

Tytti-Maaria Laine

# International Degree Students and Graduates

A Follow-up Study on Employment and Social  
Integration into Turku





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Integration into Turku**





Leverage from  
the EU  
2014–2020



Turun yliopisto  
University of Turku

**TURKU AMK**  
TURKU UNIVERSITY OF  
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# Summary

The *International talents as resource for expanding companies (PATH)* project (2015–2017), funded by the European Social Fund and coordinated by Åbo Akademi University, attempts to improve the existing services for international students in Turku, so that they would receive as much help in integration and finding employment as possible. As part of the project, Migration Institute of Finland conducted a survey in December 2016. The main research questions were: How often and how much did the international degree students work in Turku during studies and for what reasons; How successful were the international graduates in gaining employment in Turku and how well did the international students and graduates integrate into Turku in terms of social ties, language skills and a general feeling of being at home?

The results showed that 44 percent of the international students and 90 percent of the graduates who had stayed in Turku worked. Most had Finnish friends and had at least some Finnish language skills. Almost half of the students and graduates had only basic Finnish skills. Three quarters felt at home while alarmingly the rest did not.

Keywords: International degree students, employment, social integration, Turku, Finland

# Preface

People are in growing numbers receiving their education or a part of it outside their home countries. The number of international degree students has constantly increased also in Finland, and the figure was already 20,353 degree students in 2015. The tuition fees for the following term in 2017 have been introduced for those who are non-EU/EEA students. There is thus not yet experience how this can effect to the attraction of Finland as a destination country for international degree students. Most of them who already study in Finland would prefer to stay there after their graduation and build up their career and life there. Finding a good job, however, proves often to be more challenging than expected.

The research of *International Degree Students and Graduates: A follow-up study on employment and social integration into Turku* brings new knowledge of how often and how much did the international degree students work in Turku during studies and for what reasons; how successful were the international graduates in gaining employment in Turku; and how well did the international students and graduates integrate into Turku in terms of social ties, language skills and a general feeling of being at home. The preliminary study of *International Degree Students: A survey of studying, working and living in Turku* for the PATH Project was accomplished by Tytti-Maaria Laine at the Migration Institute of Finland, and it was published in 2016. Turku has been an international city attracting foreign-background people during its long history and present time. International students are one important segment of immigrants who enrich the life in the City of Turku. Important factor affecting to this flow is the high reputation of the Higher Education Institutions there.

The research is part of the International talents as resource for expanding companies (PATH) project (2015–2017) which aims to help international students in Higher Education Institutions in the Turku area to stay and act as a productive part of the local industry after graduation. The project is funded by the European Social Fund and coordinated by Åbo Akademi University in



Turku. The other partners, together with the Migration Institute of Finland, taking part in the project, are the University of Turku, Turku University of Applied Sciences, and the City of Turku.

I express my gratitude to all the PATH-project organisations for the excellent cooperation and Researcher Tytti-Maaria Laine at the Migration Institute of Finland for carrying out the research. I am also thankful to the Institute's Director Tuomas Martikainen who has given insightful comments on the manuscript, Communications officer Kaisu Issakainen who has organised the lay-out of the publication, and all the others, including the international degree students and graduates taking part to the project, and who have helped to accomplish the project.

Turku 24.4.2017

Elli Heikkilä

Research Director

Migration Institute of Finland

# 1.

## Introduction

There are around 20,000 international students studying in Finland every year. Most of them would prefer to stay in Finland after their graduation and build up their career and life there. Finding a good job, however, proves often to be more challenging than expected. This research is part of the *International talents as resource for expanding companies* (PATH) project (2015–2017) which aims to help international students in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in the Turku area to stay and act as a productive part of the local economic life after graduation. The project is funded by the European Social Fund and coordinated by Åbo Akademi University in Turku. There are four other partners taking part in the project: the University of Turku, Turku University of Applied Sciences, the Migration Institute of Finland and the City of Turku. The task of the Migration Institute of Finland is to provide knowledge about international students in Turku for the actors of the project and for the wider academic community.

The main research questions are:

1. How often and how much did the international degree students work in Turku during studies and for what reasons?
2. How successful were the international graduates in gaining employment in Turku?
3. How well did the international students and graduates integrate into Turku in terms of social ties, language skills and a general feeling of being at home?



The preliminary study *International Degree Students: A survey of studying, working and living in Turku* for the PATH Project was published in 2016 (Laine 2016). It was conducted using Surveyypal internet survey, which was sent to all the international degree students of four higher education institutions in Turku: Åbo Akademi University, the University of Turku, Turku University of Applied Sciences and Novia University of Applied Sciences (Turku campus). The preliminary survey took place in September 2015. This survey received 303 responses and 135 of them announced to be willing to take part in the follow-up survey a year later and left their e-mail address for this. The follow-up was sent to these 135 respondents, out of which 130 had a functioning e-mail address. Totally, 48 of them answered to the survey in Surveyypal.

This study is structured as follows. Chapter 2 takes a general look at the international graduates' employment in Finland. Survey data is introduced in Chapter 3, after which the empirical analysis starts by looking at the international students and graduates employment situation in Turku in Chapter 4 and the social integration in Chapter 5. Main findings are introduced in Chapter 6 which is followed by best practices gathered from Great Britain and Finland in Chapter 7. Finally, suggestions for actions are presented in Chapter 8.



## 2.

# International students and graduates in the labour market

Most international students studying in Finland are keen to stay in the country after graduation and make a life there (Kärki 2005; Heikkilä & Pikkarainen 2008; CIMO 2014; CIMO 2016; Laine 2016). A large proportion also do stay. Out of all the international graduates of 2009, 51 percent were working in Finland a year after graduating, 48 percent three years after graduating and 44 percent five years after graduating. A third moved away from the country shortly after finishing their studies and the figure increased a little during the five year period. Around a fifth of the graduates stayed in Finland for some other reason than work (CIMO 2016). The international graduates' work situation seems to develop in a reverse order compared to the Finnish graduates. Looking at all the Master's degree graduates of 2003 in Finland, Puhakka and Tuominen (2011) found that while only 68 percent of them were employed at the time of graduation, 84 percent were in this position five years later. For men, the number was significantly higher (95 percent since many of the women (16 percent) were on family leave. Unemployment rate had dropped from 16 percent to 2 percent.

