

**ESSENTIAL  
FRAMEWORKS  
FOR ENHANCING  
STUDENT  
SUCCESS**

**FLEXIBLE LEARNING  
IN HIGHER EDUCATION**

# What is flexible learning in HE?

**Advance HE believes that flexible learning is about empowering students by offering them choices in how, what, when and where they learn: the pace, place and mode of delivery.**

Flexible learning requires a balance of power between institutions and students, and seeks to find ways in which choice can be provided that is economically viable and appropriately manageable for institutions and students alike.

## Who is the framework for?

Given that flexible learning requires a partnership between all stakeholders, including employers (where relevant), this framework is intended for a wide audience. In particular, it is for those working in higher education (HE) with responsibilities for decision-making in areas such as strategic planning, programme development, administrative systems and structures, technological infrastructures relating to learning and teaching, and employer engagement. It can be most effective if applied across an institution, as well as at the programme level.

## Why is flexible learning important?

Flexible learning is important because it is a key means of allowing students to combine different areas of their lives – work, study and leisure – in ways that suit them best. When well supported, this positively impacts recruitment, retention and progression; widens participation; and offers opportunities to learners of all ages, backgrounds, ethnicities and nationalities.

Flexible learning is student-centred and empowers students to become independent and autonomous, fostering graduate attributes that will enable them to manage the complexities of 21st century life.

In an age where employability is high on the agenda of most higher education providers (HEPs), flexible learning facilitates interaction with employers in mutually constructive ways, as a result of which students contribute to the national economy and maintain their financial viability while studying.

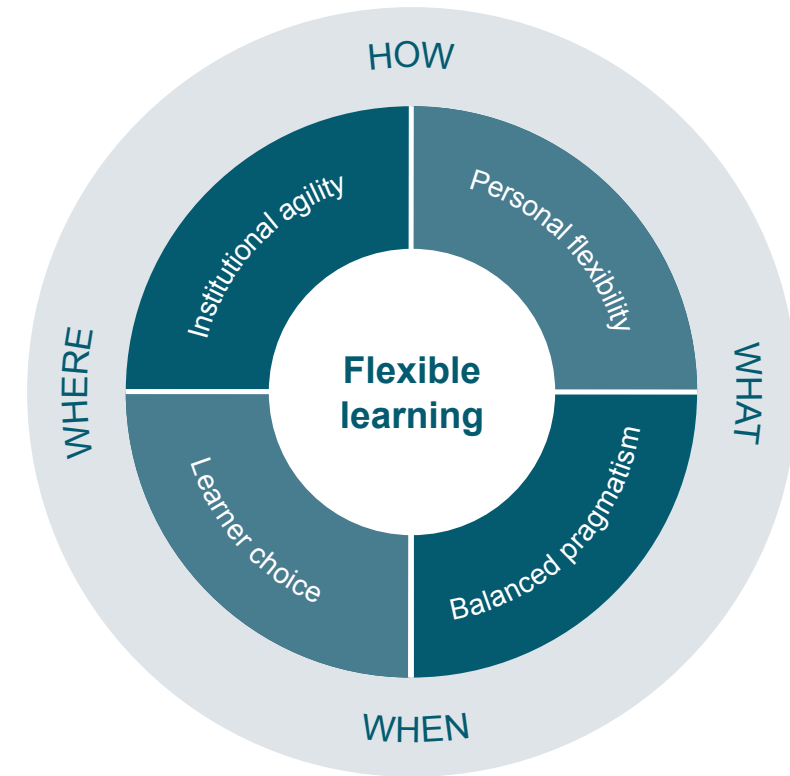
# How this framework is structured

The framework, represented on the diagram, maps the significant elements of the flexible learning terrain. It provides a way of reviewing your institution's flexible learning provision. By providing an overview of flexible learning, the framework offers a structure within which creative thinking and innovative approaches to learning and teaching can be considered. The areas of focus overlap and intersect, and hence can be combined to enhance the learning experience.

## Four key areas of focus

Flexible learning lies at the heart of the framework, from which four key areas of focus emanate. Learner choice and personal flexibility focus on students, while institutional agility and balanced pragmatism emphasise institutions. Together their message is one of partnership between HEPs and students with the goal of providing accessible yet manageable learning opportunities for a wide range of people.

Flexibility is primarily a question of offering students choices about the pace, place and mode of their study, choices articulated in the next ring: how, what, where and when.



# There are four further areas of focus

## TECHNOLOGY-ENHANCED LEARNING

A high degree of mobile learning, and the design of learning spaces that support it; innovative pedagogies and collaborative working; embedding appropriate digital literacies for both students and staff; and the use of learning analytics to provide as personalised an approach as is possible.

