



HELSINGIN YLIOPISTO
HELSINGFORS UNIVERSITET
UNIVERSITY OF HELSINKI



International Student's Guide to Working in Finland

International Student's Guide

Career Services

INTERNATIONAL STUDENT'S GUIDE TO WORKING IN FINLAND

INTRODUCTION	2
1. WORKING LIFE IN FINLAND	3
2. PRACTICAL MATTERS	5
3. WHERE TO LOOK FOR A JOB?	7
4. APPLYING FOR JOBS	11
5. INTERNSHIPS	19
6. THESIS CO-OPERATION	21
A SMALL VOCABULARY	22

INTRODUCTION

In June 2003 Career Services published a survey on the employment status of foreign graduates of the University of Helsinki. The survey proved that there are good employment opportunities for foreign graduates but not enough information available about the Finnish working life, job-hunting techniques and skills needed in the employment market. This guide tries to answer to some of those needs. It is written for the international students of the University of Helsinki, degree students to be more specific, to help them find the best possible jobs. We hope it will be of help whether you are looking for a part-time job, summer job or more permanent employment.

This guide is published together with a supplement that includes a large number of links which we encourage you to visit for more information.

Career Services
University of Helsinki

1. WORKING LIFE IN FINLAND

Persistence, determination, and motivation are the key words when it comes to job searching. The Finnish labour market is highly competitive and looking for a job as a foreigner is challenging. Finland has suffered from a high unemployment rate since the economic crisis in the early 1990s. It is not unusual for a new graduate to send dozens of CVs and get one or two invitations to an interview. Moreover, there are no scouts searching for talented new employees; employers expect applicants to take initiative and contact them directly. On the other hand, both Finnish and foreign graduates of the University of Helsinki have been extremely successful in finding jobs that enable them to use the skills and theory acquired during their studies.

Skills needed

Perhaps the biggest change in the labour market in the last few decades everywhere in the Western world is the emergence of temporariness. Nowadays less and less graduates land a steady job or hold the same post for long periods of time. Instead, young graduates are likely to find themselves in a fixed term contract, working in a project or in free lance work. This means adjusting to ever-changing circumstances and task-descriptions and requires the will and ability for continuous learning.

Recently employers have started to give more value to social skills already when choosing a new employee. Depending on the position, weight is given either to teamwork skills or decision-making ability and the ability to work independently. Over all, job advertisements often call for interpersonal skills and leadership qualities.

University graduates' work tasks generally require good oral and written communication skills. Doing research and writing reports are part of the daily work and often done in a tight schedule. Therefore good writing skills will be a big help. Experience of giving presentations and chairing meetings is also beneficial considering the future duties and responsibilities.

Another major area of required skills has to do with intercultural communication and this is definitely where international students and graduates are at their strongest. Many employers have now realised the need not only for language skills but experience of working in multicultural environments.

Computer skills are a necessity in the modern working life. Knowing your way around word processing, internet, and the pc environment is no longer an asset but a basic requirement. Getting to know the basics of web publishing and layout designing will help you further along.

Learning Finnish

The single most important skill needed in the Finnish labour market is the ability to speak and write Finnish. Whatever line of work you do, it is essential to show that you are willing and interested in learning Finnish. Of course, there are sectors and companies where English is used as a working language but these are exceptions. In fact, the lack of Finnish language may prove to be an obstacle already at the application stage. Most job announcements whether in newspapers or in internet are in Finnish only. Knowing at least elementary Finnish opens many doors and it is highly recommended that you actively study and practise Finnish.

Part-time job or a career?

Looking for the dream job takes time and you may sometimes be forced to look for less ideal work. Living in the capital area has the advantage of a large variety of part-time jobs. Common lines of work among students are: substitute teaching, assisting in research, working in a grocery store or in a shop, cleaning, catering, maintenance, personal assistant, library assistant, telemarketing, working in a call centre and so forth.

Although work experience that is related to your studies is the most important, all work experience gained in Finland will help you later on when you are applying for the job you really want.

2. PRACTICAL MATTERS

Work permit

You should contact the local police department or the employment office to find out whether you need a work permit or not.

As a general rule, you do not need a work permit if you are a citizen of an EU/EEA country, Switzerland or any of the Nordic countries (Sweden, Norway, Denmark, and Iceland) or if you have a permanent residence permit.

Foreign students get a work permit automatically as part of their residence permit which allows them to work up to twenty hours per week during terms and full time during holidays (December 15 – January 15 and May 1 – September 30).