The economic situation has affected all the graduates' employment somewhat since the financial crisis of 2008. In January 2014 there were 4,772 unemployed and less than a year earlier graduated HEI graduates. A year later the same figure was 4,911 and in 2016 it was 5,206. Recently the employment situation has improved and the figure for January 2017 was 4,744 (Taulu 2007). Open vacancies have, however, been few, which means that the international graduates have likely struggled having had to compete with the Finnish job seekers. Finland is also among one of those countries with a very high proportion

## 2. International students and graduates in the labour market

of highly educated people, which means that there are usually plenty of applicants for any job openings. In 2010 the share of people aged 25–64 years with a tertiary education in OECD was 30 percent and in EU21 countries 28 percent. In the Scandinavian countries the share of tertiary educated people exceeded 40 percent (Pavlin & Svetlik 2014).

Finding a “proper job” is challenging for all graduates but especially so for international students for two reasons. First is rather obvious; they are not native Finnish speakers and often their Finnish language skills are merely basic (Laine 2016). Between 72 and 90 percent (depending on the employer sector) of all the graduates of 2003 felt that Finnish language skills were an important part of their work (Puhakka & Tuominen 2011). International students know this fact and often find the high demand of Finnish language skills and the lack of them the biggest obstacle when looking for work (Kärki 2005; Heikkilä & Pikkarainen 2008; Shumilova et al. 2012; Laine 2016). The second is the lack of personal contacts and this is especially true for those students who have just arrived to the country and for those who perhaps only study for two years and do not work during studies or complete internships. Internships have found to be very useful for creating these personal contacts which may even lead directly to paid employment (Laine 2016).

# 3.

## Survey data

### 3.1. Methods

The survey for the preliminary study took place in September 2015 and the study was published in 2016 (Laine 2016). It was conducted using SurveyPal internet survey, which was sent to all the international degree students of four higher education institutions in Turku: Åbo Akademi University, the University of Turku, Turku University of Applied Sciences and Novia University of Applied Sciences (Turku campus). International degree student in these two studies means a student whose country of citizenship in the student register is other than Finland, and who is studying for a full degree (Bachelor, Master, Licentiate or Doctoral) in Turku. Therefore, exchange students and other visitors are excluded from the study.

The preliminary survey took place in September 2015. This survey received 303 responses and 135 of them announced to be willing to take part in the follow-up survey a year later and left their e-mail address for this purpose. The follow-up was sent by e-mail on the 13<sup>th</sup> of December 2016 to these 135 respondents, out of which 130 had a valid e-mail address. Reminders were sent on the 19<sup>th</sup> and on the 28<sup>th</sup> of December. The survey was closed on the 31<sup>st</sup> of December 2016 and 48 international students and graduates answered to the survey. The response rate was 36, which was twice as good as in the preliminary survey (18 percent).

The answers were matched automatically to the preliminary survey's answers, so a minimum amount of background questions was needed. Respondents were

### 3. Survey data

asked about their current employment, future plans, services that had helped them and questions about social integration. All the questions can be found in the Appendix.

In addition to these surveys, an opinion poll about the activities organized by the PATH Project was done in September and October 2016 also using SurveyPal internet survey. This poll was answered by 16 respondents and ten of them had taken part in the activities of the project. Even though the number of respondents was small, some valuable information was received, and some quotes from this poll are used in Chapter 7.3.

The quantitative part of the research has been analyzed using frequency distribution, cross-tabulation, graphics and tables. The qualitative section has been conducted using content analysis and citations from the respondents.

## 3.2. The respondents' profile

Of all the respondents, 40 percent were female and 60 percent were male, meaning that the male population is slightly overrepresented in this study. In 2015, 46 percent of all the international degree students of Åbo Akademi University, the University of Turku and Turku University of Applied Sciences put together were female and the rest were male.

A little over half (54 percent) of the respondents were from the University of Turku, almost a third (29 percent) from Åbo Akademi University, 15 percent from Turku University of Applied Sciences and one respondent (2 percent) from Novia University of Applied Sciences.

A third (33 percent) of the respondents had graduated between the first and the second survey, and two thirds (67 percent) were still studying the same degree (Table 1). Four of the Master's degree graduates had already started

**Table 1. Respondents' situation in December 2016.**

Level of studies in 2015	Students in 2016		Graduates in 2016	
	Respondents abs.	% of respondents	Respondents abs.	% of respondents
Bachelor's degree	8	17	1	2
Master's degree	15	31	13	27
Doctoral degree	9	19	2	4
Total	32	67	16	33





postgraduate studies between the two surveys. Although they technically were students at the time of the second survey, they had graduated from the degree program they were on during the first survey and therefore are categorized as graduates. In the same way, the postgraduate students who, in the second survey, were continuing the same degree they were doing in 2015 are categorized as students. This essentially means that there are postgraduate students in both categories.

**Table 2** shows that nearly a fifth of the respondents were students studying technology, IT or engineering. Over ten percent were graduates of the same field and as many were students of business or economics. 8 percent were graduates from mathematics and natural sciences.

### 3. Survey data

**Table 2. Respondents' field of study in 2015.**

Area of study	Students abs.	% of respondents	Graduates abs	% of respondents
Technology/ IT/ Engineering	9	20	5	11
Mathematics and natural sciences	3	6	4	8
Business/ Economics	5	11	1	2
Education	3	6	2	4
Medicine	4	8		
Humanities/ Theology/ Fine arts/ Culture	2	4	2	4
Social Sciences	2	4	1	2
Law	2	4		
Health care and social services			1	2
Seafaring	1	2		
Futures studies	1	2		
Total	32	67	16	33

40 percent of the respondents were from the EU/EEA, almost a third from Asia, and the rest from the North America, Non-EU Europe, Africa and South America (**Table 3**). The share of respondents from the EU/EEA countries was markedly higher than in the preliminary survey (increase of 15 percent). The share of respondents from Asia, on the other hand, had decreased by 15 percent.

