programme and contemplate on the different implementation alternatives of online degree programmes at a national level.

> "
> The online degree programme enables studying alongside working and from abroad. Self-initiative and self-direction are important. The importance of peer support is also emphasized, it is important to be active in discussions.
>
> - Online degree student

PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTATION OF COURSES

Planning the courses of online degree programmes is learning design, which takes into account the quality criteria, the contact and remote teaching online and the assessment and communications plan. Participation in online teaching must be enabled also otherwise than at an agreed time and at an agreed place.

"

Different learning methods should be utilized in online degree programmes. The presence and feedback of the teacher are important

- Online degree student

According to [the mapping made](#) (in Finnish) on online degree programmes, the teaching is interactive and active, and it may contain contact teaching arranged online at an agreed time. The studying may be independent, group-based or instructed.

In producing a comprehensive and versatile study experience, the following issues should be considered: pedagogic models and pedagogic design of online learning, location of the course in the span of the degree, the framework provided by the organization such as schedules, resources, the teacher's contribution and competence.

The courses of an online degree programme are intertwined in the degree programme entity often planned and implemented by different people. When a similar structure is adhered to in the planning of online degree programmes, it facilitates studying: a structure that is clear and the functions of which can be predicted by the student. However, this does not prevent the teacher personalizing the course with e.g. own contents, tasks and functionality.

Pedagogic models and learning design are considered when planning the courses. For example, Salmon's Carpe Diem model, Laurillard's ABC model, or the Design Book for Online Learning by Aalto University and Huhtanen can be used as the model for pedagogic design. In addition to the pedagogic model, the quality criteria for online implementations shall be taken into account in the course structure.

If the course includes online seminars or other real-time interaction online, an own pedagogic implementation is designed for it and in this case, the pedagogic model can be flipped learning, which leaves time for interaction in the online seminar. In an online course without contact lessons the teaching takes place with videos, podcasts and readable learning material and tasks.

In the Online Degrees Working Group's webinar '[Good practices for courses in an online degree programme](#)' (in Finnish) the course planning process was presented. In the compilation publication of the eAMK project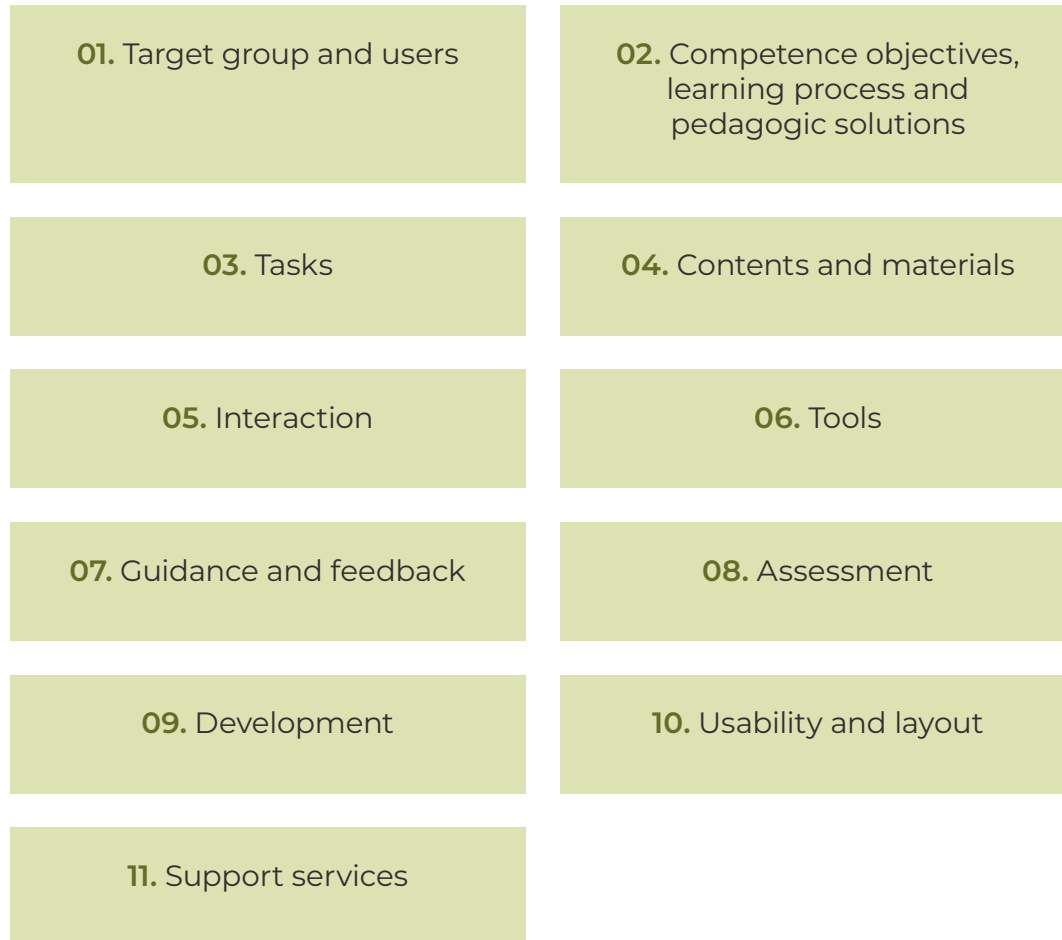, '[Matkalla verkkotutkintojen yhteisiin](#) [toimintatapoihin](#)' (Towards shared operating methods in online degree programmes), the course level, group work level and individual work level are described as the levels of planning. The courses are a part of the entire degree, and versatile design of online learning supports the learner.

eAMK quality criteria for online implementations support the planning

The quality of online implementations is ensured both during the planning and in an implemented course. The courses are planned based either on the eAMK quality criteria for online implementations or the quality criteria of the own higher education institution to proceed e.g. in weeks or themes.

The eAMK quality criteria for online implementations contain 11 themes, and each of them takes into account both the planning and implementation stages. The aim of the quality criteria is to work as a self-assessment tool and a developer of the quality of online studies of universities of applied sciences and CampusOnline.fi.

# #
THEMES OF THE QUALITY CRITERIA FOR ONLINE IMPLEMENTATIONS

01. Target group and users	**02.** Competence objectives, learning process and pedagogic solutions
03. Tasks	**04.** Contents and materials
05. Interaction	**06.** Tools
07. Guidance and feedback	**08.** Assessment
09. Development	**10.** Usability and layout
11. Support services	

Usability, accessibility and different learners are taken into account by complying with the eAMK quality criteria for online implementations. The learning objectives of the course come from the curriculum, and they are specified on a case-by-case basis.

