Employability of International Graduates Educated in Finnish Higher Education Institutions

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Short Bio of Authors

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Abstract

While international graduates' employment is increasingly becoming a concern in terms of both attracting international students to Finnish higher education and supporting Finnish labour market development and economic growth, there is little concrete information available on the subsequent employment of international graduates. In the light of this background, VALOA has launched a research project to fill the gap by examining the activities, outcomes and experiences of international students after graduation from Finnish higher education institutions (HEIs). The study was conducted by Higher Education Group, School of Management, University of Tampere, particularly a research team led by Yuzhuo Cai and with Yulia Shumilova and Elias Pekkola.

This report presents the outcomes of the VALOA study on international graduate employability conducted in Finland in 2011-12. The study, following a mixed methods design, involved a survey of international graduates of 2009-10 (N=363) in 15 Finnish HEIs and 20 complimentary interviews with the graduates and employers. The design of survey was based on the definition of employability and job success criteria as discussed in the literature review.

The report presents employment situation of international graduates, post-graduation mobility trends, the challenges and experiences of transition from higher education to the world of work along with employers' views on hiring and working with international graduates. It also discovers the factors affecting the employment of international graduates and explores the relevance of the skills gained in the course of studies for the world of work as perceived by international graduates and their employers. The differences of employment experiences between graduates of different nationalities, gender, age groups, disciplinary background and type of institution were highlighted throughout the report. In the end it elicits recommendations on how Finnish HEIs can raise their profiles internationally and enhance the employability of international graduates.

The findings of the study will be useful for university administrators involved in international marketing process, current and prospective international students and graduates, policy makers and other experts working with the issues of international education and employment.
# Table of Contents

Acknowledgements 10

Chapter 1. Introduction 11
Research problem and background 11
Relevance of the topic 12
International graduates’ employment and attraction of international students to Finland 12
International graduates’ employment and the Finnish labour market 13
Previous studies 14
Significance 15
Research question and objectives 16
Methodology 16
Quantitative study 16
Qualitative study 18
Structure of the report 19

Chapter 2. Description of survey data 20
Institution and degree 21
Gender and age 22
Study field 23
Length of study 24
Language of instruction 24
Nationalities 25
Motivations to study in Finland 25
Post-graduation mobility 27
How does the VALOA data represent the population? 28

Chapter 3. Employment situation of the graduates 29
Employment rate 30
Employment experience 34
Status of employment 36
Job searching methods 37
Fields and sectors of employment 39
Satisfaction with jobs 41
Relevance of current job to the field and level of study 44
Income 45

Chapter 4. Skills and factors related to employment 47
Competencies and skills relevant to employment 48
Graduates’ own skills and the skills required in the workplace 51
Finnish language skills 52
Internship 54
Working during studies 56
Study abroad experience 57
Barriers to finding jobs 58
Relevance of education in Finland to labour market 59
Recognition of degrees 59
Skills gained from Finnish higher education 59
Criticism of Finnish higher education 60
List of Figures