## EMPLOYMENT

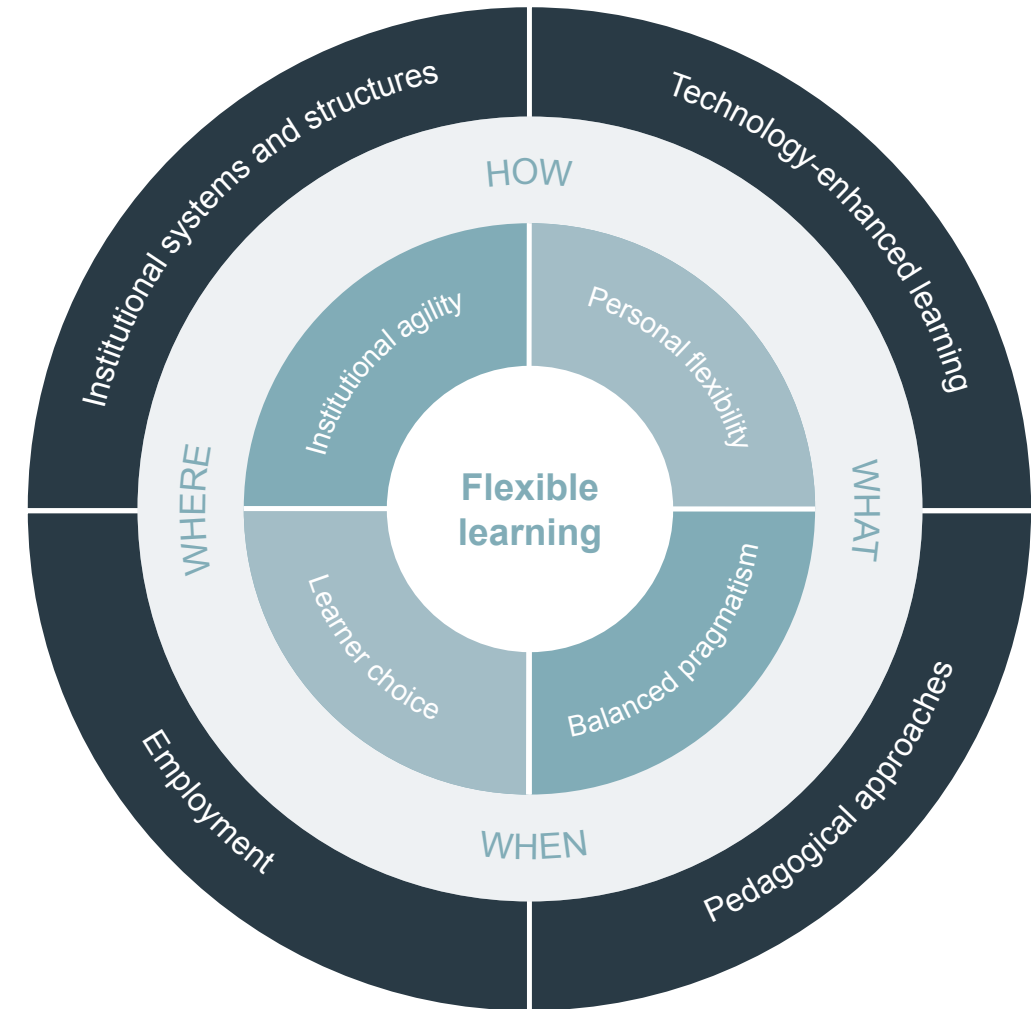
Developing strong collaborations and partnerships with the employment sector, to include work-based and work-place learning, thus addressing a student's long term employability; and a seamless intersection between employers and HEPs through flexible working which offers employees similar choices in how, where and when they work. This takes place in a context of increasing globalisation.

## INSTITUTIONAL SYSTEMS AND STRUCTURES

The infrastructures that HEPs have in place and on which they depend for their efficient functioning. These include administrative and financial systems, as well as academic regulations and the availability of support services. Institutional systems and structures are designed for flexibility rather than homogeneity.