**Table 3. Respondents' nationalities by global region of origin.**

Citizenship	Respondents abs.	% of respondents
EU/EEA	19	40
Non-EU/EEA Europe	4	8
Asia	15	31
Africa	3	6
North America	5	11
South America	2	4
Total	48	100

# 4.

## Work

### 4.1. Work during studies

Employment during higher education became increasingly common all over the world during the 2000s. Not only did more students work, but they also worked for longer hours. In Europe, Australia and the United States, the proportion of employed students in the end of the 2000s was around 50 percent, and in some European countries more than two-thirds of students worked for living. (Beerkens et al. 2011) In Finland, where the student employment during that time was indeed indeed around 60 percent, the trend has since turned and the proportion of students working has decreased continually since 2011. In 2014, 56 percent of all the university students and 54 percent of the University of Applied Sciences students worked in Finland (Statistics Finland 2016). Even though less students work now than six years earlier, the numbers are still high.

While the hours of work during studies is not restricted for Finnish students and students from the EU/EEA countries in any way, those Finnish students wishing to receive student allowance have to limit their work in order to earn no more than 660 € during every month they receive allowance (Kela 2017). International students do not qualify for student allowance, but their work is restricted by their visa, if the work does not form a part of their degree. Student visa, needed by the students from outside the EU/EEA countries, allows them to work during studies as long as the working hours are no more than 25 per week *on average*. During holidays there are no restrictions (Maahanmuuttovirasto 2017a). For many international students work is the only means to support their

#### 4. Work

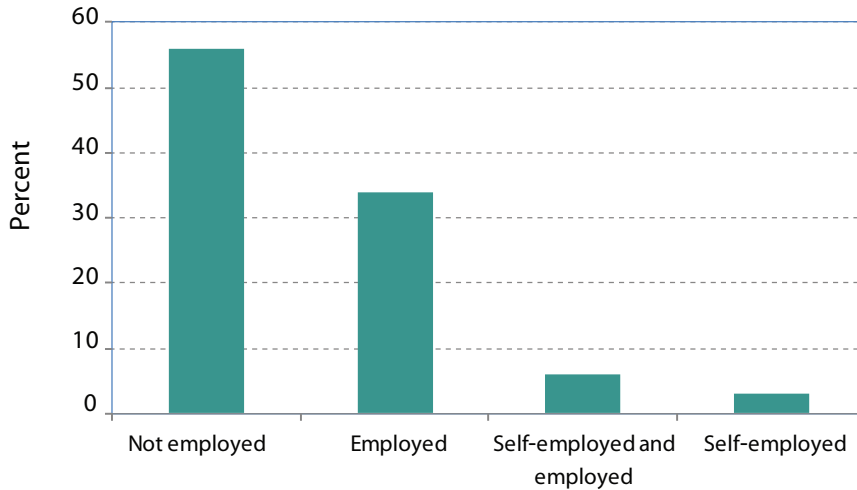


Figure 1. Students' employment situation in 2016 (N=32).

studies, and this will probably be even more so in the future, since the tuition fees are for the non-EU/EEA students.

Employment was not unfamiliar to the respondents of the preliminary survey in 2015, either. 71 percent of those having lived in Finland for at least a year worked or had worked in Turku. The high percentage is probably a little misleading, since it covers all work done in some cases during several years of life in Turku and in a few cases already before studying. It does, however, paint the picture of how common working among international students really is. In the 2016 survey it was the current employment which was asked about, and then 44 percent of the students (N=32) were in some kind of employment. One student was purely self-employed, two were both self-employed and employed by someone else, and 11 students were employed solely by someone else. 18 students (56 percent) did not work at all (Figure 1).

Seven students, that is half of all those employed, worked full-time (at least 36 hours per week) and as many students worked part-time (25 hours or less per week) (Figure 2).

These figures correspond to those of Shumilova et al. (2012) who found out that half of the students in universities and universities of applied sciences in Finland gained some kind of work experience during their studies. According to their findings the length of the work experience varied from less than a month to the whole duration of the studies.

## 4.1. Work during studies

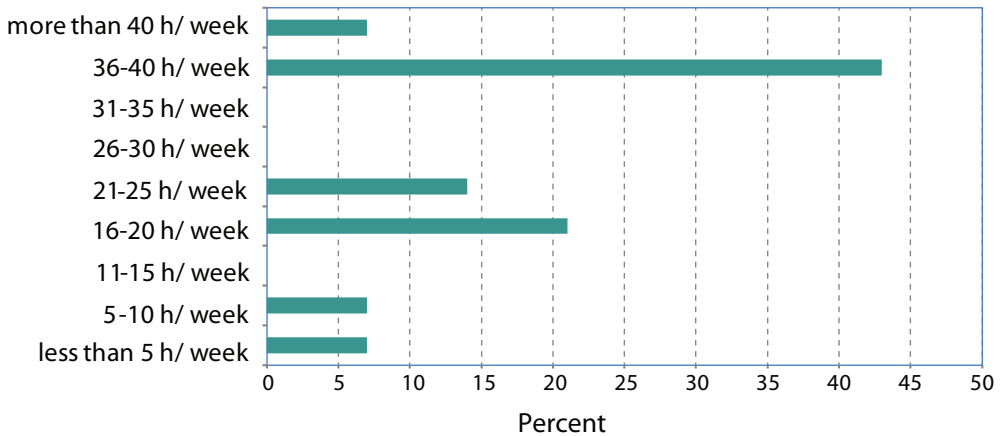


Figure 2. Students' working hours per week in 2016 (N=14).

### 4.1.1. Full-time work

All students working full-time but one worked between 36 and 40 hours while one worked more than 40 hours per week. Five out of the seven students working full-time were Ph.D. students, who worked at the universities. The other two full-time workers were Master's degree students who were about to graduate in a couple of months, both with an IT degree. Both had also received this job after the first survey, meaning that they had probably not worked full-time for very long during their studies. Both the results of the preliminary survey and the follow-up suggest that most international degree students working full-time in Turku were actually Ph.D. students and those Master's degree students who were about to graduate shortly. Only three (out of 167) Master's degree students and no Bachelor's degree students (out of 79) worked full-time in 2015. From the three Master's degree students, one graduated two months later and another one was on his/her final year.

The income for students' full-time work varied between 1,600 € and 3,750 € per month, the average being 2,420 €. The highest incomes did not go to those with the highest degrees, but quite the vice versa. The two Master's degree students working full-time also had the highest wages, working in professional capacity in IT. The Ph.D. students' wages varied between 1,600 € and 2,373 € depending on the subject area. The Ph.D. student from the Faculty of Humanities received the smallest salary while the Faculties of Law and Medicine paid their students the most.