FIGURE 2-1. Distribution of age groups 22
FIGURE 2-2. Distribution of respondents by home continent 25
FIGURE 2-3. Main reasons for taking up higher education degree studies in Finland by type of institution 26
FIGURE 2-4. Length of staying in Finland before taking up studies in Finland 27
FIGURE 2-5. The place where graduates settle after graduation (by type of HEI) 28
FIGURE 2-6. The place where graduates settle after graduation (by geographic origin) 28
FIGURE 3-1. Employment rate of graduates by gender 30
FIGURE 3-2. Employment rate of graduates by discipline and type of institution 31
FIGURE 3-3. Employment rate of international graduates by continent of origin 31
FIGURE 3-4. Comparison of employment rate by country of origin between university and UAS graduates 32
FIGURE 3-5. Employment rate by graduates’ locations 32
FIGURE 3-6. Employment rate by the graduates’ locations 33
FIGURE 3-7. Employment rate by age group (comparison between university and UAS graduates) 33
FIGURE 3-8. Employment rate by age group and gender 34
FIGURE 3-9. Percentage of graduates who have been employed at least once 34
FIGURE 3-10. Percentage of graduates who have been employed at least once by location 35
FIGURE 3-11. Number of employment experiences 35
FIGURE 3-12. Status of first employment 36
FIGURE 3-13. Characteristics of first and current jobs 36
FIGURE 3-14. Methods of job searching (first job) 37
FIGURE 3-15. Time used to find the first job 38
FIGURE 3-16. Comparison of the time used to find the first job between the graduates from universities and universities of applied sciences 38
FIGURE 3-17. Percentage of graduates staying in the first job by location 39
FIGURE 3-18. Professional fields of the graduates’ current jobs 40
FIGURE 3-19. Distribution of graduates’ current employment in terms of sectors 40
FIGURE 3-20. Satisfaction with current job 41
FIGURE 3-21. Average satisfaction level with first and current job by higher education sector 41
FIGURE 3-22. Average satisfaction level with current job by status of employment 42
FIGURE 3-23. Average satisfaction level with current job in Finland by geographic origin 42
FIGURE 3-24. Average satisfaction level with current job by location 43
FIGURE 3-25. Average satisfaction level with current job by relevance of study 43
FIGURE 3-26. Average satisfaction level with current job (using or not using intercultural competences) 43
FIGURE 3-27. Average satisfaction level with current job by age group 44
FIGURE 3-28. The percentage of graduates whose current jobs are relevant to their fields of study taken in Finland 44
FIGURE 3-29. The relevance of current job to the level of education attained in Finland 45
FIGURE 3-30. Salary level compared to the local average in the field 46
FIGURE 4-1. Comparison of employment rates between graduates with and without work experience 49
FIGURE 4-2. Comparison of employment rates by the relevance of work experience to the field of studies 50
FIGURE 4-3. Comparison of employment rates by the level of Finnish language skills 50
FIGURE 4-4. The level of skills and competencies possessed by graduates and those required at work (graduates’ perceptions) 51
FIGURE 4-5. The level of satisfaction with the availability of Finnish language courses by type of institution 52
FIGURE 4-6. Finnish language studies by type of institution 53
FIGURE 4-7. Language skills by type of institution and discipline 53
FIGURE 4-8. Internship status vs. employment rate. 54
FIGURE 4-9. The locus of internship by type of institution 55
List of Tables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Table 1-1.</td>
<td>Categories of investigation and variables</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 2-1.</td>
<td>Distribution of respondents by higher education institution</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 2-2.</td>
<td>The distribution of respondents by study field</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 2-3.</td>
<td>The average length of study by degree level and institution type</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 2-4.</td>
<td>Language of instruction in different institutions</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 3-1.</td>
<td>Income distribution of employed graduates who settled in Finland</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 4-1.</td>
<td>Cross-tabulation of competencies &amp; skills and employment status</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 5-1.</td>
<td>List of graduate interviewees</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
List of Abbreviations

CIMO the Centre for International Mobility
EU European Union
HEI Higher education institution
HEG Higher Education Group, School of Management, University of Tampere
non-EU in this report: Other European countries that are not members of the EU
UAS University of Applied Sciences
ACA Academic Cooperation Association
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Chapter 1.
Introduction

Research problem and background

The number of international degree students in Finnish higher education institutions (HEIs) has been gradually increasing. In 2010, there were 15,707 international degree students, including 7,815 in universities (4.6% of all university students) and 7,892 in Universities of Applied Sciences (UAS) (5.7% of all UAS students) (CIMO, 2011b). When considering these figures, the goal of the Strategy for the internationalisation of higher education institutions in Finland 2009–2015 to increase the number of international students to 20,000 by 2015 looks feasible. However, various stakeholders have expressed a growing concern as to what happens to these international students after they graduate. This question is gaining in importance in the context of the experimental introduction of tuition fees in selected Master programmes for non-EU/EEA students, Finland’s ageing population and the government’s strategy to attract highly skilled immigrants (Finnish Ministry of Education, 2009). In other words, international graduates’ employment is increasingly becoming a concern in terms of both attracting international students to Finnish higher education and supporting Finnish labour market development and economic growth.

