

The student in control

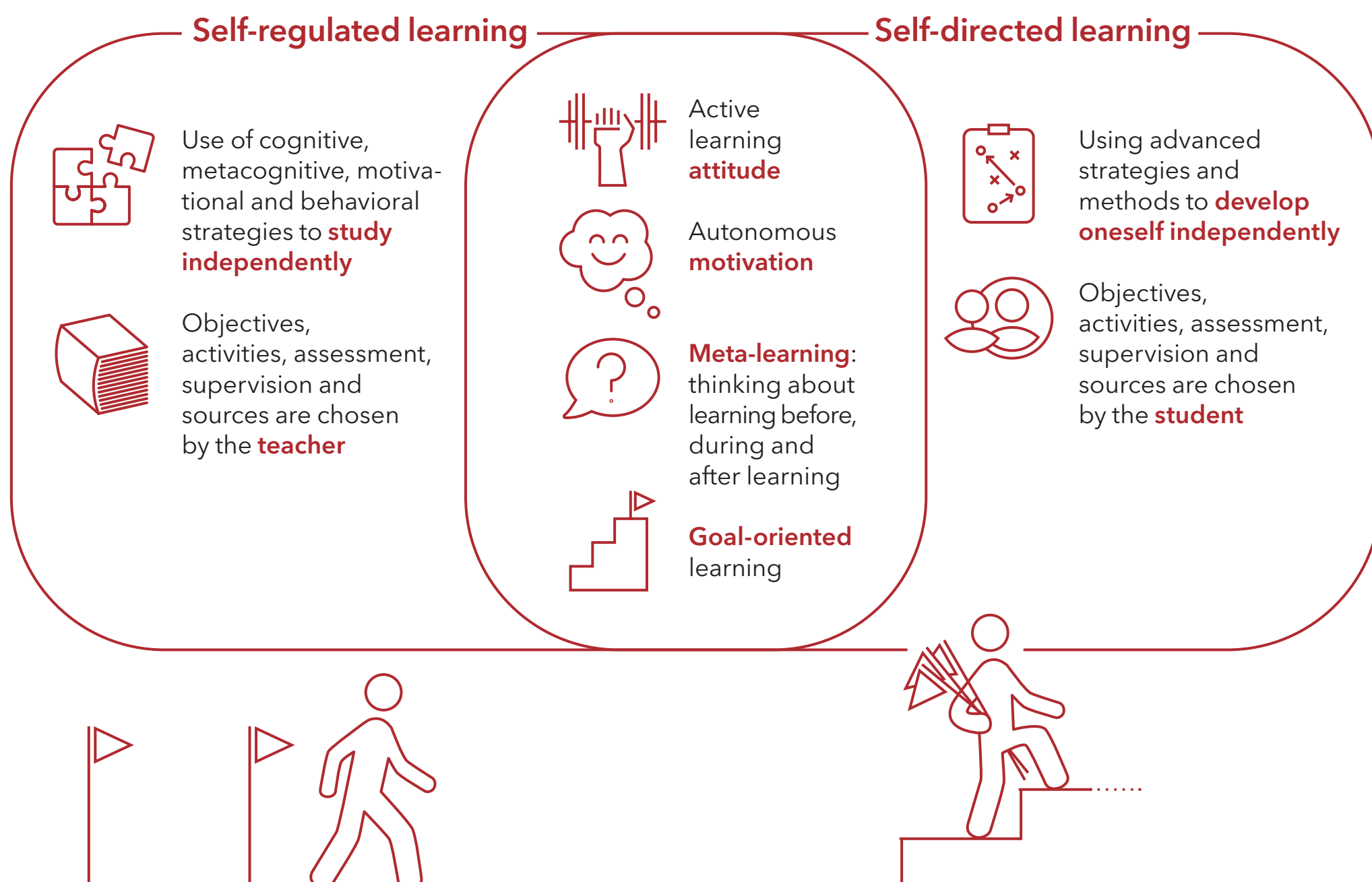
Five questions and answers about learner agency and self-directed learning

1 Why are learner agency and self-directed learning important?

Higher education is increasingly shifting towards learner-centered education, focussing on engaging students in and increasing their control over their learning. These educational designs are based on **flexibilization**, **personalised learning**, **microcredentials** and **learning outcomes** and make use of **online (or blended) learning**. As such, they require more learner-agency on the part of students, which is the capacity to influence one's learning and learning environment, and demand self-directed learning, which is the actual behaviour of directing one's learning. Besides, a **rapidly changing professional field** and **inter- and multidisciplinary societal challenges** demand professionals who are capable of adapting and learning continuously alongside and from others. It is for these reasons that Inholland wants to encourage learner-agency and self-directed learning.






2 What is the difference between self-regulated and self-directed learning?

The concepts of 'self-regulated' and 'self-directed' learning are often used interchangeably, however, they are not the same. Both require an active learning attitude and autonomous motivation, are goal-oriented and involve meta-learning, i.e. students are required to think about learning before, during and after the learning process. **The main difference is that self-regulated learning is about regulating and managing study strategies within the context of a predefined learning pathway, while self-directed learning is about shaping the learning pathway itself.** Most skills required for self-regulated learning prepare students for the skills they need to practise self-directed learning. For example, one of the self-regulated learning skills is to come up with and use a strategy to monitor understanding of the course material, for example by writing an outline. Developing a suitable method to 'assess' learning in this way, is a preparation for shaping self-directed learning assessments.



3 What are the preconditions for the ability to develop learner-agency and self-directed learning?

Preconditions for learner-agency self-directed learning include:

-  **Personal factors**, such as autonomous motivation, self-efficacy and the confidence to conclude the learning pathway successfully.
-  **Relational factors**, such as a bond of trust with the lecturer and peers, and a safe learning climate.
-  **Instructional design factors**, such as the ability to influence, choose or create learning objectives, assessments, etc, for example in electives.
-  **Acquired skills** to shape learning pathways (self-directed learning) and to develop study strategies within the context of a predefined learning pathway (self-regulated learning).
-  To ensure that students acquire the necessary skills, it is essential that lecturers **meet students' individual learning needs**, let them practise in authentic learning contexts and gradually and explicitly transfer responsibilities to them.

5 How can we support a common language?

If we want to develop this concept further together, it would be useful to clarify exactly what we mean when we use the aforementioned or related terms. For instance, finding an answer to the question 'What do you mean exactly by *self-reliance when learning*?' could promote a rewarding exchange of views on related challenges and solutions.

autonomy
ownership
engagement
reflective professional
personal leadership
student as partner
self-directed learning
student agency

self-determination
self-responsible learning
self-regulated learning
study crafting
self-efficacy
self-sustainability
job crafting
self-organizing ability
self-regulation

student wellbeing
student participation
student voice
self-responsibility

4 What are the challenges and dilemmas when it comes to supporting self-directed learning?

A sample of the questions that stakeholders shared with us:

-  What is the importance of offering **structure** when supporting self-directed learning?
-  How does **the role of the teacher** evolve and how can we shape this development?
-  How does teaching to support self-directed learning affect the **allocation of tasks, assessment organisation** and **timetabling**?
-  What are the consequences of teaching to support self-directed learning in degree programmes for **degree programme funding**?
-  What kind of **technological support** does supporting self-directed learning require?
-  How can we ensure that degree programmes serve **both individual needs and common goals**?
-  How can **professional practice** contribute to this development? And how does it benefit?
-  Is self-directed learning about '**Bildung**', '**qualifications**' or maybe even '**Bildung qualifications**'?

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