### 4.1.2. Part-time work

Part-time workers' working hours varied from less than five hours per week to 20–25 hours per week. Two of the seven students working part-time worked as professionals (education or teaching and communications and media), one in services and sales (customer service and selling) and two in an elementary occupation. Two respondents did not specify the occupation category, but one of them specified the industrial category of their job to be consulting or corporate training. The wages of those students working part-time ranged between 550 € and 1,600 € per month, the average being 825 € per month. The main reason for all the seven students to work part-time was to earn money for living. Only one mentioned gaining work experience as an additional reason to work. The work was found in four cases through personal contacts, in one case from the internet or newspaper and in one case from LinkedIn. One student working part-time was self-employed.

### 4.1.3. Job satisfaction

The respondents were asked how satisfied they were with their current job on a scale from one to five, 1 being not at all satisfied and 5 very satisfied. The average for both part-time workers and full-time workers was three. Full-time workers gave more fours (4) and fives (1) than the part-time-workers (only one four and

#### 4.1. Work during studies

one five), but at the same time the only number one, not at all satisfied, came from a full-time worker, a Ph.D. student. Therefore it is not necessarily the case that students working in jobs matching their education are happier with their jobs than those working in lower level jobs. One Ph.D. student estimated her job satisfaction to be 4 out of five, but the feeling of discrimination made her job difficult.

*It was extremely hard and nerve wracking to find a position at the university. Even though people are nice there is still some sort of segregation between the locals and internationals. For example all the work meetings are still held in Finnish which leaves the ones cannot speak Finnish completely out of the circle. Often we cannot take extra responsibilities because of that. Additionally giving lectures is almost impossible due to not having lectures in English, which creates an unequal experience among the researchers. When we complete our Ph.D., we are supposed to know how to give lectures in university level, but there is almost no opportunity for us to give any. Learning about work related regulations is also hard (not sure if it is also hard for Finnish speakers) we are lacking a good information flow. I am soon attending to a mentoring program which hopefully will help me to see what opportunities I have after completing my Ph.D., thus far I have no idea what I can do with my degree in Finland, since we are constantly told that an academic position will not be an option due to the budget cuts. It was my dream to work as an academic but I need to move on and explore other opportunities but I feel I don't have enough channels to do so. Since I am married to a Finn, I have no option of leaving Finland for job (at least this is the situation now, I don't know if we both can find a job in another country to move away). (F, Non-EU/EEA Europe)*

This student felt that she was not treated equally with the Finns at the university due to language barrier. Conversational language was Finnish, lectures would have had to be given in Finnish and work regulations were difficult to come by. Like many university graduates, she was also unsure about what she could do with her degree outside the academic world.

##### 4.1.4. Effect of employment during studies on delay in graduation

According to Aho et al. (2012) working during studies does not generally have a negative effect on studies or delay graduation, but may do so in some cases. Working during studies does not seem to be the reason for delayed graduation in this study, but often students did graduate later than they had planned. In September 2015 the respondents (all still students at the time) were asked to

#### 4. Work

state their estimated time of graduation. Five estimated to graduate during the same year, but only three did. 21 respondents estimated to graduate in 2016, but only nine (43 percent) did. 12 students estimated to graduate in 2017, but in December 2016 three of them stated that they were more likely to graduate in 2018 or later. Sometimes the delay may not have been for more than a few months. For example, 7 out of the 12 students who were supposed to graduate in 2016 expected to graduate between January and March 2017. Others had postponed the graduation for longer, up until October 2017. Both two students who expected to graduate in 2015, but did not, graduated in May 2016.

Almost as many students with a delayed graduation did not work (6 students) as did work (8 students) during studies. Therefore working cannot, at least solely, be blamed for the delay. Earlier, at least during the peak of the economic crisis it was a choice for some students, including Finns, to delay their graduation in the hope that the labour market situation would improve (Mäkinen-Streng 2010). This may also be the case with some international students who have not managed to find a job.





### 4.1.5. Plans after graduation

Not surprisingly, most of the plans the students in the follow-up survey had for the time after the graduation involved working or further study. Five students planned to continue studies on Ph.D. level and one on Master's level. Further study seemed sometimes (3/5 cases) to be a valid option for work, if work was not available, and sometimes (2/5) the only option. Two students were also planning to start their own company and a third was interested in entrepreneurship.

*I am now applying for some companies in Finland as an entry-level position or internship. After my graduation, I will continue my job searching. Startup company is also one of attractive options, but it demands much effort, especially financial and human resources. (F, Asia)*

Nine students (28 percent) were planning to leave Turku after the graduation. Four of them planned to move to a bigger city in Finland and most of them named Helsinki to be the preferred destination. One was planning to return to home country and one was going to look for work within the EU, one just abroad. Five students were planning to stay and 18 were planning to stay in Turku after the graduation, if work was available. The following plan seems to sum up well the plans of most of international students in Turku:

*Plan A: Find work in Turku. Plan B: Move where I can get work. (F, EU/EEA)*

## 4.2. Graduates' employment

Out of the 16 respondents who had already graduated, ten (63 percent) were still living in Turku, two elsewhere in Finland (13 percent) and four (25 percent) abroad.

### 4.2.1. Graduates who stayed

Seven out of the 10 graduates who had decided to stay in Turku had Master's degree, two had doctoral degree and one graduate had Bachelor's degree. Six out of the seven Master's degree graduates had stayed for further study and were doing their Ph.D. at the University of Turku or at Åbo Akademi University. Three graduates had received work in Turku and one had decided to stay for family reasons.

## 4. Work

Half of the graduates' lives had gone as had been the plan a year earlier. Those who had planned to continue their studies, had done so, and those who had planned to stay and work did just that. The other half's life plans had either changed or they had not had any specific plans in the first place. For example, two graduates who had planned to move to some other location in Finland had stayed in Turku after all, both for further study.

Eight of the graduates worked as professionals, and one in an elementary occupation. The industrial categories of the professionals were research (5), education or teaching (1), welfare and health care (1), and IT (1), while the economical category for the elementary occupation was "something else". The last mentioned occupation was held by a person who was looking into continuing his/her studies in Turku and the only person currently not in employment was waiting for his/her Ph.D. studies to start soon after. There were no job seekers as such in this group.