However, there is little concrete information available on the subsequent employment of international graduates from Finnish HEIs. One of the few studies on the topic was done by MAJKULMA (2011), who investigated the employment of graduates with foreign backgrounds from Finnish Universities of Applied Sciences (years 2002–2006). For instance, she found that the employment rate of international graduates in English programmes was only 58%, while the rate for Finnish graduates was 81.9%. Moreover, there is a lack of in-depth analysis of international graduates’ employment not only from the graduates’ perspective but also in the eyes of employers (CAI, 2012).

In light of this background, VALOA has launched a research project to fill the gap by examining the activities, outcomes and experiences of international students after graduation from HEIs in the years 2009–2010 from the perspective of both the graduates and their employers. VALOA is a national project partly funded by European Social Fund, promoting the employment opportunities of international degree students in Finland. VALOA invited research institutes to conduct the study through a public tender in February 2011. The Higher Education Group (HEG), School of Management, University of Tampere eventually won the tender in May 2011 and launched the investigation in June 2011.
Relevance of the topic

There is an urgent need to explore the employment of international graduates from Finnish HEIs, because no sufficient information is yet available. The topic is relevant in terms of both making Finnish HEIs attractive from the perspective of international students and resolving the problem of labour shortage in Finland. The findings of the current study will be useful for university administrators involved in the international marketing process, current and prospective international students as well as graduates and policy makers. The study is also expected to help employers become more aware of the immense human resource potential represented by international graduates educated in Finland. In addition, it is a contribution to the academic pool of literature on the relations between international education and the labour market with rich empirical information on a less studied field.

International graduates’ employment and attraction of international students to Finland

Finland has a long tradition of free higher education, but recent Finnish higher education policies (Finnish Ministry of Education, 2009; Finnish Universities Act, 2009) have encouraged Finnish HEIs to develop a market-oriented approach to international higher education by implementing fee-based educational programmes for students from outside the European Union and the European Economic Area (hereafter referred to as international students). With respect to international students, there are two objectives in the next five years:

1. the number of international degree students will be considerably increased, and
2. international education will be developed as an export industry (Finnish Ministry of Education, 2009, pp. 10, 40).

However, the two policy goals might be contradictory. As the majority of international students choose to study in Finland because of its free education (Kärki, 2005, p. 21), charging tuition fees may negatively affect the enrolment of international students in Finland, as evidenced by the similar experience in Denmark and Sweden (Tse, 2011). In order to secure the successful achievement of both objectives at the same time, Finland needs to strategically develop the image of Finnish higher education so that its attractiveness to international students will go beyond a “free lunch”. It is believed that the high quality of education and research will continue to attract international students to study in Finland even after tuition fees are introduced (Finnish Ministry of Education, 2009, p. 10; Takkinen, 2010). However, as the quality of higher education cannot easily be measured and judged by students, in practice they are inclined to judge the quality of a higher education system or a particular institution by its international reputation (Marginson, 2006) and the career success of graduates (Teichler, 2009, p. 15).

Institutional reputation is closely associated with university rankings. In this respect, most Finnish HEIs may, in general, be at a disadvantage, due to their relatively small size and the fact that they are less comprehensive than many other HEIs. The University of Helsinki is the only Finnish HEI ranked in the top 100 international universities.

Due to the invisibility of Finnish higher education on the ranking lists, it is very important to convince students of promising employment prospects when promoting Finnish higher education in international education markets. However, this is a problem for Finland for two reasons. Firstly, a recent study entitled the International Student Barometer shows that employability and career services are the greatest weaknesses of the Finnish higher education system (CIMO, 2011a). Along with the high cost of living, the limited opportunities to learn the “difficult” language rarely spoken outside Finland, the small and competitive labour market, the residence permit bureaucracy which will be discussed below, career guid-
ance and better international student services might become an important factor of post-graduation mobility, resulting in either brain gain or brain drain. Secondly, it is hard to find relevant information on the employment of international graduates from Finnish HEIs, as there are few studies and reports on the topic.

International graduates’ employment and the Finnish labour market

In his review of Finland’s labour market and immigrant integration, Tanner (2011) notes that Finland’s population is growing older. For instance, a bulk of the post-World War II baby boomers (over 500,000 people) will be retiring in the next five years. Consequently, there will be a need to fill vacant slots left by retirees in the labour market. Given the demographical trend in Finland, population decline will inevitably occur after 2025 if no compensating measures are systematically implemented. Tanner suggests that the speed of the decline may be slowed by more immigration, particularly labour migrants. Attracting more labour migrants may increase the working-age population, therefore compensating for future labour shortages.