The course planning process

In planning the courses of an online degree programme, the issues to be considered are the scheduling, learning design, online interaction, global students, setting the pace for continuous feedback and guidance, the assessment plan and, obviously, the technology used in the course. The student gets the information on the schedules, such as contact teaching online, the task requirements and their method of implementation as individual or group work. In addition, the student can utilize the learning material implemented in different ways, the descriptions of the learning activities and the detailed progress of the entire course (Figure 1).

the quality criteria and pedagogic process of eAMK online implementations		
	Planning and implementation the teaching of a course	**Studying on and participation in a course**
Pedagogic design	• instruction and interaction • assignments and materials • assessment and feedback • schedule and dates	• activities and times • individual and group assignments • compulsory and additional materials • tasks to be assessed and other tasks
Guidance and interaction	• pedagogic planning of contact and distance teaching online • communications and contacts • presence and instruction	• participation as individuals and in groups • online community and peer students • channels and times of communication • recordings and substituting assignments
Assessment and feedback	• continuous and versatile assessment • real-time and automated feedback	• self-, peer and group assessment • assessment by the teacher • feedback as a part of the learning process
Technical-pedagogic solutions	• possibilities and limitations of technology • pedagogic implementation and operational methods • support and instructions	• purpose • instructions and operational methods • freedom of choice • support

Figure 1. Planning and implementation of online learning entities.

Feedback, guidance and assessment throughout the course

In an online study entity, the feedback and guidance are planned as a part of the duration of the entire course. Online degree programme students have wished for regular guidance, information and feedback. The guidance-based feedback may be targeted at individuals or groups and it can be planned beforehand to be given either authentically in a guidance situation or in writing, also as automated messages. The course can contain a separate interactive area for feedback and open questions. The learner is informed of the methods

and times of communication and giving feedback in the online learning environment. Accessibility is essential. The feedback given by the student needs to be considered in developing the course.

Assessment which continues throughout the entire course is built in the assessment plan. The assessment can be either partly or entirely automated or manual, or a combination of these. To the student, the assessment is shown as self-, peer or group assessment or as direct assessment provided by the teacher in both individual and team assignments. The teacher shall activate students to work weekly. It's useful to pay attention to this in particular when the learning is demonstrated only with an exam taking place at the end of the course. It's important that the teacher also considers their own visible activity, participation and instruction throughout the course and is present on the online course as a teacher also at other times besides online contact lessons.

Monitoring completed assignments and assessments helps the teacher see the students' progress on the courses and find possible drop-outs in time. With the help of monitoring the completed assignments, the student can monitor their own progress on the course in addition to assessments and feedback. The own

analytics of the learning platform provides plenty of data on the student's progress and activity on the online course.

Essential information on the course for the student

The campus of online degree programme students is online, and therefore it is important that they can easily find all necessary information from the online implementation. The essential information includes:

- in which online learning environment the study module or course is arranged
- how to proceed weekly, what needs to be assimilated and how the learning is demonstrated
- how the online contact lessons or webinars are implemented
- how and on which channels does communication take place
- how the assignments are completed: as individual assignments at the student's own pace or by working in groups
- which learning assignments are to be assessed and what their importance is in terms of the grade
- which materials are compulsory for the course and which are additional information
- which tools and technical solutions are used and where can support be obtained

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STUDENT IN AN ONLINE DEGREE PROGRAMME

Combining and coordinating work, family, leisure time and studies is the responsibility of the student. It's also sometimes okay to be offline. Making progress is the most important!

Online degree programmes #23

Planning and implementation of instruction

All duties related to study guidance counselling at universities of applied sciences are at the core of study guidance counselling in online degree programmes and traditional degree programmes alike: guidance on learning and studying, instruction for professional growth and career planning and supporting personal growth and well-being. In online degree programmes, all guidance takes place digitally and it shall be ensured that all essential perspectives of guidance are considered in the digital instruction services which support the online degree programme.

As principles for digital planning and implementation, it is useful to adhere to the quality criteria for digital guidance produced in the eAMK project. All those carrying out and planning guidance and instruction work for students at higher education institutions can utilize the criteria.

# #
QUALITY CRITERIA FOR DIGITAL GUIDANCE

The quality criteria are comprised of four themes, which can be applied in planning the guidance of online degree programmes.

1: Service entity for digital guidance. It is important to create guidance services which the student can access throughout their entire study path, if necessary. Students must be informed of the available guidance services, their contents, implementors and methods of implementation and operation. The services shall be accessible to everyone. The guidance and instruction services shall be considered an important part of the quality system of the organization providing the degree.

2: Digital guidance as functions - process and event. The aim of degree students' guidance is to support the student's learning, growth and development. Selecting the most suitable guidance method is based on the student's needs and thus the guidance methods offered in online studies should also be versatile and adequate. In particular, supporting community-oriented and group work, guidance on individual study paths (ISP, recognition of prior competence) in the selection of studies offered by different higher education institutions, scheduling online studies, supporting the progress in studies and the self-regulation and motivation in learning,

support for using technological devices and applications and combining studying, working and leisure time may create a need for guidance in online degree programmes. In the guidance, the student's own activity and inclusion are also always supported.

To guarantee the high quality of guidance work, those working in guidance duties must be professional. Directing students to other parties providing guidance and counselling (e.g. health care services), if necessary, is also a part of the ethical responsibility of guidance counsellors and instructors in online degree programmes. Attention must also be paid to the fact that the environment in which guidance is provided is safe (e.g. safety questions, undisturbed focus and privacy protection).

4: Data protection, information security and ethical aspects. Especially in degree programmes which are fully completed online, it is important to note that the ethical, data protection and information security related questions and requirements in the guidance are met. In the guidance situation, the students must be informed and the ethical and legal principles and agreements of the organization can be discussed. When the guidance takes place in a secure manner, it is easier to establish an atmosphere of trust, which is usually the prerequisite for the success of a good guidance session.

When all the abovementioned factors are taken into account, the guidance in online degree programmes adheres to the quality criteria. In planning the guidance, The quality assessment tool for digital guidance and instruction can be utilized and to support the further development work, the established quality criteria for guidance. It is recommended that both of these are utilized also to support the guidance counsellor's or instructor's own work (development plan) but also as a basis for the organization's joint development days, for example.

DIGITAL GUIDANCE SERVICE PACKAGE

Responsible for the criteria being met = organisation = counsellor = student

The service package covers the student's guidance needs during their studies

The guidance serves the student during their studies in the following themes: Digital competence, variety of courses offered, studying at UAS, personal study plan, ability to study and professional growth (see the Digital guidance path image, eAMK).

Guidance services have been described and the responsibilities have been defined, and they have been communicated to the students and the operators involved

The responsibilities of the organisation, the counsellor and the student have been agreed upon in the guidance service description.

Different client groups, such as applicants, degree students (bachelor's, master's) and open studies students, at different stages of their studies, have been taken into account in the guidance service descriptions from the point of view of continuous learning.