The wages for the Master's degree graduates working full-time in Turku (N=7) ranged from 1,800 € to 2,000 € per month, the average being 1,948 € per month. For the two doctoral graduates the wages were not much higher, 2,200 € on average. The wages for part-time work (N=2) ranged from 600 € to 800 € per month. These wages seem to be in line with those of international graduates all over Finland. The most typical salary in the graduates' first job in the study of Shumilova et al. (2012) was between 2,001 € and 2,500 €, and wages lower than 2,000 € were very common. At the same time the wages for all the graduates in Finland are considerably higher. Doctoral graduates in research earn on average 3,756 € per month five years after their graduation (Sainio and Carver 2016) and Master's degree graduates in all lines of work on average 3,288 € per month (Puhakka & Tuominen 2011).

In spite of the low wages, international graduates' job satisfaction was generally high, the average being 4 out of 5. Not surprisingly, the graduates who were happiest with their jobs were those whose job matched their level of education and the unhappiest (2 out of 5) were those whose job did not require as much as the person had to offer or those whose job perhaps did not provide enough income to live off.

### 4.2.2. Graduates who left

The reasons making six (38 percent) of the graduates to move away from Turku were all related to work or family. Four of them had moved abroad and two to another destination in Finland. They either already had a job somewhere else (1), could not find work in Turku (1), or received funding (1) or work (1) elsewhere. One graduate had never lived in Turku and had family elsewhere in Finland and

#### 4.4. Finding work

one moved abroad for family reasons. Three of those who had left Turku did not think it possible that they would ever return to live there, one was already about to return, and two others thought it possible that they could return, at least for work.

### 4.3. Self-employment

Altogether five of the 48 respondents were self-employed, two part-time and three alongside other work. Three of the five entrepreneurs stated being self-employed rather by necessity than by choice, due to the lack of work available in Turku. One of them stated his/her own company being more like a hobby for them than anything else. For one, self-employment was their main source of income and for the remaining three, an additional source of income.

Another two respondents were or had been self-employed in Turku during the 2015 survey, but were now in other employment. None of the self-employed had received funding for their enterprise or training from the TE services.

### 4.4. Finding work

International graduates who have completed a degree or other qualifications in Finland may apply for a new residence permit on the grounds of work after they have found a job. If they do not have a job when the residence permit for studying expires, they can apply for an extended permit to look for a job (Maa-hanmuuttovirasto 2017b).

79 percent of the employed graduates (N=14) had found the first job they had after graduation already during his/her studies. One had found his/her job less than a month after graduation and one 1–3 months after the graduation. One was purely self-employed. Nine of the fourteen employed graduates were in their first job after the graduation, but four had already changed jobs at least once. These findings are again in line with those of Shumilova et al. (2012) who found that 59 percent of the international graduates had found their job already during studies and another 19 percent within three months after the graduation. Of the university graduates as many as 63 percent had found their first job during studies and further 17 percent within the first three months (Shumilova et al. 2012).

Of all the employed respondents (N=31), 42 percent (13) had found their job through personal contacts, 13 percent (4) from a newspaper or internet advert, 10 percent (3) through an internship, 8 percent (2) via job agency and

## 4. Work

19 percent (6) through other means (university website, scholarship, LinkedIn etc.), and the rest some other way. It is noteworthy how important role personal contacts play in finding work. These personal contacts with the Finnish working population are often limited among international students and this surely affects the employment prospects for many.

In the survey, the students and graduates were able to tell which services in Turku had helped them in job hunting or developing their professional skills. Two mentioned not having used any services. One respondent had tried to get help from the career services for writing his/her CV, but had negative experience of this. Three other respondents had, however, positive experiences of the career services and their CV clinics, mentoring programs and networking events.

### 4.5. Internship

21 respondents (44 percent) had completed an internship during studies. Whether or not one had completed an internship did not seem to make a difference in employment situation later. 57 percent of those respondents who had and 56 percent of those who had not completed an internship were in employment in 2016. Of the 14 graduates who were in employment, exactly half had completed an internship and half had not. Both graduates not in employment in 2016 had completed an internship. So many other factors affect the students and graduates employment situation that internship alone does not seem to make a great difference (Shumilova et al. 2012). However, one of the graduates had received his/her job as a direct result of well performed internship. Other positive results of an internship were mentioned to be the making of important contacts, improved language abilities and learning necessary skills for further employment.

## 4.6. Language skills

### 4.6.1. English

All respondents but two studied or had studied in English. Therefore it is not surprising that almost all respondents (N=47) estimated their own English language abilities to be fluent (74 percent) or advanced (23 percent). One respondent estimated to have intermediate English language skills even though he/she was studying in English. One respondent, a citizen of an English-speaking country, reported to have no English language skills at all, which is quite unlikely, since they were able to answer the English language survey.

### 4.6.2. Finnish

Respondents' (N=46) Finnish language skills varied from none (8 percent) to fluent (4 percent). Almost half of the respondents (46 percent) had only basic Finnish skills, while 38 percent had intermediate and 4 percent advanced Finnish skills. The self-estimated Finnish language abilities had not improved in a year for 72 percent of the respondents. Most (70 percent) of those with basic language skills in 2015 still had basic skills, although 30 percent had improved to intermediate level. Half of those (N=8) with no Finnish skills in 2015 still had no Finnish skills, while the other half had acquired basic skills. It is surprising, and little alarming, that even after spending at least two years in Finland, four respondents still had no Finnish skills at all. All of them were students or graduates of the Swedish speaking Åbo Akademi University. The Finnish language skills seemed to vary somewhat between the HEIs, but most students and graduates from all of them still had either basic or intermediate skills (Figure 3).

Interestingly, this survey did not clearly point out that better Finnish language skills would have actually improved students or graduates chances of employment. Of the two respondents with fluent Finnish neither had a job. Two respondents with advanced Finnish skills did have work. Of the 14 respondents with intermediate skills, six (43 percent) did not have work while eight (57 percent) did and of the 22 respondents with basic language skills nine (41 percent) did not have work while 13 (59 percent) did. Exactly half of the respondents with no Finnish skills at all also had a job. Again, it seems that working or not working during studies and after is dependent on many things, and according to this survey the language abilities do not have an effect on employment.