Taxation

Before you start looking for work you should register at the local tax office where you receive a tax card. This tax card is then given to your employer.

Employment contract

Employment contract is made before the employment begins. In this contract the employee agrees to perform certain tasks against the agreed salary and other benefits. The employee is entitled to a written contract.

Generally the employment contract is made for the time being; the contract can also be made for a fixed term but this requires a good reason.

At the beginning of the employment the employer and employee can agree on a trial period during which either party can cancel the employment contract without a period of notice. Agreeing on a trial period is very common and usually there is no specific reason for it.

Keep in mind that the employment contract is legally binding not only for the employer but also the employee.

Termination of employment

The employment agreement can be terminated only for a good and valid reason. The notice period varies from 2 weeks to 6 months and depends on how long your employment relationship has lasted.

Make sure that before you finish your work, you receive a certificate of employment from your employer. This certificate should state your major tasks and responsibilities and the period of employment. You may also ask to receive an evaluation of your work.

Salaries

There is no universal statutory minimum wage in Finland. Instead, minimum wages and salaries are agreed upon in collective labour agreements.

3. WHERE TO LOOK FOR A JOB?

Self Assessment

Before you start sending out applications it is a good idea to sit down and take a few moments to think about your work history, personality and career goals.

- What am I good at?
- What kind of work am I interested in?
- What kind of work experience do I have? What kind of work did I enjoy the most?
- What skills have I gained in my hobbies or in volunteer work?
- Do I prefer to work in the private or the public sector?
- What are my career goals? What skills and experience do I need to achieve them?

Remember that getting the job you want depends not only on your qualifications and skills but also on your personal qualities and determination.

Direct contacts

Many employees prefer not to advertise for job openings. Instead they expect possible candidates to contact them directly either by phone, post or email. If you are applying for a job at for example a small shop or a grocery store, you might even want to consider visiting the place to introduce yourself.

The most common way to contact employers is cold calling or sending a marketing letter in which you introduce yourself and enquire whether the company would have use for a talented person such as you. This letter is then followed by a phone call.

Internet

Internet has proved to be an effective tool in job searching as well as in many other things. Using internet effectively in job-hunting does not mean sending the one and same cover letter to hundreds of companies. Internet is best used as a source of information: you can search for the employers that interest you the most to find out some background information on them.

Most private companies and institutions in the public sector maintain a web page and many companies accept online or email applications. There are several job databases online.

When wondering where to find contact information for employers in your line of work, do go and search the internet. The yellow pages are available online if you want to search for companies in a specific branch. There are also several business directories available online.

Newspapers

Helsingin Sanomat is the biggest daily newspaper in Finland and especially the Sunday edition has a large selection of vacancies. Many of the big, international companies advertise their open vacancies in Helsingin Sanomat and it might be worthwhile to have a look at the paper regularly to see which companies are actively recruiting.

Free local papers are distributed in buses, trams, the underground and other places around the capital area. These papers too regularly publish job listings.

Recruitment Agencies

Private recruitment agencies offer students part-time or summer jobs typically in clerical and maintenance work or in catering services.

Networking, friends, contacts

The lack of a network of friends and colleagues is what usually differentiates foreign students from Finnish students. Newly arrived foreigners cannot use the help of their friends to find information about companies and employment opportunities. But if and when you do have a social network, it is good to share the information you have. Other foreign students are probably the best sources of information on which companies to contact and who is hiring but do not hesitate to ask questions from your Finnish friends either. Networking is something you should remember already at the beginning of your studies. You are likely to need these contacts later in working life.

Employment Office

The Employment Offices offer help in matters such as job-seeking and employment, career planning, self-employment, unemployment benefits and work permits. All Employment Office services are free of charge. You can visit the office to review material available or book a time for an interview. A variety of information is available online together with a job database.

Employment Office is also the place to turn to if you ever run into a conflict with you employer, for example if your salary is delayed.

There are several offices in the capital area. The Employment Office in Hakaniemi (Address: Haapaniemenkatu 4 A) has specialised in serving immigrants and the Kluuvi Employment Office in serving university students and graduates (Address: Mikonkatu 7 A). Employment Offices are open Monday to Friday 9 am – 3.45 pm.