In this respect, there is a growing pool of global talent available for Finnish employers. They are the international graduates from Finnish higher education institutions, many of whom intend to stay and work in Finland (CIMO, 2011a). However, such resources have not been efficiently used yet.

The foreign talent will not merely solve skill shortages in Finland. It is acknowledged that foreign expertise can add value to a company’s innovation, design and marketing, even though the company may not yet intend to market internationally. When a Finnish enterprise decides to hire a foreign national, it can gain a number of benefits, but the decision may also result in expenses, unless the individual has already spent some time in Finland as international graduates have. In the latter case, the list of benefits includes: language skills; knowledge of the target market abroad; contacts to businesses and institutions and an understanding of the political, business and cultural peculiarities of both Finland and the target partner country (Vehaskari, 2010). In other words, hiring international graduates might be a cost-efficient way for Finnish companies to internationalise.

Despite all these advantages, there are difficulties in retaining the international talent in Finland. First of all, until recently, the approach to labour immigration in Finland could be characterised as ad hoc and cautious. The government has adopted a strategic goal to connect students educated in Finland more closely with the country’s labour market needs and has implemented less strict work permit policies for students where work is available. Non-EU graduates can extend their residence permit for six months after graduation to look for a job. If they are lucky enough to secure a highly paid job (with a gross salary of 4,832 euros per month), they are eligible for a new type of residence and work permit, the so-called Blue Card with extended social benefits (Infopankki, 2011). Yet the entry level jobs and the fixed-term contracts that are usually available for graduates often result in a vicious circle of residence permit applications dependent on the applicant’s luck to get a work contract on time.

Secondly, it is important to note that the Finnish labour market is highly competitive due to its small size and the relatively high higher education attainment rate in the 25–34-year-olds’ age group. In 2009, almost 40% of young people had a higher education degree (OECD, 2011). Although the average unemployment rate among university graduates was only 4% (ibid.), the rate was more than double among foreign-born graduates (Finnish Ministry of Education, 2009). According to Vehaskari (2010), the cost of educating one degree student in Finland ranges from around 30,000 to 100,000 euros depending on the major. In this context, it is legitimate to wonder whether the graduates will be able to find a job in Finland and stay, adding value to the Finnish economy, or rather take advantage of the heavily subsidised education and leave in search of better opportunities elsewhere.
Previous studies

Despite the importance of the employment of international graduates to the aforementioned issues, this study only focuses on the transition from international education to the world of work. A number of relevant studies on the topic have been completed, including the studies on international degree students and graduates in Finland (Ciulinaru, 2010; Kärki, 2005; Majakulma, 2011; Pulkkinen, 2003), studies of the employers’ perspective on the relevance of international student mobility to work (Garam, 2005) and their perspective on having international graduates in Finnish companies (Cai, 2012; Laine & Kujanpää, 2008; Säpyskä, 2007; Söderqvist, 2005).

In June 2003, the Career Services, University of Helsinki, published a survey on the employment status of foreign graduates (of years 1997–1999) from 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. The report highlights the problem of underemployment – situations where the graduates do not benefit from their education in their jobs – which was a reality for 15% of the respondents (N=72). Many respondents also pointed out that “being a foreigner is itself an obstacle to succeeding in the labour market”, with 40% feeling somehow discriminated against (Pulkkinen, 2003).

In 2005, the student unions of five Finnish universities conducted a survey to investigate how international degree students perceive Finland as a place to study, work and live (Kärki, 2005). Although it is assumed that, due to the increase of the ageing population in Finland, highly educated and skilled foreigners can provide the future labour force to secure the country’s economic growth, the survey shows that international students face great challenges in finding a job in Finland mainly because of the language barrier and the relatively small Finnish labour market. The other factors identified by the survey that affect foreign students’ employment in Finland are discrimination, access to job information searches, lack of the right contacts, lack of relevant work experience, wrong field of study and residence permit restrictions. It is indicative that 21% of the students were planning to leave Finland when asked about their future plans after graduation, while eight percent felt that they would like to stay, but it was not possible.