The guidance service description indicates
- where the materials related to different guidance needs can be found, e.g. self-learning materials
- when the different guidance services are available, how a guidance time is booked and/or how the guidance services can be accessed
- how the web-based guidance and IT support services are provided.

The guidance is part of the developing quality system of the university of applied sciences

The organisation has a guidance plan in place that also takes digital guidance into account.

The organisation's guidance plan has been made available for all.

The guidance takes place in a timely manner in relation to the organisation's processes and resources.

The student has the opportunity to participate in the agile development and continuous improvement of services (e.g. plan-do-check-act).

The organisation has appointed persons in charge of the regular updates of digital guidance materials and services.

Here, a service package means the existing guidance services that are available throughout the study path. Users are aware of the guidance services that are available during the study path, their contents and providers.

The service description takes into account cooperation and networks

The services of partners and networks outside of the organisation that participate in the guidance are indicated in the description of guidance services (e.g. student health services, the Social Insurance Institution of Finland, providers of career tutoring services).

Accessibility of guidance services promotes equality and improves the quality of digital services

The organisation complies with the obligations set out in the Act on the Provision of Digital Services.

Information about the guidance services is provided on the official website of the organisation.

The guidance services have been named understandably and their technical functioning has been ensured.

The use of visual elements in the service descriptions and guidance services is well-considered and clear.

In the materials provided in text form, due consideration has been given to
- readability, sufficient font size and uniform appearance
- the possibility of using a screen reader

A text track or a separate text file has been provided in video and audio materials.

The guidance services take into account the guidance needs resulting from the internationalisation of education (e.g. time differences, the language of service and service culture).

The service description indicates whether the guidance service provider is a human or whether the service has been automated (e.g. bots).

My personal development plan:

# #
SUPPORT SERVICES AND OPERATIONAL ENVIRONMENTS

In online degree programmes, the entire studying and teaching process takes place online. Supporting a harmonious teaching, studying and learning process in online degree programmes requires holistic and proactive planning. This means close cooperation between teachers, students, working life experts and the support and administrative staff throughout the entire process. Participation possibilities for everyone must be considered.

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In online degree programmes, the teaching is assumed to be independent from place and mainly also from time. Technical solutions and support services must be built to support community-oriented studying and a sense of togetherness, as the student community and its support are important for committing to the online degree studies and completing them. The competence objectives and requirements of online degree programmes are similar to those of more traditional degree programmes. The consistency, functionality and even quality of the learning environments and services which support the learning environments and learning requires continuous development of the knowledge, skills and attitudes related to the operations. The appropriate support services for students and teachers should be utilized in assimilating new learning situations and tools, not only in the induction and orientation in the beginning of the studies. Supporting these abilities is vital throughout the entire degree.

> **"**
> Teachers should have a consistent style in terms of course materials. A consistent communication and contact policy is also useful. The course platform should be clear, the materials easily accessible and the tools suitable for the tasks.
>
> Student in an online degree programme

	Operating environment	Support services	Competence	Accessibility
Organization	tools and resources available in the environment	model for organizing support services	definition of the required competence	accessibility evaluation of the used environments and resources, defining the requirements
Training	policies on using tools and resources	cooperation with support services	taking care of the teachers' competence and its development requirements	understanding the accessibility requirements
Teacher	applying the policies in practice	utilizing the competence of support services	maintaining and developing own competence	applying on the own course and in the own activities
Student	getting to know the operational environment	utilizing support services	acquiring competence required in studying in an online degree programme	use of accessible contents and materials

Figure 2. Levels of planning the operating environment.

Solutions related to the study experience of students in online degree programmes are made on several different levels. The solutions made at the higher education institution level create the framework for the working and solutions at the teacher and degree programme level. The availability of the support required in the operating environment is a solution made at the organizational level. Many choices which improve the experience can be made at the degree programme and teacher level within the set boundaries. These are related to the teachers' operations in online environments. From the student's perspective, the online degree programme is mostly comprised of courses, the planning and implementation of which is the responsibility of teachers. In a situation which is ideal for the student, the teachers cooperate thus that a consistent entity is formed of the courses' contents, methods of implementation and the ways of utilizing tools on the courses. This should not be left as the responsibility of the teachers alone, but managers play an important part in guiding the teachers to cooperate and creating the prerequisites for cooperation. Teachers' skills and abilities to work in the online degree programme's operating environment, both technically and pedagogically, are also essential. The teachers themselves should be responsible for taking care of their own competence. The important task of the manager and organization is to provide opportunities to develop the competence required in teaching in an online degree programme and ensure the availability of support.

Online degree programmes #29

Consistent solutions in the operating environment

The operating environment of an online degree programme must yield in many ways, similarly to traditional university campuses. The campus of students in an online degree programme is online and it takes shape through different digital services and their user interfaces. In selecting these, the following requirements must be considered in making the implementation solutions of the degree programme:

- The openness and accessibility of the contents and materials
  - cognitive accessibility i.e. understandability
  - technical accessibility with different tools
  - gratuitousness, user rights and licences

- Information security (secure to operate, operate in a secure manner)

- Independence from terminal devices (works on different terminal devices and transfer rates, mobile applications available, scalability)

Often students criticize the teachers' varying ways of action in the operating environment. For example, if the workspaces on an online platform look different, it is difficult to find the required information and return boxes for assignments. At the course level, we recommend the following tips for technical solutions:

- **"Less is more"**
  - only a limited number of basic online learning tools

- **Equality and consistency**
  - the tools for studying, selected to be used in the degree, are provided to all students supported and free of charge
  - keep to the selected tools
  - aim for consistent methods of use

- **"Keep it simple"**
  - select tools which people can use
  - favour simple solutions

- **Make the choices in cooperation with the support services**
  - recognize the needs for support and agree on organizing the support
  - foresee possible problem situations

- **Ensure availability**
  - know to recognize the malfunctions of user IDs and direct the student forward to fix the situation (alternatively through IT services or independently in an online service)
  - select solutions which work with different terminal devices (software + contents)
  - the student's opportunity to choose how and when they study

Tips for carrying out student-based support services

In carrying out support services for online degree programmes, *a clear service promise* and functional digital pedagogy based support services are required for both students and teachers. In fact, the support services for online degree programmes are *a functional entity*, which requires from the parties – the people responsible for the education, the teachers and the guidance and support staff – an open and confirential partnership. There are several different models for organizing the support for remote and online studies. At the organizational level, it must be solved how this service entity, produced by different functions, is implemented. All those providing support are required to have good knowledge of the teaching solutions and guidance services.