## 4. Work

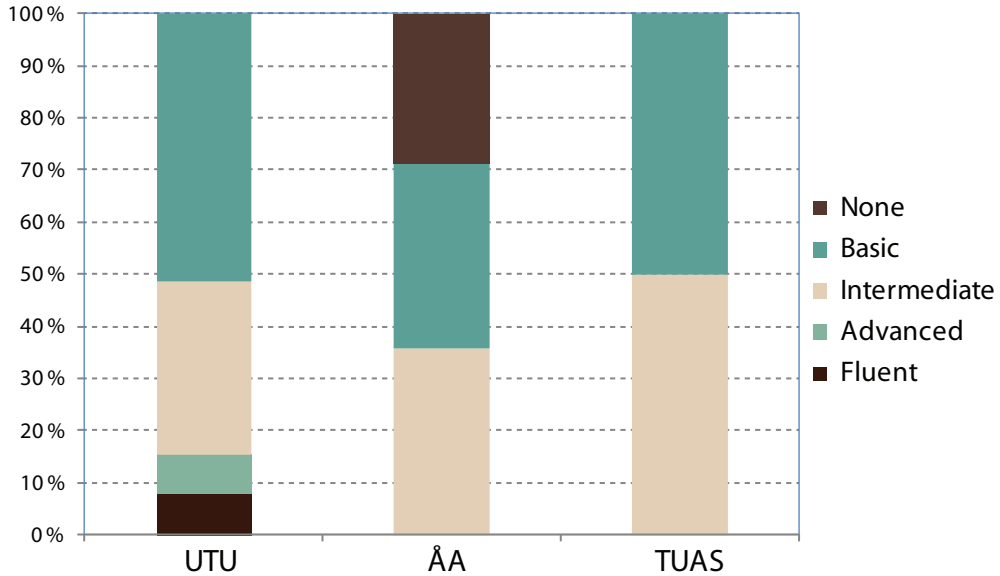


Figure 3. Respondents' Finnish language skills (N=47).

Here we have to take into account again that a large proportion of the respondents were doctoral candidates or researchers at universities, and this group of people does not necessarily need a great amount of Finnish language skills to gain employment. This is also why a large proportion of international graduates work at universities (Sainio & Carver 2016).

### 4.6.3. Swedish

Surprisingly many of the international students and graduates had some Swedish skills, too. While almost half (46 percent) knew no Swedish at all, more than half had some knowledge of it. 23 percent had basic skills, 10 percent intermediate skills, 4 percent advanced skills and 4 percent were fluent in Swedish. One of the two fluent speakers was actually a Swede, but for other than this one person, country of origin does not explain the good language skills. For some international students Swedish has simply proved to be a language more easily learned than Finnish.

## 5.

# Social integration into Turku

According to sociologist Mark Granovetter's (1973) social network theory, social ties can be divided into strong and weak ties. Friends equal strong ties which help people to get by, while acquaintances equal weak ties which help people to get ahead, for example to find work. Immigrants face many cultural and linguistic challenges when trying to create these social ties with the locals (Eskelä 2014). Compared to many other immigrant international students have at least two strengths in this perspective, English language skills and the HEI environment. As seen before, most speak English very well and get by well in Finland with that. Also the HEI environment provides a mass of prospective social ties with young Finns and on the other hand with the academic staff who generally also speak English very well. Many international students also find a local girlfriend or boyfriend and gain many more friends and acquaintances through them.

Having a Finnish partner did indeed improve the respondents' chances of having Finnish friends. Half of those who stated in 2015 having a Finnish spouse or girlfriend or boyfriend (N=14) said that most of their friends were Finnish speaking Finns, while only 17 percent of the rest of the respondents said the same.

For seven (15 percent) respondents most of their friends were Swedish speaking Finns. Five of them were students of the Swedish speaking HEIs of Turku, but two were not. The chances of having many Swedish speaking friends did also improve if you had a Finn as a partner, but the effect of the language of the HEI was greater. Only four respondents (8 percent) stated not having any Finns as friends, but all of them were from the University of Turku.

## 5. Social integration into Turku

In the 2015 survey we asked: If you plan to move away from Turku after graduation, which are the most important reasons for this? Three respondents belonging to the follow-up group stated one of the reasons to be that they did not feel at home in Turku. In 2016 the respondents were asked to mark whether the claim "I feel at home in Turku" was true or false for them (or had been during their stay in Turku). It is a little alarming that altogether 12 respondents (25 percent) did not feel at home in Turku. There were notable differences between universities. The students of Åbo Akademi University felt at home more often (93 percent) than did the students of University of Turku (71 percent) and especially more than those of Turku University of Applied Sciences (33 percent). The four students who did not have any Finnish friends did not feel at home in Turku, but having Finnish friends did not necessarily mean that a student would automatically feel at home.





# 6.

## Main findings

The survey was responded by 32 international degree students and 16 graduates from four higher education institutions in Turku. The aim was to find out how often and how much did the international degree students work in Turku during studies and for what reasons, how successful were the international graduates in gaining employment in Turku and how well did the international students and graduates integrate into Turku in terms of social ties, language skills and a general feeling of being at home.

### International students and work during studies

44 percent of the students were in some kind of employment. One student was purely self-employed, two were both self-employed and employed by someone else, and 11 students were employed solely by someone else. 18 students (56%) did not work at all. Positive is that many students worked in their own field and some had received full-time work already before their graduation. Less than half of the part-time workers were employed in elementary occupations such as cleaning. More than a half of the students working part-time had found their job through personal contacts. This shows that personal contacts are important in gaining employment even during studies.

### International graduates work in Turku

63 percent of the graduate respondents had stayed in Turku after graduation. Nine out of ten were working and one was about to start to work. 80 percent worked as professionals and most of them were Ph.D. candidates. Three graduates had stayed for other work. The employment rate for the respondents staying in Turku was very high, 100 percent. This could be explained by a bigger enthusiasm for responding to this kind of survey if you have been employed than if you have not. Many international students also have to give up job hunting fairly early after graduation because they cannot afford to stay.

### International students and graduates language skills and social integration

Respondents' Finnish language skills had not really improved during a year between the two surveys. 46 percent had basic Finnish skills and as many as 8 percent had no Finnish skills at all. Surprisingly many knew at least some Swedish. Most had Finnish friends, especially if they had a Finnish partner, but nevertheless one fifth did not feel at home in Turku.