Säpyskä (2007) carried out an investigative project, “Taking Foreigners’ Skills into Use in Pirkanmaa Area”, in which the goal was to clarify how the public sector could help both Finnish employers and foreign employees to find each other in the recruiting market and make the Pirkanmaa area a more international, multicultural and open working and living environment. The tone of the report as well as the attitude of the interviewed Finnish employers is generally positive. Nevertheless, the Finnish language is often an obstacle to the foreigners’ employment in Finland. However, this finding is closely followed by constructive solutions and suggestions. The project states that if the foreign workers’ Finnish language skills are sufficient, their work scope needs to be broadened. It also suggests that foreign workers should be more active and brave in expanding their social and professional networks and contacting employers. In doing so, they might end up discovering “hidden vacancies”.

A recent report (Vehaskari, 2010) on the employment of foreign talents in Finland found that the language barrier is not the only challenge that a foreigner faces when trying to find employment in Finland. The other challenges include the restrictive bureaucracy of the residence permit, closed professional networks, difficult family integration and limited career options. The author also indicates that the Finnish employers’ attitudes towards foreigners generally play a negative role, and changing attitudes is hard and takes time.

One of VALOA’s research reports (Ciulinaru, 2010) investigated the factors that affect the adaptation and integration of international students in Finland by interviewing eight international students in two
HEIs in the Helsinki area. The findings indicate that Finnish language skills and a network of contacts, in particular with Finns, affect the integration and employment of international students in Finland.

Nevertheless, there is little concrete information on how the international graduates from Finnish HEIs have been employed. Only Majakulma (2011) surveyed the employment of international graduates from Finnish Universities of Applied Sciences. She discovered that the employment rate of international graduates in English programmes is only 58%, while the rate for Finnish graduates is 81.9%. In comparison, those international graduates who had studied in Finnish or Swedish programmes are better employed.

With respect to the employment prospects of international graduates from the employers’ perspective, the Centre for International Mobility (CIMO) conducted a study in 2005 to examine the relevance of international student mobility to work from the point of view of employers in Finland (Garam, 2005). Among the employers under investigation, there was a strong belief that studying abroad enhanced the students’ capacities to handle difficult situations, gave them a broader perspective and a sense of proportion, improved their language skills and provided them with opportunities to understand different cultures and to work with people from other countries. However, international experience would only bring the graduates advantages in initial employment in work related to international operations. On the other hand, in workplaces where cross-cultural and language skills are not required, the employers often consider those with an international education background to be overqualified.

Söderqvist (2005) explored factors that enhanced and hampered the recruitment of foreigners in Finnish companies from the employers’ perspective. Based on 27 interviews of employers of different-sized companies, she found that, in general, Finnish companies had not oriented their human resource strategies towards foreigners, though most employers did see diversity as important to business development. She concluded that Finnish employers did not know or even think of how to benefit from foreign employees. She states that Finnish small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are particularly slow to attract and employ foreign graduates. “Workplace diversity in Finland is advanced when it comes to women and disabled people, but so far there have been few efforts to increase cultural diversity,” she explains. Currently, she is conducting a similar study that will show whether there is a shift in attitudes and approaches to diversity.

Similarly, most of the employers interviewed by Laine & Kujanpää (2008) reported “having no real need for foreign labour”. There were some companies that had employed foreigners because there were not enough Finnish workers available. Meanwhile, almost every company expected their employees to speak Finnish at a decent level.

Cai (2012) interviewed the employers of 16 Finnish companies in China about their perceptions of the employability of Chinese graduates from Finnish HEIs. The investigation highlighted a dilemma: although the Finnish companies in China were generally inclined to recruit Finnish-educated Chinese graduates, few are employed there. Cai’s study explored the reasons behind the dilemma and discussed the implications for both the students and the universities.