## PEDAGOGICAL APPROACHES

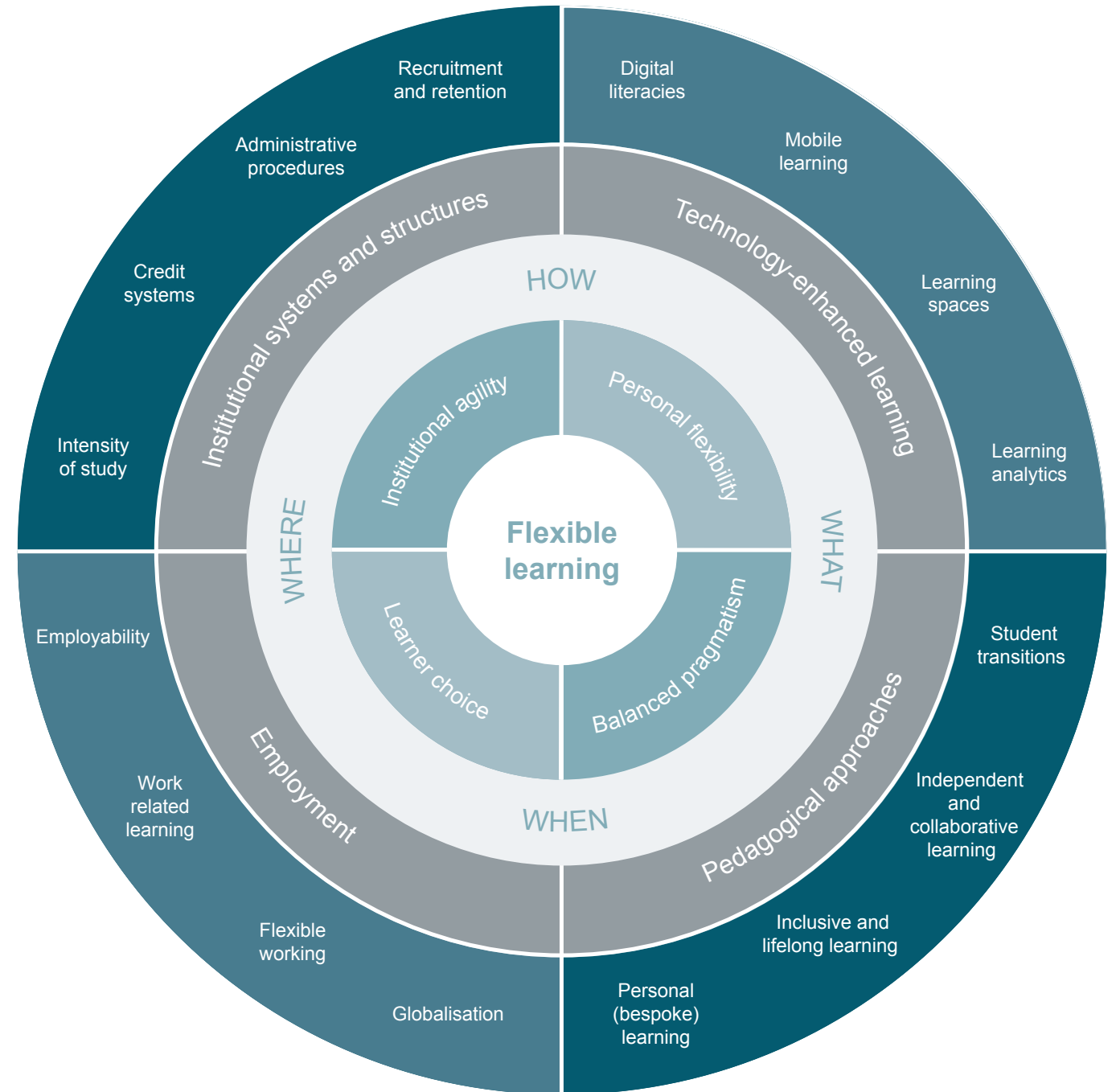
The way in which learning, teaching and assessment takes place and their underpinning philosophies and rationales. This may include (for example) the incorporation of techniques intended to foster independent as well as lifelong learning, and the ability for students to design their own programme of study.



# Contributing components

Each of the four further areas of focus has a number of component parts, all of which contribute to enhancing or hindering the degree of flexible learning available to students.

This area of the framework serves as a prompt for ensuring that wider implications of intended action have been considered. An investment in mobile technologies, which offers students greater flexibility in when, where and with whom they learn, for example, may introduce the need to ensure students have the necessary digital literacies and that they are able to work independently and autonomously.