Teachers and their ways of working in the online environment are in a crucial position in terms of the student's study experience. The teacher and peer students are the closest parties to provide support for the student. The student is responsible for their own devices and their functionality. In addition, *guidance and support in digital pedagogy* shall be available in the everyday life with remote connections, for example from a support service unit. With shared policies, practices can be unified and the burden of students eased. These policies are best constructed through a dialogue during the planning and implementation of teaching, between the teachers and the persons who provide digital support. A correctly timed and student-oriented support service for remote and online studies is a channel to receive and convey constant information on the activities and feedback for the development of the entity formed by teaching and the other support services.

In the online degree programme, the student's support for learning, the learning environment and the space of learning are constructed and *the learning experience is formed through technology.* From the student's perspective it is not essential who produces the service. Instead the information on which services are available and how is crucially important. Adjusting the service hours with the students' study times and the meetings with the provider of the support organized in different ways lower the threshold for utilizing the support. The contact can take place e.g. through different helpdesk services, in a WhatsApp group, through a chatbot or on-call service number. The student's need for support may emerge in a contact to the support for remote and online studies, even if the issue in reality was related to e.g. guidance or well-being services. Identifying the correct need for support requires that the support staff is sensitive and able to direct the student forward to the support which matches their needs.

A.

Tips for implementing support services:

- proactive, holistic planning
- a clear service promise; what kind of support is available, how and when
- service times match the study times
  - ◊ correct timing of support
  - ◊ identifying the real need for support and guiding the student forward
- utilizing the information on the activities and continuous feedback, obtained through the support services for remote and online studies, in developing the teaching and other support services

B.

Recommendations/good practices related to students' support services:

- implementing the online user IDs shall be safely enabled with remote connections
- digital orientation to students starting their studies
  - ◊ necessary information on and skills to use the selected tools
  - ◊ enables practical training in a secured environment
  - ◊ the materials and tasks of the orientation can be revisited later as the studies progress
- support for and induction in using the tools are provided throughout the degree
  - ◊ availability of support when the students are studying, also in the evenings and possibly weekends
  - ◊ support is offered if the learning assignments require it, induction in skills for using the tools is not provided early but "just in time"
  - ◊ easy access to the contact information of the support services in the student's operational environment, e.g. in virtual classrooms and the workspaces of the online platform
- encountering the support service staff in different contexts during the studies
  - ◊ lowers the threshold to utilize the support services
  - ◊ improves the quality of the learning experience, e.g. visits for checking the sounds to a virtual classroom also as the studies progress or versatile use of cloud services
  - ◊ in terms of teachers, the support services can assist in utilizing e.g. flipped learning or different group work methods in an online environment

# #
CHALLENGES WITH SUPPORTING AN ONLINE DEGREE STUDENT

Supporting the student

- How do you support the online degree student?
- How are you present online?
- How can the student reach you when they need support?
- Can you access the assisting support services online?

Supporting the community

- How do you support the building of a community online?
- How do you connect the online community to the rest of the UAS community?
- What is your own role in the online community and how are you active in it?

Supporting studying

- How do you support online learning?
- How do you support studying online?
- Where can you see what kind of support is needed and when?
- Do you have adequate technical and online pedagogy related skills?

Are all support channels available online?

Do all support services have the knowledge/ opportunity to support online degree students equally to students on campus?

Is the higher education institution's technical ability and competence adequate for providing support online?

Online studying entails flexibility for combining work, family, hobbies and studies, but requires commitment, self-directedness and above all, new study skills from the student. What do the students themselves say about studying online? What kind of issues should be considered in studying in an online degree programme? Read the tips on the next page.

# #
TIPS FROM ONLINE
DEGREE PROGRAMME STUDENTS

01
Organize your studies

Plan and schedule your studies. ● Set a pace for your online meetings, group work and independent study time on a weekly level. ● Remember to take care of recovery and days off. ● Take care of your digital working environment and ensure your IT skills.

02
Study as a part of a group

Participate in defining the group's joint learning goals and rules. ● For your part, create a positive atmosphere in the group. ● Be active and place your own competence at the group's disposal. ● Value the competence of others. ● If necessary, ask for help.

03
Be self-regulating and make choices

Be self-regulating and self-motivated. ● Monitor the progress of your studies carefully from the start. In online studies, you are responsible for the progress of your own studies. ● Make flexible choices according to your own learning objectives and opportunities.

04
Maintain your motivation to study

Recognize and influence your own motivation to study. ● Try to find means which suit you to positively influence on your motivation. ● Showcase your own competence to yourself and others e.g. in an electronic portfolio. ● Be active in utilizing your peer students and the staff providing support for studies.

Visions on the future of the national online degree programme

"Life happens"

The online degree programme can provide the student an opportunity to complete studies in higher education as a part of different situations in life. National cooperation in online degree programmes may offer a student the best possible competence path to become a professional in their field.

Opportunities of the national online degree programme

- Flexible, versatile and extensive student-oriented learning paths

- The strengths of higher education institutions made accessible to students through national cooperation

- Combining the studies with work, family, travelling despite the location of the higher education institution

- Obtaining the skills needed in digital work in national and international online environments

- Instructed studies and jointly agreed support channels

# #
STARTING POINTS IN PLANNING THE NATIONAL ONLINE DEGREE PROGRAMME

In planning the national online degree programme, several central starting points have to be considered first.

When several higher education operators or other network partners are involved, it is particularly important to set the framework for the cooperation to accomplish a flexible but functioning online degree programme from the student's perspective.

The network has to carefully define the sharing of responsibility both in terms of studying in an online degree programme and its administration before the implementation. The decision-making and coordinating responsibility may vary depending on what kind of an online degree programme is being built (see pp. 47–53 visions on different opportunities for online degree programmes). The composition of the network and the number of its operators are also dependent on the type of the selected online

degree programme. It is important to consider from the student's viewpoint in whose ecosystem the student is. It must be considered according to the type of the online degree programme what kind of policies have to be made regarding the degree so that it works in the ecosystem in question and the student can complete the degree as planned. It is thus important to take into account the possible limiting factors, such as legislative factors or special contents in the curriculum.

The implementation of the online degree programme must be of high quality both in terms of the teaching and support services. The support and guidance services can be carried out either in a centralized or decentralized manner, depending on the type of the network and degree. It is also vital to consider,

in terms of both students and staff, how the ecosystem between the people and technology is implemented. The learning environment solutions enable carrying out a joint online degree programme either in a completely shared, new platform or by utilizing the partners' own platforms. However, from the student's perspective, the consistency, functionality and even quality of the learning environments and services are important.

Support from the management is of particular importance in the planning and implementation of the national online degree programme. Cooperation is carried out best if the funding channels enable high-quality implementation of education from the perspectives of studying, teaching, support services, administration and guidance.

What needs to be considered in terms of the cooperation network?