Eures

Eures, European Employment Services, is a network that works for the free movement of workers within the 17 countries of the European Economic Area (EEA). There are EURES-advisers in all 17 EEA countries who

assist all EEA citizens in looking for a job in the EEA area. They can help you already before you enter Finland and again when you have arrived. In Helsinki, the EURES advisor is situated in the Kluuvi Employment Office (Address: Mikonkatu 7 A). Eures offices maintain a European wide job database.

Teaching

Teaching your native language to Finns might seem as the perfect solution to unemployment. Foreign language day care centres, private language schools, and many polytechnics actually do prefer a native speaker for teacher. Elementary and secondary schools on the other hand require the ability to speak Finnish. Finns are big on qualifications; having a degree or any kind of teaching certificate is often required when applying for a job as a teacher.

Self-employment

Employment Offices offer advice and information about free lance work and setting up your own business. Other places to turn to with questions concerning self-employment are the Employment and Economic Development Centre (T & E Keskus), the Women's Enterprise Agency (Naisyrityskeskus) and the New Enterprise Agency (Helsingin Uusyrityspalvelu).

Summer jobs

Most students get their first work experience in summer jobs. Finnish people take long summer holidays, typically a month, and these vacancies are usually filled with students or young professionals. Applications for summer jobs should be sent as early as possible; January is a good time to start looking.

4. APPLYING FOR JOBS

Analysing job ads

Take time to analyse the job announcement thoroughly; you will be surprised at how much information you gain from this. What are the formal requirements? Which of these requirements do you fulfil? What is considered an asset when applying for this job? Try to picture an image of the person the employer is looking for and then list which of those qualities you possess. Jotting down key words while analysing the ad will help you answer the job ad.

Pay attention to the style of language used in the ad. You should use the same level of formality when writing your covering letter.

Phoning the employer

There is usually a contact person mentioned in the job ad and then it is a good idea to call the employer for extra information. However, sometimes it is clearly stated that the employer prefers not to receive any phone calls. In that case, you should respect the wish.

Remember that the employer will get their first impression of you during the phone call and they might take your name down. Remember to introduce yourself at the beginning of the phone call. The questions you ask should be appropriate and vital to know. Do not ask what the salary is or whether they think you are a suitable candidate for this job opening.

Take notes during the phone call. These notes will help you in writing your covering letter. Write down the name of the person you spoke with; you might want to refer to this phone call in your application.

Advice on writing a covering letter

The key focus of your covering letter should be on persuading the prospective employer to invite you to an interview. Therefore, you must demonstrate that you have all the skills and abilities needed in performing the job successfully. Covering letter is always written for a particular job. Do not send copies of the same covering letter to many employers; take time to write a new letter for each job opportunity. The employer will respect the time and effort you have put into it.

Keep in mind:

- Find out about the company you wish to work for. Do they have a mission statement? Who should you address your covering letter to?
- Keep it short and simple. Covering letter should be no longer than one page (4-5 paragraphs).
- Provide examples of your past achievements
- Visual appearance is important. Do not use too small a font size. Leave space for margins.
- Remember the employer's point of view: they are looking for someone they can benefit from.
- Do not copy a sample covering letter. Samples are only to give you ideas on what sort of things to include, you do not need to copy them from word to word. Make the covering letter look like your own; reveal your personality.
- Covering letter should always be typed and printed on a good-quality paper.

Sample covering letter

Your name
Street address
Postal address
Phone number / mobile
Email@address

Date

(Photo)

Title and name of the receiver
Name of company / institution
Street address
Postal address

1st paragraph

How did you find out about the job?
Why are you interested in working for this particular employer?
Why are you interested in this particular job opening?
What is your motivation for applying for this job?

2nd paragraph

What are your qualifications for this job?
Have you done something similar in the past?
Describe your expertise related to this line of work whether it is work experience, theoretical knowledge, volunteer work experience or something you have learned in your leisure time activities.

3rd paragraph

What are you like as a person?
Do not only list adjectives but illustrate them with examples.
What is your work style?
If you have outstanding computer or language skills, remember to mention them here.
Do you perform best when working independently or in a group?
If your former colleagues have given you positive feedback, use it here.

4th paragraph

What happens next?
Will you contact them or will you wait for an invitation to an interview?
State your salaries wish if asked to do so.
What is the best way to reach you?
When would you be able to start?

Sincerely yours, (English)
Ystävällisin terveisin (Finnish)

Signature
Your name typewritten

Enclosure (Attach your CV)

Cold calling

Cold calling means sending an application to an employer that has not advertised a job opening. This uninvited covering letter is for the most part identical to any regular covering letter but tends to be written in a more marketing manner. When writing a cold call the goal is to convince the employer that you are worth meeting. You should identify what sort of employment you are looking for but leave the door open for the employer's suggestions.