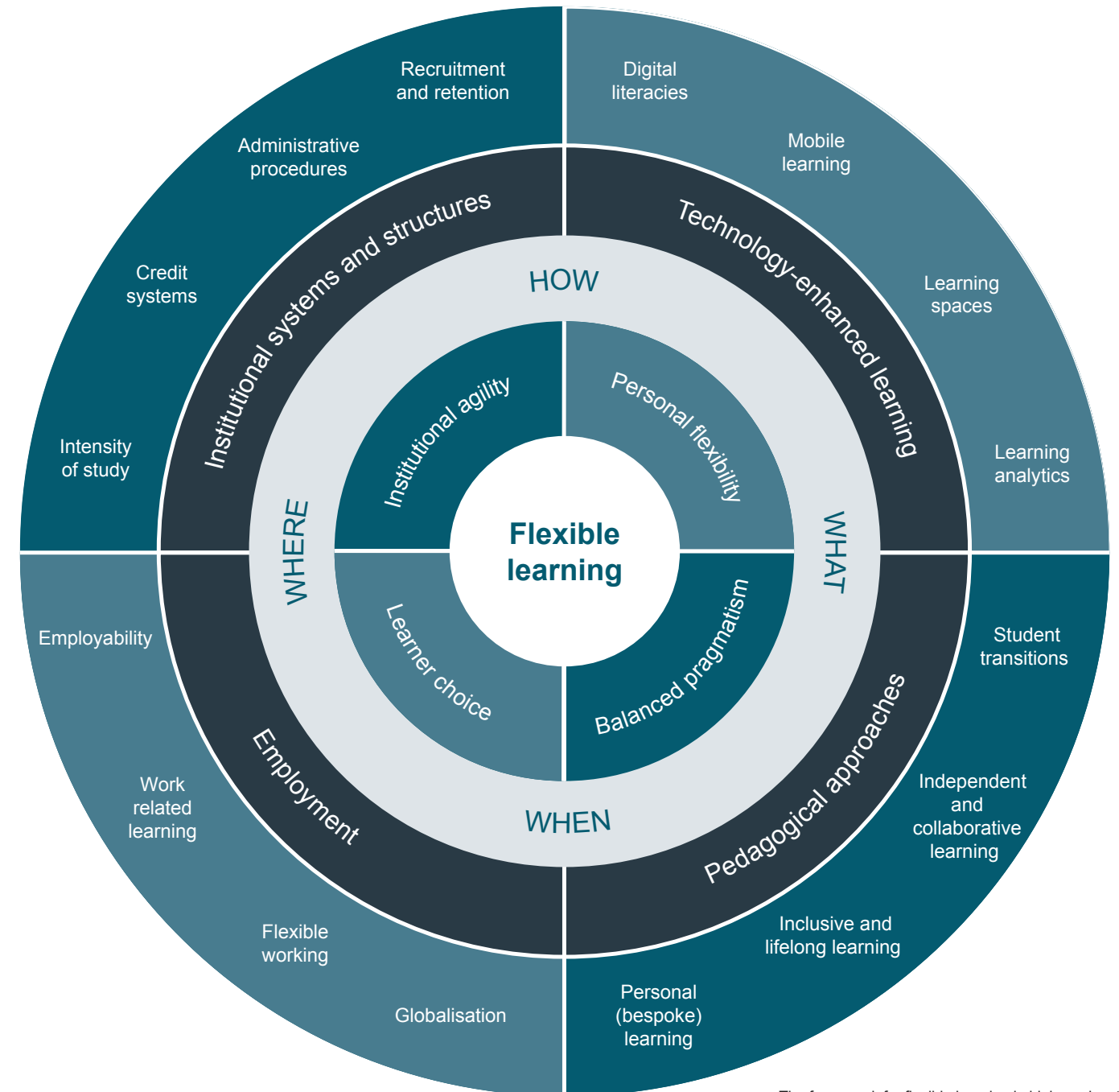
# How does this framework align with the Professional Standards Framework (PSF)?

Staff may want to consider how their engagement with flexible learning in higher education can offer an effective approach to areas of activity, enable deeper understanding of core knowledge, and demonstrate alignment with professional values. It is particularly relevant to the following dimensions:

**ACTIVITY:** A1, A2 AND A4  
**KNOWLEDGE:** K4 AND K6  
**VALUES:** V1, V2 AND V4

Advance HE invites lecturers, teachers and learning support staff to evidence their use of this or other Advance HE frameworks in applying for Fellowship in recognition of their commitment to professional practice.

To find out more about Fellowship visit: [www.advance-he.ac.uk/fellowship](http://www.advance-he.ac.uk/fellowship)





## Acknowledgements

Thanks are due to the authors of successive Advance HE publications on aspects of flexible learning whose work informed this framework; to the participants of Advance HE's Flexible Learning Strategic Enhancement Programme; and to the group of expert practitioners who met in May 2015 and offered valuable feedback to draft versions.

The logo for Advance HE, featuring a stylized 'A' with a blue dot and a purple dot, followed by the text 'AdvanceHE' in a bold, sans-serif font. Below the text is a horizontal bar with segments of teal, blue, red, yellow, purple, and orange.

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