◑ Laws, statutes and regulations must be considered in compiling the online degree programme

◑ Commensurability of universities of applied sciences' own degree regulations

◑ The network must ensure continuous supply, its quality and availability

◑ Joint models of operation and pedagogic starting points

◑ Cooperation between teachers and other staff in the network essential

◑ Funding according to the profiles, supply and the completion of degrees

◑ Online degree programme students and staff create the online degree programme community

◑ The network may also include international partners of the higher education institutions in the network

◑ Taking working life as a part of the network must be considered

◑ Ensuring a functional technical environmen

◑ Introducing the library, well-being services and others as a part of the network

What needs to be considered in terms of the student?

- Student-orientation in the planning

- Free completion enables flexible progress in the studies all year round and a quicker graduation schedule

- Students' legal protection must be considered

- Support and guidance for the student's professional growth is essential

- Guidance plays a central part and specific support services need to be provided in a centralized manner

- Support and guidance for community-oriented and individual learning

- Considering and enabling peer support

Also in planning and implementing the study entities, remember to consider joint ways of action, joint training and support for teachers, shared learning environments, utilizing quality criteria and genuine presence and interaction

What needs to be considered in terms of support services and guidance?

- Joint service promise and guidance promise

- Centralized support ensures quality and the availability of the same information, and enables versatile ways of being in touch

- The support services are shown as a consistent and a single place for online degree programme students

- Monitoring the progress of studies in one place

- Centralized administrative solutions inside the network

- Pedagogic and technical support constantly available for teachers

- Working life solutions need to be considered in implementing the online degree programme

- eAMK quality criteria and other already produced information need to be considered in the planning

- Open Badges as a part of competence development in the online degree programmes

In the planning and implementation of learning environments in the national online degree programme, remember to consired shared tools and ways of action, applying solutions from working life, building and supporting an online community, learner orientation and supporting learning styles, and pedagogic use of technical environments

Building the opportunities of the national online degree programme was started by creating visions of future online degree programmes.

Materials and information, which were vastly collected in different ways, were utilized as the basis for the envisioning work. The Online Degree Working Group assembled regularly in 2019-2020, when it collected material related to online degree programmes from different perspectives, e.g. planning online degree programmes, guidance, students' well-being and study entities. In addition, the working group organized several webinars, as a part of which viewpoints for webinar topics were collected from the participants and students (see p. XX in this publication, Webinar links) The working group compiled the good practices it collected in the publication of the eAMK project (Link to article), and collected comments and proposals for good practices in the national implementation of online degree programmes in a workshop of the eAMK event. In the envisioning, doctoral thesis work on the pedagogic planning of online degree programmes has been utilized (Joshi, link to blog marjojoshi.com). In addition to the large amount of materials of the eAMK project, the materials of the development project on cross-institutional studies provided help in the envisioning work.

In the following pages, the results of the envisioning are presented in more detail and the opportunities of four different future visions are discussed.

The central questions in the envisioning:

1. What is the goal of the national online degree programme?

2. Who is/are the central operator(s)?

3. What needs to be considered in the implementation?

4. In which environment is the degree carried out?

5. How is the student/staff supported during the online degree programme?

Vision 01	**Vision 1: A freely formed online degree programme** = selecting the degree studies and the entire degree freely from any university of applied sciences
Vision 02	**Vision 2: Moving from a traditional degree programme to an online degree programme** = the basic studies of the degree are completed on the campus of the home institution, after which the remaining part of the degree completely online
Vision 03	**Vision 3: A new, joint online degree programme** = a completely new, joint degree programme implemented by a cooperation network of the higher education institutions and other operators
Vision 04	**Vision 4: An existing, joint degree** = selecting an existing degree programme already implemented by several UAS's and offering it jointly

Check out the more detailed descriptions on the visions on the following pages!

VISION 1
A freely *formed* online degree programme

DESCRIPTION

The student can freely complete a degree from any higher education institution in the network. The student can select studies freely from all higher education institutions in the network, and at the end of the studies, the degree is applied for from any HEI in the network.

Essential added value:
- The student is not dependent on the study option or selection of a specific higher education institution, but can complete studies flexibly until the required amount of studies has been completed
- Also enables micro degrees and other specialization or partial attainments
- Can be applied for a degree completed through Open Studies

Central operators
- University of applied sciences network
- CampusOnline operating environment
- Guidance staff
- Support services and administration

To be considered in the implementation:
- Centralized support and administration (e.g. through CampusOnline or other shared operating environment)
- Requires assimilation in terms of the Degree Regulations of universities of applied sciences
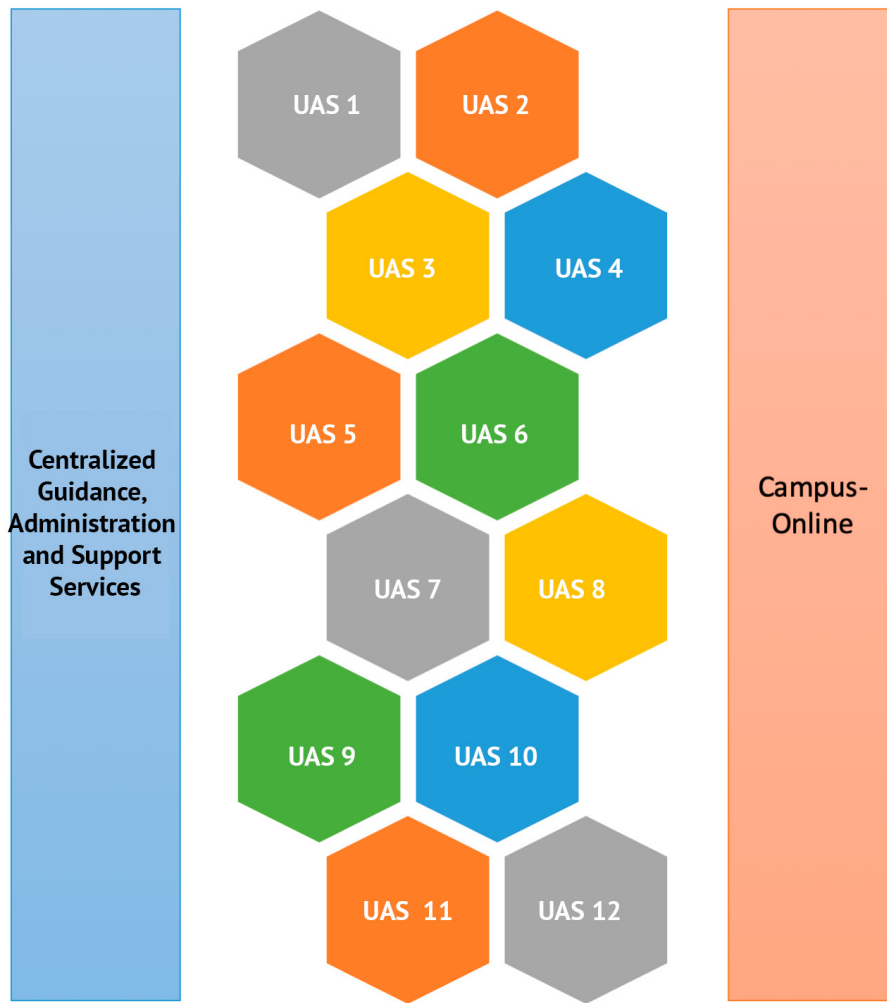
Implementation environment:
- Distributed model, studies are completed by freely choosing them at different higher education institutions and different technical environments
- The degree is applied from a higher education institution in the network according to the student's choice