Advice on writing a CV

Curriculum Vitae or CV is more than summary of your life, it is your marketing tool. CV has to be easy to read and visually effective. Student or graduate CV should not be longer than two pages. Write in plain language and use action words (I participated, initiated, obtained, investigated, evaluated etc). The curriculum vitae should be written in a reverse chronological order i.e. the most recent experience first.

There are different formats to CV writing such as the chronological CV and the skills-based CV. The following sample is a combination of these two and good for most situations.

Sample CV in English

Curriculum Vitae or Your Name

Date

Personal Details

Name, address, email, mobile / telephone number

Date and place of birth

Nationality
(Civil status)

Education

Mention all degrees you have completed after secondary school. Give the year of graduation, name of degree, school name, and a brief description of your studies (majors, minors, honours etc).

You do not need give a full list of courses you have taken or mention grades. You should, however, give the topic of you thesis.

Work experience

List your work experience in reverse chronological order. State the job title, name of the employer and dates of employment. There is usually no need to mention exact dates, month and year will do. Give a brief description of your tasks and responsibilities.

You do not need to give full details of all previous work experience but make sure there are no gaps in your work history. Emphasise the experience that is relevant for the job you are now applying for and any work you have done in Finland.

Computer and language skills

Remember to mention the level of command: native language / elementary / intermediate / fluent

Activities / Interests

What are your hobbies?

Have you been active in any organisations?

Have you done volunteer work?

References

This section is not compulsory in a Finnish CV. However, if you know that your former supervisor and/or professor is willing to speak on your behalf, it might be a good idea to put their details down as referees (name, title, contact information). Always ask the person before naming them your referee.

You might also want to mention:

- awards and special skills
- military service
- publications
- living or working abroad

Sample CV in Finnish

Ansio luettelo tai Curriculum Vitae

Päivämäärä

Henkilötiedot

Nimi, osoite, sähköpostiosoite ja puhelinnumero

Syntymäaika- ja paikka

Kansallisuus

Siviilisääty

Koulutus

Mainitse ylioppilastutkintosi sekä kaikki sen jälkeen suorittamasi tutkinnot.

Jos opintosi ovat edelleen kesken, on hyvä kertoa arvioitu valmistumisaikasi.

Opinnot, jotka eivät ole johtaneet tutkintoon (esim. opiskelijavaihto) voit listata otsikon "Muu koulutus" alle.

Työkokemus

Esitä työkokemus käänteisessä aikajärjestyksessä uusimmasta vanhimpaan.

Kerro lyhyesti työtehtävistäsi, vastuualueestasi tai saavutuksistasi.

Sinun ei tarvitse kertoa yksityiskohtia kaikista työpaikoista vaan voit esim. yhdistää useamman työpaikan saman otsikon alle. Älä kuitenkaan jätä aukkoja työhistoriaasi.

Kielitaito ja atk-valmiudet

Vapaa-aika

Kerro lyhyesti harrastuksistasi ja mahdollisista luottamustehtävistä tai vapaaehtoistyöstä. Anna persoonallisuutesi näkyä tässä osiossa.

Suosittelijat

Suosittelijoita ei ole välttämätöntä mainita, mutta jos tiedät, että esim.

opinnäytetyönohjaajasi tai esimiehesi antaisi mielellään lisätietoja sinusta, voit laittaa heidän nimensä, tittelinsä ja yhteystietonsa ansioluettelosi loppuun.

Muista kuitenkin aina pyytää suosittelijoiltasi lupa nimetä heidät.

Voit lisätä ansioluettelosi myös

- Uratavoitteet tai erityistaidot*
- Julkaisut ja palkinnot*
- Kansainvälinen kokemus*

How to prepare for an interview

- Make sure you know something about employer. If you have not yet visited the employer's net site, do it before the interview. You might even find some information on the exact job you are applying for.
- Remind yourself why you are applying for this job. Go over your strengths and qualifications one more time.
- Be on time for your interview. Find out well in advance where the interview is held, with whom and at what time.
- Bring work and school certificates and a CV with you.
- Dress neatly and appropriately. Usually smart casual is enough, in the business world however men tend to choose a dark suit.