**Significance**

The significance of the study is determined mainly by four factors: the lack of empirical data in the field; the fact that the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture is planning to use the employment of graduates as part of its funding allocation system (Rautopuro, Puhakka, & Tuominen, 2011); the higher education internationalisation strategy aiming to increase the number of international students and the need to satisfy the rapidly growing labour market needs with an increased input of foreign talent (Davies, Weko, Kim, & Thulstrup, 2009).
Research question and objectives

The overarching research question of this study is to discover and explore the transition of international graduates from Finnish higher education institutions to the workplace. While the previous studies in Finland are mainly concerned with surveying the international graduates of a few institutions, interviewing only several graduates from different institutions or studying only the employers’ perspective, the current study represents the first attempt to approach the issue of international graduate employment on a larger (national) scale both quantitatively and qualitatively. The perspectives of both graduates and employers are taken into account through the lens of the following research objectives:

• To provide an overall and comprehensive picture of the activities, outcomes and experiences of international graduates from Finnish HEIs in the years 2009–10.
• To discover what factors affect the employment of international graduates.
• To explore the relevance of the skills gained in the course of studies for the world of work as perceived by international graduates and their employers, focusing on the added value of Finnish higher education.
• To elicit recommendations on how Finnish HEIs can raise their profiles internationally and enhance the employability of international graduates.

Methodology

In order to reach the above objectives, this study employs a mixed methods approach, which is a procedure for collecting, analysing and integrating both quantitative and qualitative data at some stage of the research process within a single study (CRESWELL, 2003). The rationale for mixing both types of data is that neither quantitative nor qualitative methods are sufficient by themselves to capture the details of situations. Basically, this study takes a sequential explanatory approach, which is characterised by the collection and analysis of quantitative data followed by the collection and analysis of qualitative data. The priority is typically given to quantitative data, and the two methods are integrated during the interpretation phase of the study. The interviews are analysed to explain the findings from the quantitative analysis and to provide detailed descriptions and stories to compensate for the limits of the survey. Integrating both quantitative and qualitative analysis also helps to build well-validated and substantiated findings. We used SPSS 19 and NIVIO 8 respectively to analyse the quantitative and qualitative data.

Quantitative study

This study starts with quantitative research – a large scale survey of international graduates from 15 Finnish universities and universities of applied sciences (UAS) – all part of the VALOA network – that agreed to take part in the study. The survey was designed based on the literature review and previous relevant surveys (e.g. Reflex project, 2007, and Erasmus Mundus Employability study, 2011). In addition, higher education experts commented on the draft survey and their comments were taken into account.

The survey is based on the following definition of employability: an individual ability/potential and skills to gain, retain and (when necessary) find new fulfilling/satisfying work (CROSSMAN & CLARKE, 2010, P. 602; HARVEY, 2001; HILLAGE & POLLARD, 1998). Therefore, finding employment is only one of the components of employability, along with labour market-relevant skills and job satisfaction. Employability is also contingent on a number of variables external to HEIs such as social background, gender, age, ethnic affiliation, career aspirations, networks, the quality and availability of work expe-
rience, access to information, the peculiarities of job search behaviour and recruitment mechanisms and labour market conditions (Harvey, 2001; Krempkow & Wilke, 2009; Lindberg, 2008; Pavlin, 2010, p. 102). However, we recognise the importance of HEIs in helping students develop not only the academic skills but also the generic or transferable ones more valued by employers in highly skilled professions. In addition, we also recognise the linking function of HEIs between students and the labour market.

The concept of employability is closely linked to “professional success”, which can be described by a number of subjective and objective indicators such as: “a) the smoothness of the transition from higher education to the labour market (duration of job search), b) income and socio-economic status, c) a position appropriate to the level of educational attainment, d) desirable employment conditions (independent, demanding and responsible work), and e) a high degree of job satisfaction” (Pavlin, 2010, p. 5).

Based on the conceptual discussion above, main research categories and variables were developed as shown in Table 1–1. A cross-tabulation with the background variables (e.g. type of institution, gender, age, geographic origin, etc.) was done if the analysis showed significant differences in the results.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research category</th>
<th>Variables</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Socio-economic background</td>
<td>gender, age</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>nationality (native languages)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Educational background</td>
<td>reasons to study in Finland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>type of institution</td>
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<td>degree programme</td>
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<td>time to complete a degree</td>
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<td>field of studies</td>
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<td>language of instruction</td>
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<tr>
<td>HR activation during studies</td>
<td>work experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>study abroad experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>internship &amp; its relevance for studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Finnish language skills &amp; satisfaction with the availability of Finnish language courses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mobility after studies</td>
<td>residence after graduation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career success</td>
<td>current employment status</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>job search length &amp; methods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>type of employment contract</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>field &amp; sector of employment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>salary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>job–education match (horizontal and vertical)</td>
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<td>skills match (own-obtained during studies–required at work)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>job satisfaction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenges</td>
<td>defects of higher education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>challenges with degree recognition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>challenges in securing a job after graduation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recommendations</td>
<td>recommendations to HEIs and other stakeholders on ways to enhance international graduate employability</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