Support for students/staff:
- Students' guidance at the centre, support for the student's professional growth and progress in the study path, compiling the degree parts in a centralized manner
- Distributed support for teachers in their own higher education institutions

# #
"WILD AND FREE"

Centralized Guidance, Administration and Support Services

UAS 1
UAS 2
UAS 3
UAS 4
UAS 5
UAS 6
UAS 7
UAS 8
UAS 9
UAS 10
UAS 11
UAS 12

Campus-Online

01. The studies start, the student selects and completes basic and professional studies freely from the CampusOnline course supply

02. The student completes online studies freely from different universities of applied sciences on CampusOnline

03. The student completes practical training and applies for recognition of learning from a UAS through an online course planned for the purpose (e.g. UAS 8)

04. The student writes their thesis for one of the network's universities of applied sciences through an online course planned for the purpose (e.g. UAS 7)

05. The degree is completed, the student applies for the degree from one of the network's universities of applied sciences (e.g. UAS 9)

Online degree programmes #47

VISION 2
Moving from traditional to an online degree programme

DESCRIPTION

The opportunity for an online degree programme is offered also to those completing regular degree programmes (by completing a specified number of online studies). Studies can be selected freely from all of the HEIs in the network, and at the end of the studies, the degree is applied for from the home institution.

Essential added value:
· The student applies for on-campus studies at a specific HEI, but can move to complete the degree online by selecting a specified number of entities online
· The student gains experience on both on-campus studies and online studies
· Enables moving to working life straight after having completed the basic studies

Central operators:
· The UAS network enables specialization and profiling in the online degree programme section
· The online degree programme personnel and support services from the home institution
· To be considered in the implementation:
· Distributed support and administration, but principles of cross-institutional studies in transferring the studies

Implementation environment:
· Distributed model, studies are completed at different HEIs and different technical environments but as a student in the home institution
· The degree is applied for from the home institution

Support for students/staff:
· The student's guidance in the home institution, supporting the student's professional growth and progress in the study path and supporting online studies at the transfer stage
· Distributed support for online degree programme teachers in their home institutions at the online degree programme stage

# #
"WRAP UP THE BASIC STUDIES AND THEN TO WORKING LIFE"

Guidance, administration and support services of Own UAS

The UAS network, CampusOnline
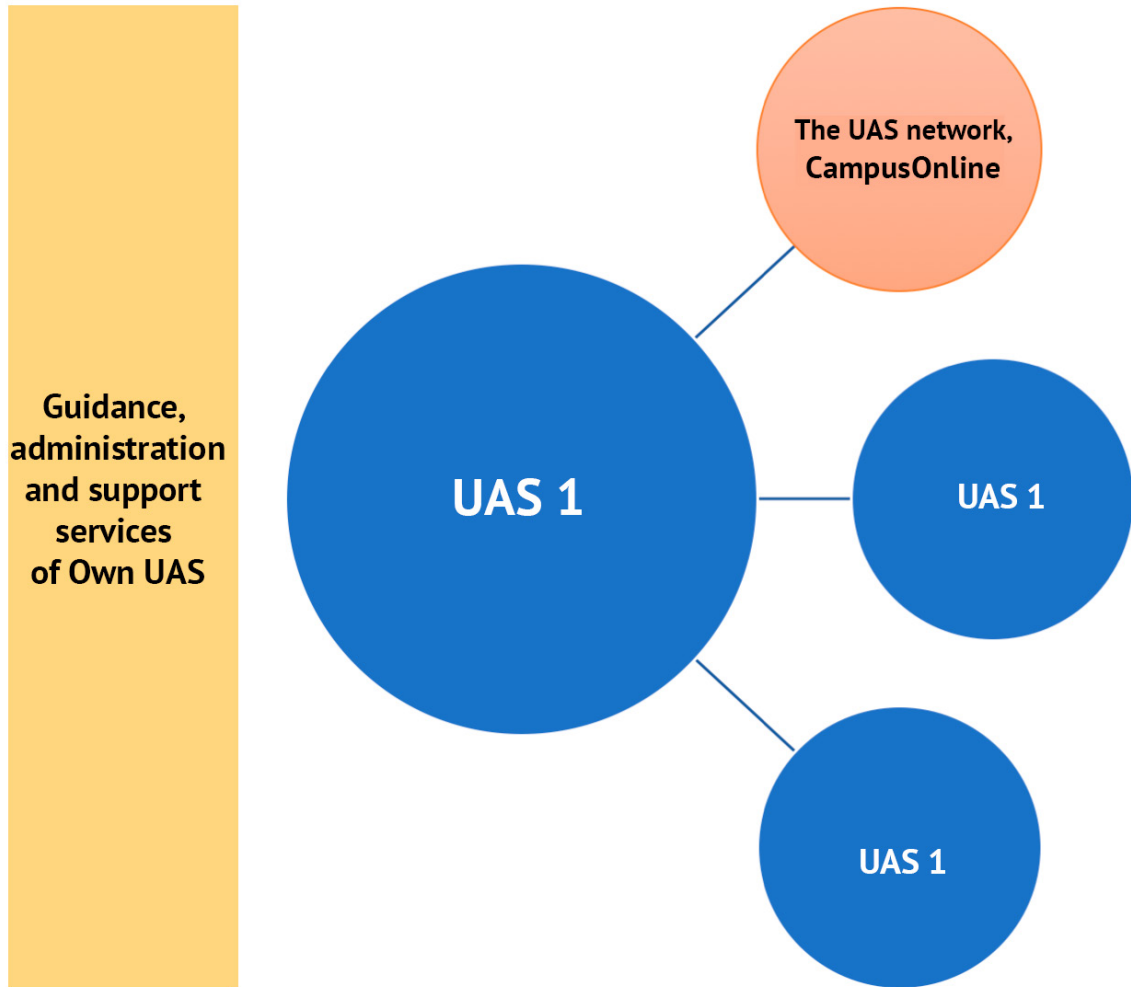
UAS 1

UAS 1

UAS 1

01. The studies start, the student completes first-year basic studies at UAS 1 as on-campus studies

02. The student moves to an online degree programme and completes 2nd- and 3rd-year studies online (own UAS, CampusOnline)

03. The student completes the practical training through their own UAS and own instructor

04. The student writes their thesis through their own UAS and own instructor

05. The degree is complete; the student applies for the degree from their ow UAS (UAS 1)

VISION 3
A new, joint online degree programme

DESCRIPTION

Creating a new degree programme, for which an own curriculum is created by the network in cooperation. Students complete studies from the HEIs in the network and the completed degree is the network's own degree.