# 7.

## Best practices

### 7.1. Great Britain

The British Prime Minister Tony Blair announced on 18<sup>th</sup> of April 2006 over 27 £ million in funding to increase the number of international students in the UK by 100,000 over the next five years. This was called the second phase of Prime Minister's Initiative for International Education (PMI2) and the quality of the international student experience became one of the four key themes of it. Priority was given to financial advice, transition, teaching and learning, students' services, students' unions, employability, professional development and best practice guides. The key projects included The International Student Calculator, Prepare for Success website, and International Virtual Careers Fairs (UKCISA 2011a).

The International Student Calculator was commissioned by UKCISA (The UK Council for International Student Affairs) and developed by a charity called UNIAID. It is an interactive website which helps prepare international students for the cost of living in the UK. Between 2008 and 2011 the International Student Calculator received over 200,000 visits from 210 countries, and almost two thirds of UK institutions linked to the site in 2011 (UKCISA 2011a). This kind of service is yet to arrive in Finland and would probably prove to be very useful for many.

Prepare for Success is an online pre-arrival study skills website developed by the University of Southampton. The website focuses on critical thinking, studying independently, understanding course assignment, taking part in seminars and using study time effectively. Between 2008 and 2011 it was accessed in

## 7. Best practices

208 countries and had between 500–800 visits in any 24-hour period (UKCISA 2011a). This kind of interactive website could be a great way for international students to get to know the Finnish way of studying before their arrival to the country. There are many websites already dedicated to the Finnish customs, but it is more difficult to find information about the way studying is organized, how one is expected to behave towards professors, is it mandatory to attend the lectures etc. This kind of information would even be useful for young Finns who are still planning their studies, since the way to learn transforms dramatically from high school to higher education.

International Virtual Careers Fair project provided a virtual “one stop shop” for international employers looking for UK educated talent to meet their skills needs. Three virtual fairs were organized in the term of 2010–2011 each specializing in different parts of the world. One of the fairs had 1,679 registrants from 84 institutions and 94 companies from six countries. Students found the access to labour markets in other countries very useful and employers also found the fair useful in terms of access to potential candidates. These kinds of virtual fairs could be useful in Finland. Even though we do not necessarily want our international talents to leave the country, the fairs could also be used for matching domestic companies with students from all over the country.

Other services the HEIs of Great Britain have developed for their international students with the PMI2 finances include the provision of follow-up sessions (ongoing workshops on immigration, work and academic issues), which 86 percent of the institutions offer. Around half of the HEIs provide a 24 hour emergency contact number for students throughout the year. 40 percent of institutions also arranged for immigration registration to take place on campus and further 25 percent assisted students with this in other ways, 95 percent of the HEIs offered hardship funding for their students and two thirds offered specialist support for international students in finding part-time work during study (UKCISA 2011b).

I-graduate (2015) listed some best practices for international students, which came up in their best practice exchange groups. These included providing one-to-one appointments with international students to set-up bank accounts, providing and promoting fixed transfer times at airports to manage student expectations when they are being picked up, organizing specific alcohol-free events for students in the welcome week, simplifying the orientation process, and implementing a buddy scheme.

International students in Great Britain have several different instances aiming to help them find work after graduation. In addition to the national advisory body UKCISA, there are some charitable organizations, such as AG-CAS (The Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services), NASES (The National Association of Student Employment Services) and HECSU (Higher

## 7.2. Finland

Education Careers Services Unit) helping all students and graduates to find employment. Their aim is to offer support, mentoring and networking possibilities. For example, NASES tells on its website that they work in cooperation with several big organizations including Jaguar Land Rover, Matalan, PriceWaterHouse Coopers, LinkedIn and London Metropolitan Police, to name just a few (NASES 2011).

These kinds of national charitable organizations do not exist in Finland and the students have only the career services of their own HEIs to help them with employment issues. A big problem seems also to be the lack of enthusiasm from the companies' side. If more big companies like those in Great Britain, would step up and cooperate with the HEIs, gaining part-time work, completing internships and starting careers would certainly get easier for many students, international and Finnish alike.

## 7.2. Finland

The past decade has seen several projects aiming to improve the international students' employment opportunities in Finland. In the period of 2009–2011 two projects took place, one in Kainuu Region and one in Pirkanmaa Region, which both created some new useful practices. In Kainuu, Kajaani University of Applied Sciences' project "Kansainvälisten opiskelijoiden integrointi Kainuuseen" (Integration of international students into Kainuu Region) (Kajaanin ammattikorkeakoulu 2009) created speed friending for making new friends. Work-Place Pirkanmaa (2009) project piloted for example "Puhu minulle suomea" (Talk to me in Finnish) campaign (, in which students wore a pin saying "Talk to me in Finnish" encouraging people in different every day interactions to communicate with the international students in Finnish instead of English. This was used later in Kainuu and in South Savo Region. Mikkeli University of Applied Sciences' project "Ulkomaalaiset opiskelijat Etelä-Savon voimavaraksi" (Foreign students as a resource for South Savo Region) (2011–2012) (Kähkönen 2013) was carried out to ease the gaining of workforce for the businesses and organizations in South Savo. The project informed local companies about the international students, created positive press coverage, increased direct contact between companies and teachers, helped students to apply work, organized info events about job hunting, made guidebooks for job hunting and a guidebook and leaflets for companies. "Nojatuolimatkat" (Armchair travels) was also used which meant that international students visited local nursing homes and told about their home countries and their own culture in Finnish.

## 7. Best practices

The project also included friend family program which is in use in many HEIs today (Ojamies & Puttonen 2013).

The experiences in South Savo region were positive, the number of projects made by international students for local companies increased a little, new internships opened up and some of the companies that took part in the project ended up hiring international students, even permanently. Friend family program was a success with 50 local families and 60 international students taking part and the Armchair travels received positive feedback (Keto & Kähkönen 2013).

Many other services have been provided for the international students since these projects. WorkPlace Pirkanmaa project gave an impetus to several new services in Tampere, including All Bright! Talent Tampere network, ambassador program, Twinkle event, and Talent Tampere Mentoring Program (Tampere Region Economic Development Agency 2016). Me2we service was established in 2015, which aims to link HEIs and students with companies in order to help companies to employ and students to find work (Me2we 2016).

### **7.3. Best practices and activities in the PATH Project**

The PATH Project was not originally set to create any new services for international students as such. The aim was to make the services already available more easily found, available in English and clearer by using a "PATH model". The model includes three paths that are available for the international students depending on their own decisions: employment path, when the students decide to stay in Turku and work there, entrepreneur path, when the students decide to become self-employed in Turku and, finally, an ambassador path, when the students decide to leave Turku and want to promote the area in their chosen destination. Different services helping students on these paths were gathered together in order to find them all in one place.