TABLE 1–1. Categories of investigation and variables

When the first draft questionnaire was ready, a pre-test – an online web survey – was conducted in October 2011. Altogether 10 responses were received. Besides recording their responses to the structured questions, the survey also asked the respondents: 1) how long it took them to complete the survey, 2) whether they had any difficulties with the questions, and any other comments on the structure and wording of the survey. A preliminary analysis of the pre-test survey and the respondents’ suggestions were used to help improve the layout of the final questionnaire (see Annex 1).
The VALOA project identified the sample as all international graduates of the 16 HEIs in the VALOA network who completed their studies in 2009 and 2010. The HEIs involved were contacted to obtain research permits and lists of relevant graduates whose updated addresses were applied for from the Finnish Population Register. Out of the 16 HEIs, one opted not to take part in the study and another one decided to forward the link to the online form of the survey to the target graduates by e-mail.

The survey was sent to 1,803 international graduates, based on the lists provided by participating HEIs. The majority (n=1,501) of the surveys were sent in a paper form, as HEIs do not usually keep an e-mail database of their alumni. Among these, there were 177 addresses residing abroad, according to the Finnish Population Register data. Another 292 graduates were contacted by e-mail; hence the number of those residing abroad is unknown in this group. Still, the opportunity to fill in the questionnaire online was mentioned in the cover letter to the paper survey and in the reminder postcard.

By the final deadline, January 25, 2012, we received 363 eligible responses (with approximately half of them returned on paper). By eligible responses we mean responses from the target graduates whose native language is something other than Finnish. Swedish-speaking Finns have also been excluded from the sample. With the deduction of the 97 envelopes that were returned marked “address unknown”, the actual response rate is 21.3%. In order to increase the response rate, some material incentives were given in the form of a prize draw, and a reminder via either post or e-mail was sent to all respondents in December 2011.

After the quantitative data collection, we conducted a preliminary examination to provide us with an overview of the situation of graduate employment and to discover some key factors related to the employment.

### Qualitative study

Based on an understanding of the quantitative data, a follow-up qualitative study was designed. Although the main subjects of the study are international graduates, interviews of both graduates and employers are included in the qualitative study phase in order to gain a holistic view on the transition from higher education to work. The employers’ perspective is considered important, because educational output or employability is dependent on employers' beliefs (BAILLY, 2008).

The interview questions for graduates were developed so as to gain a better understanding of personal mobility and educational and career trajectories. Along with the opportunity to provide additional information on study, integration, job search and graduate work experiences, the graduates could also elaborate on their recommendations for HEIs and other international students/graduates. Interviewees were selected from the pool consisting of those survey participants who agreed to be interviewed, taking into account the diversity of disciplines, current status (employed/unemployed), the type of institution (university/UAS), gender and nationality. In total, 22 graduates were contacted and 10 agreed to take part in an interview. The interviews with those who resided in Tampere (N=3) were conducted face-to-face and the rest (N=7) by phone. The duration of an interview was between 10 and 28 minutes. The interviews were quite short due to their complementary nature.