Essential added value:
- The student applies for a joint online degree programme carried out by the cooperation network
- Also enables micro degrees or other different types of completion methods
- International or working life partners can belong to the network

Central operators:
- HEI network
- Cooperation between operators is central
- Centralized, the degree programme's own online degree programme support staff (but shared by the network)
- Can include cooperation with the network's own HEI, international or working life partners

To be considered in the implementation:
- Centralized support and administration
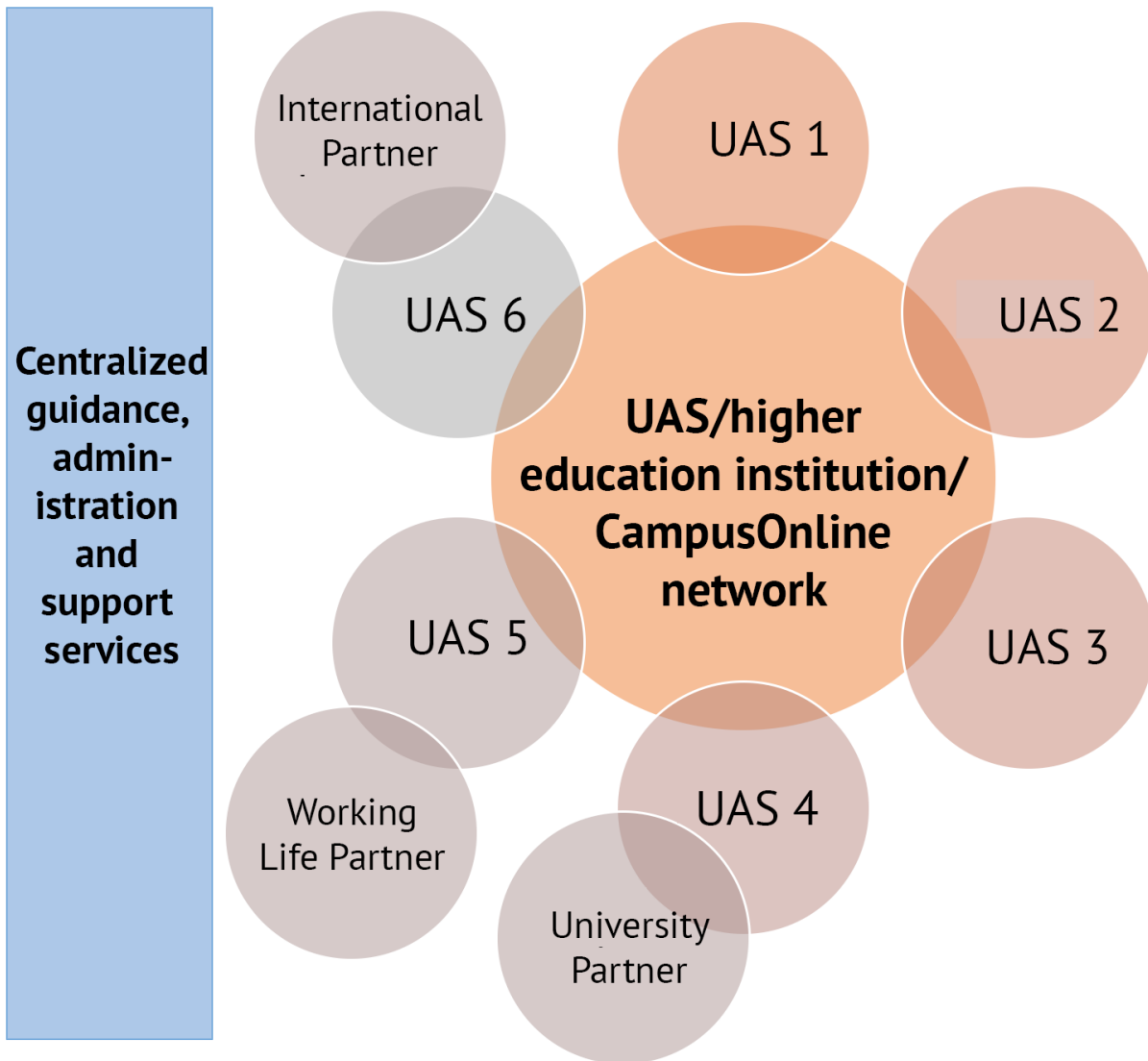- Funding channels
- Teachers shared by the network

Implementation environment:
- A centralized model, in which the studies are completed in a shared technical environment
- The studies are offered through the network but from inside one degree programme (elective studies possible from all degree programmes)
- The degree is applied for through the network and the party granting the degree is the network, not an individual HEI

Support for students/staff:
- Student's guidance, supporting the professional growth and progress on the study path and supporting online studies in a centralized manner through the network
- Centralized support for teachers through the network

# #
"A DEGREE FOR FUTURE EXPERTS"

Centralized guidance, admin- istration and support services

International Partner

UAS 1

UAS 6

UAS 2

UAS/higher education institution/ CampusOnline network

UAS 5

UAS 3

Working Life Partner

UAS 4

University Partner

01. The studies start, the student completes basic and professional studies from the network supply as a student of the network online

02. The student completes elective studies from the entire CampusOnline supply online

03. The student completes practical training and applies for recognition of studies according to the network's requirements and through their instructor

04. The student completes their thesis according to the network's requirements and through an instructor

05. Degree completed; the student applies for the network's degree

Online degree programmes #51

VISION 4
An existing, joint degree programme

Essential added value:
- The student applies for a degree in their home institution, which is implemented in cooperation with the network
- Enables so-called double degree type, i.e. all HEIs in the network are listed in the degree certificate

Central operators:
- The HEI network formed of HEIs which offer the degree
- Contents and profiling through the network and staff
- Suitable for extensive cooperation between the HEIs
- Requires coordination, cooperation between operators is central