Some new services were, however, created. One was the Ambassador Network of South West Finland which aims to promote the region as a business environment and study destination to their home country. The Ambassador Network was established together with the Intercity Collaboration of South-West Coast of Finland (Finnish abbreviation "Loura"). Also a new flexible Finnish language course teaching work life related language was established in summer 2016 at the Turku University of Applied Sciences answering to the international students' request for this type of course. In addition to these activities, the PATH Project has organized different short events informing students about the Finnish work life and entrepreneurship, and longer programs such

### 7.3. Best practices and activities in the PATH Project

as mentorship program and making the well-established Project Aces better available for international students.

The PATH Project has received a lot of positive feedback and has helped some students to receive employment. In the feedback survey of autumn 2016 the students' feedback included the following quotes:

*Good events etc., but it does not always reach the people. You are doing a great job for example with making it more popular, so it is not your fault. The whole project just needs time to grow.*

*I have found out that there are excellent programs to participate and to develop together. I do appreciate on them. And, I would like to contribute what I have received. Thanks a lot!*

*Overall in my opinion there are already plenty of different and useful events, thank you for that!*

*Those whom I met were great people so far. Only thing maybe that I could comment about are those seminars or events not so many know about. It would have been nice to see more people attending because they are really useful for us.*

*It is a nice initiation but it definitely needs some reconsidering especially given the target group (international students) workload and motivation. I.e. I cannot personally sell an area I have just arrived to and do not have experiences of yet myself.*

These quotes also bring up the biggest challenge the project had: spreading the information so that it would reach all the people the activities were targeted to. E-mails, Facebook, project's own website address (<https://blogs2.abo.fi/polku/hanke/>), ads on the notice boards and being visible in different student events just did not seem to be enough. Regardless of this, those students who did participate in the project were mostly very pleased and felt they had benefited from it.

# 8.

## **Suggestions for further activities**

Many helpful services are already in place for international students of Turku. In spite of this, many students still need more help with their CVs, finding work, finding internships and learning Finnish. Something should also be done so that more students would feel at home in Turku whether they decide to stay or not. During the PATH Project (2015–2017) many students requested more Finnish courses, more flexible Finnish courses, more advanced Finnish courses and more Finnish courses specifically for different occupations, such as doctors and dentists. There is still room for major improvements on this sector.

It is often also difficult for international and Finnish students alike to figure out all the different jobs one can do with one's degree. Having deeper understanding of one's possibilities would greatly ease the finding the hidden job openings. Personal contacts would also be a great help, but these are what international students often lack. Internships and meet and greets with different companies would help at least a little in creating those invaluable contacts.

All these services are, of course, possible if the funding is available. Now that the tuition fees for the following term have been introduced, providing best possible services and value for the students' funding input should become a priority. Hopefully, in the future, there are many more and many different kinds of Finnish courses available and the career services would be better able to answer international students' specific needs.





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## Appendix: The survey questions

1. Have you already graduated from your higher education institution in Turku?
2. Time of your graduation?
3. Estimated time of your graduation?
4. Are you currently living in (different options)?
5. What made you decide to stay in Turku after your graduation?
6. Are you planning to stay in Turku permanently?
7. Why did you decide to leave Turku after your graduation?
8. Is returning to Turku a possibility for you at some point?
9. Is returning to other parts of Finland a possibility for you at some point?
10. Do you currently work in paid employment?
11. How did you find your current job?
12. How many hours per week do you work?
13. Which occupation category does your current job fall into?
14. Which industrial classification category does your current job fall into?
15. Does your education fall into the same industrial category as your current job?
16. Does your work match your level of education?
17. Do you work primarily to (different options)?
18. What is your monthly wage before tax?
19. How satisfied are you with your current job? (1=Not at all satisfied, 5= very satisfied)
20. How quickly did you find your first job after your graduation?
21. Is your first job after your graduation also your current job?
22. Did you become self-employed
  - Because you wanted to?
  - Because there were no jobs available?
  - Other, please specify
23. Have you received:
  - Startup grant from TE Office
  - Funding from another public source
  - Entrepreneur training from TE Office
  - Entrepreneur training from somewhere else

24. Is self-employment for you
- Your main source of income
  - A source of additional income
  - A hobby
25. Are you currently looking for work?
26. Are you hoping to find a job in Finland where no Finnish or Swedish skills are needed?
27. Do you plan to stay in Turku after your graduation?
28. What are your plans after graduation?
29. Have you completed an internship in Finland later than September 2015?
30. What were the main benefits of your internship for you?
31. Which services in Turku have helped you best in job hunting or developing your professional skills?
32. What kind of services would you like to see more of?
33. Your language skills at the moment (self evaluation)
- Fluent
  - Advanced
  - Intermediate
  - Basic
  - None
34. Which of the following sentences are true for you or were true for you when you lived in Turku?
- Most of my friends in Turku are Finnish speaking Finns
  - Most of my friends in Turku are Swedish speaking Finns
  - Most of my friends in Turku come from the same country as I
  - Most of my friends in Turku are neither Finns nor come from the same country as I
  - I have both Finnish and international friends
  - I have no Finns as friends
  - I feel at home in Turku
35. Are you an ambassador in the Student Ambassador Network of South-West Finland?
36. What plans do you have as an ambassador?
37. Other comments/additional information



Tytti-Maaria Laine

# International Degree Students and Graduates

## A Follow-up Study on Employment and Social Integration into Turku

There were around 1,600 international students in Turku in 2016. Most of them would like to stay in Finland after their graduation. However, finding a job is challenging for all graduates but especially so for international students.

This book presents results of a survey conducted with international students. They were asked how much they worked in Turku during studies, and how successful they were in gaining employment in Turku. They responded also to questions about their social ties, language skills and a general feeling of being at home.

This survey was a follow-up study based on a former inquiry *International Degree Students: A survey of experiences of study, work and life in Turku* conducted a year earlier and published by Migration Institute of Finland in 2016.

Both studies were part of the *International talents as resource for expanding companies (PATH)* project which aims to help international students in Higher Education Institutions in the Turku area to stay and act as a productive part of the local economic life after graduation.



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