At the interview

- Stay calm and speak clearly. Be aware of your body language.
- Look interested. Ask questions and listen to the answers carefully.
- Explain your achievements but try not to appear over-confident. Stay focused and stick to the facts.
- Ask for clarification if you did not understand the question you were asked.
- Do not interrupt the interviewer.
- Do not criticise any former employers.
- Remember eye contact.
- Finns expect honesty in interviews. You do not, however, need to voluntarily tell anything particularly negative about yourself.

A typical interview

- Usually interviews begin with introductions and handshakes with everyone present.
- Interviewers use different tactics. Most interviews are held in a relaxed atmosphere but do not be surprised by long silences, someone taking notes or having an aggressive tone of voice.
- Motivation questions: Why do you want to work for this company? What do you know about this company? Do you know any of our products?
- Previous experience and performance: Have you done something similar in the past?
- Questions regarding your personality: What are your strengths and weaknesses? How would your former employer describe you as an employee? How do you react to stress? How do you cope with difficult situations? Give examples.
- Your problem-solving ability might be tested by asking you to solve different case-scenarios (What would you do if...?)
- At the end of the interview you will have an opportunity to ask questions that were not answered during the interview.
- If the interview has gone well you might be asked when you could start or the salary might be discussed. Avoid bringing up the issue of salary or benefits too early on.

Aptitude tests

Sometimes employers want to give the candidates an aptitude test or a psychological test. If you get an invitation to a test, take it as a good sign: you were one of the best candidates. These tests are constantly developing and there is not much you can do to prepare for the test. Best advice is to get a good night of sleep before the test and answer all questions honestly according to your work personality.

5. INTERNSHIPS

An internship is often the first work experience which allows you to put the theory you have learned in your studies into practise. Doing an internship motivates you to finish your studies and helps you set career goals; it gives you useful contacts and a taste for what is coming after graduation.

An internship can be included in all University of Helsinki degrees; for some students it is compulsory.

University sponsored internships

Each department has a limited number of internship grants. These grants are meant for degree students who are at the finishing stage of their studies and wish to gain study-related work experience. Most of the internships are in the public sector, typically in administrative tasks either in local and regional authorities or in ministries.

Application for the internships takes typically place in early spring starting in January but application dates vary according to the department. Each department/faculty has a contact person for internships; a list of contact persons is available on line at www.helsinki.fi/rekry.

Find your own internship place

Since there are not enough internship grants for all students, we would like to encourage you to look for an internship place independently. This is done in a similar way as looking for any job. Interns do not usually get paid as much as regular employees but receive extra guidance and mentoring. Remember to check at your department if you wish to gain study weeks from your internship.

Keep in mind that many companies offer young graduates the chance to participate in a trainee program. For more information about this, take a look at web pages of big international companies.

Internships abroad

For internships abroad, The Centre for International Mobility (Cimo) is the best source of information. Applications for Cimo's own internship programs take place in February and October. Cimo also grants scholarships for internships in international organisations; applications for these scholarships are on-going.

Student organisations like Aiesec, IAESTE or Elsa arrange internships abroad for University of Helsinki students and graduates. See the supplement for a list of organisations.

Most international organisations such as United Nations, European Union or the Red Cross have their own internship programs.

6. THESIS CO-OPERATION

Master's theses can be written in a partnership with a private company, organisation or an institution in the public sector. In this case, the company acts as a sponsor giving money in exchange for research in the agreed topic.

The Career Services customer service staff would be glad to tell you more about this option. You should also consult your professor if interested in thesis partnership.

A SMALL VOCABULARY

Työnantaja	Employer
Työntekijä	Employee
Työnhakija	Jobseeker
Työsopimus	Employment contract
Palkka	Salary
Palkkatoivomus	Salary wish
Ansioluettelo	Curriculum Vitae
Työhakemus	Covering letter
Työpaikka	Job
Viimeinen hakupäivä	Closing date for applications
Yhteyshenkilö	Contact person
Työlupa	Work permit
Avoimet työpaikat	Vacancies
Työvoimatoimisto	Employment Office
Harjoittelupaikka	Trainee position
Työpaikkailmoitus	Job advertisement
Harjoitteluohjelma	Trainee program
Henkilöstöosasto	Human Resources Department
Koeaika	Trial period
Suosittelija	Referee
Soveltuvuustesti	Aptitude test
Vuosiloma	Annual holiday
Työaika	Working hours
Verotoimisto	Tax Office
Vakuutus	Insurance









www.helsinki.fi/rekry