To be considered in the implementation:
- Distributed support and administration, cross-institutional studies' principles in transferring the studies
- Funding channels
- Is not suitable for tightly regulated degrees
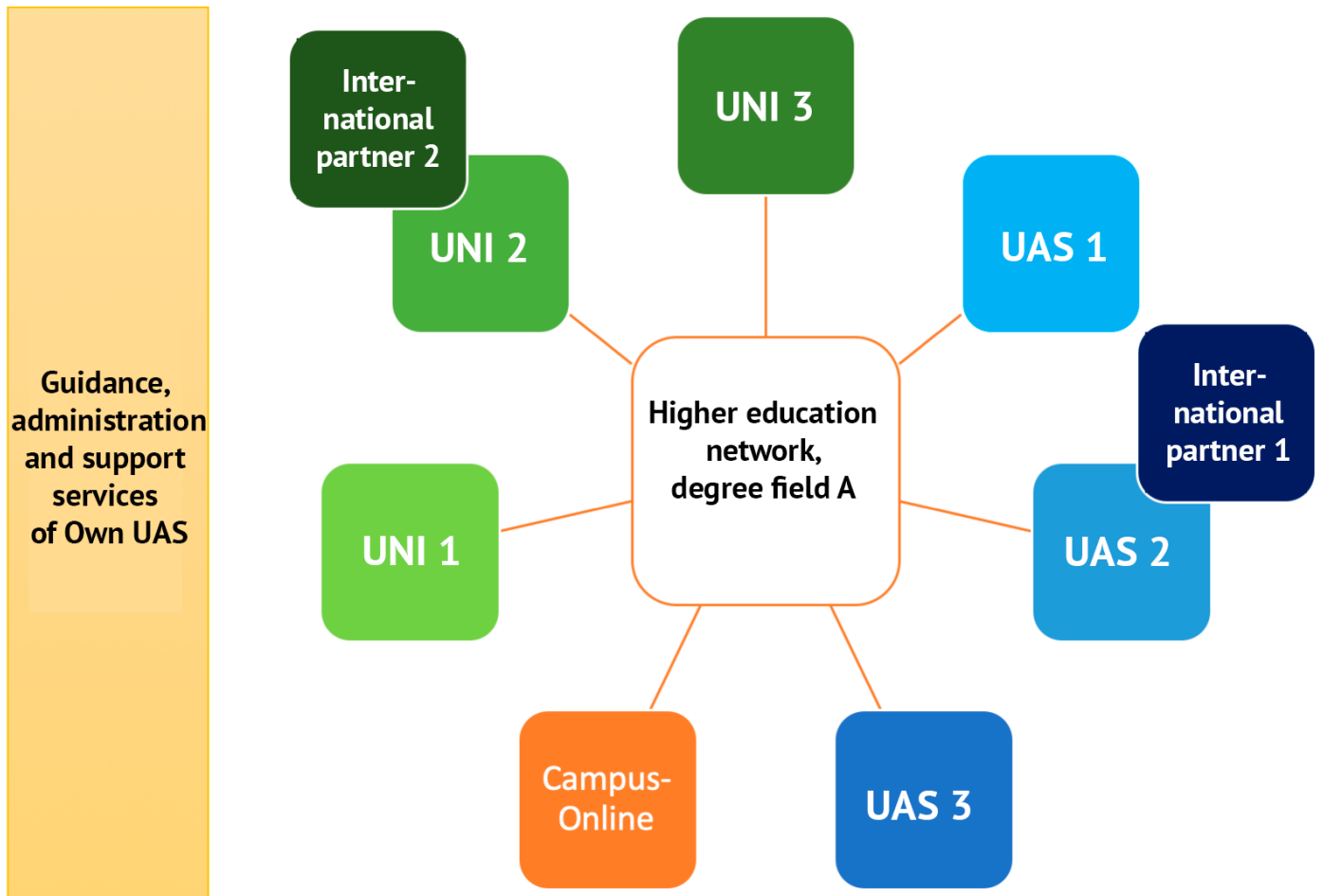- Suitable for fields of larger masses

Implementation environment:
- Distributed model, studies completed in different operating environments
- Centralized model also possible, with a shared technical environment
- The studies are offered through the network but from inside one degree programme (elective studies possible from all degree programmes)
- The degree is applied for from the home institution

Support for students/staff:
- Students' guidance, distributed support for professional growth and progressing in the study path
- collecting the parts of the degree in a a centralized manner, according to the principles of cross-institutional studies
- Distributed support for teachers in their own higher education institutions

DESCRIPTION

An existing degree, already in several HEIs. Contents, which are possibly profiled, can be jointly produced and offered. Students complete studies from the network's HEIs and the completed degree is the home institution's degree.

#52 Online degree programmes

# #
"WITH COOPERATION, LESS IS MORE"

Guidance, administration and support services of Own UAS

International partner 2

UNI 2

UNI 3

UAS 1

International partner 1

UNI 1

Higher education network, degree field A

UAS 2

Campus-Online

UAS 3

01. The studies start, the student completes the basic and professional studies from the network's supply online as a student of the network

02. The student completes elective studies from the entire CampusOnline supply online

03. The student completes practical training and applies for recognition of studies according to the network requirements and through an instructor

04. The student completes their thesis according to the network's requirements and through an instructor

05. Degree completed; the student applies for the network's degree

Online degree programmes #53

# #
FINAL WORDS

Digitalisation is a central change trend for HEIs.

The higher education field discusses the future role of the higher education institution in throughout Europe. Many factors affect this, and not least the fact that the amount of information is unlimited. It is largely up to individuals to decide what competence they wish to acquire for themselves. Demonstrating competence and obtaining an official document on the competence is still the prevailing practice. Certificates are appreciated and they are valuable.

However, learning takes on new dimensions as we live in the digital era and the amount of information and training available is beyond any estimations. Digitalization also changes learning and education thus that people can increasingly study alongside working and according to their personal schedules. In Finland, the Rectors' Conference of Finnish Universities of Applied Sciences Arene and the Rectors' Council of Finnish Universities (Unifi) have jointly started to promote the national digivision 2030 plan. The vision group of the higher education institutions states that digitalization is a central change trend for HEIs. Technology also supports the implementations of a central trend, open, flexible and continuous learning.

For their part, national online degree programmes can support the development

> **"**
> National online degree programmes
> enable flexible paths to both micro
> degrees and more extensive degrees.

of future digivisions in the field of higher education by enabling flexible paths for micro degrees, diplomas and more extensive degrees. Studying online provides students good starting points for working in the increasingly digital and global environments of working life. Possible European or more extensive international cooperation on online degree programmes would provide teachers and students possibilities for networking and developing and sharing their own competence. Future in the higher education sector appears very interesting and the mentioned development trends will permanently change the practices of education. It is desirable that the availability of information and new methods develop students' curiosity and encourage them to make different solutions in terms of education. In the great transformation of working life, we need young people in whom different working life skills are emphasized. Change is permanent and for this we wish to coach our students for example by utilizing digitalization.

Minna Scheinin
Marjo Joshi