When selecting potential employers for the interview, we tried to find representatives of SMEs and large companies in the following four sectors: IT (N=2); Production (N=3); Services & Consultancy (N=3) and the public sector (N=2). The initial list of companies to choose from was prompted by the VALOA survey participants and, in three cases, the recommendations of the WorkPlace Pirkanmaa Project Coordinator. In total, 17 employers were contacted and 10 agreed to take part in an interview. All of the interviewed employers employed international graduates from Finnish HEIs in their companies, including graduates who graduated in the years 2009–10. The majority of the interviews were conducted face-to-face. The duration of an interview varied between 19 and 52 minutes.
The report is organised into eight chapters. Chapter 1 features the research topic, goals, the background and relevance of the study and the methodology of data collection and analysis. In Chapter 2, the survey data is described in terms of the socio-economic background of the sample, the characteristics of the study programmes completed, the reasons to come to Finland and the residence after graduation. Here, the characteristics of the survey data are compared to other relevant statistics. Chapter 3 presents the employment situation of international alumni after graduating from Finnish HEIs. In this chapter, the employment rate is cross-tabulated with the most important determinant variables, such as gender, major disciplines (hard/soft), continent of origin, residence after graduation and type of HEI attended. Additionally, the chapter focuses on the length of job search and the number of work positions held after graduation. The field, sector and character of employment are also analysed along with job satisfaction. Chapter 4 is dedicated to an analysis of the skills and factors that affect graduate employability, such as Finnish language skills and work and study abroad experience gained during studies. The graduates’ own competencies are compared to those required at work and to the ones developed during degree studies in Finland to see the relevance of Finnish higher education to the world of work. Finally, the barriers to finding a job are presented. The findings presented in Chapters 2–4 are based on the quantitative data derived from the survey responses, whereas Chapters 5 (graduates’ perspective) and 6 (employers’ perspective) are based on the qualitative data: open-ended responses in the survey and the interviews with graduates and employers. Chapter 7 discusses the convergences and divergences in the quantitative and qualitative findings with some comparisons to previous studies, while Chapter 8 presents the conclusions and a summary of recommendations to the stakeholders.
Chapter 2.
Description of survey data

The survey provides an overall view of international graduates’ employability and skills. It covers both sectors of the binary model of Finnish higher education, namely universities and universities of applied sciences (UAS). In this report, the term “university of applied sciences” and the abbreviation “UAS” are used to refer to professional higher education institutions of the polytechnic sector (in Finnish language: ammattikorkeakoulu). Currently, there are 16 universities and 25 UASs in Finland.

The mission of universities is to conduct scientific research and provide undergraduate and postgraduate education based on it. Universities confer Bachelor’s and Master’s degrees, and postgraduate licentiate and doctoral degrees. Finnish universities are independent corporations under public law or foundations under private law (Foundations Act). Their operations are built on the freedom of education and research and university autonomy.

UASs educate professionals in response to labour market needs and conduct R&D which supports instruction and promotes regional development in particular. The UAS system is still fairly new, established gradually in the 1990s. UASs grant Bachelor’s degrees (polytechnic degree, ammattikorkeakoulututkinto) and Master’s degrees (polytechnic Master’s degree, ylempi ammattikorkeakoulututkinto) that are fully recognised first and second tier degrees according to the Bologna Process provisions.

The analysis of the survey is based on the survey responses of 363 international graduates from seven universities and eight UASs. In the following, the composition of the respondents will be presented and the data will be compared with other statistics on similar issues.
Institution and degree

Out of all of the respondents, 62.4% of the graduates are from universities and 37.6% from UASs. This is slightly different from the distribution of enrolled international students in Finland. According to recent statistics by CIMO (2011b), Finnish higher education institutions hosted 15,707 international students, of which half (7,815) are studying at universities and the other half (7,892) are in UASs.

Most of the university graduates (88.3%) had a Master’s degree and most UAS graduates (94.0%) had a Bachelor’s degree. The distribution is not surprising. Regardless of the Bologna Process, the Master’s degree remains the “standard university degree”. In addition, the emphasis in English language instruction has been on Master’s degree education. In the UASs, the standard degree is a Bachelor level degree. The Master’s degree in the polytechnic sector is comparably new, as it was introduced in 2005, and it requires three years of work experience.

In terms of the graduation institutions, the number of graduates is shown in Table 2-1. These institutions include the 15 HEIs – all part of the VALOA network – that agreed to participate in the survey.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aalto University</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>21.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Helsinki</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>15.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HAAGA-HELIA University of Applied Sciences</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>10.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helsinki Metropolia University of Applied Sciences</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>7.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tampere University of Technology</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>7.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Tampere</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>7.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Oulu</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>5.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laurea University of Applied Sciences</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>5.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hanken School of Economics</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>3.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tampere University of Applied Sciences</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kemi-Tornio University of Applied Sciences</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HAMK University of Applied Sciences</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oulu University of Applied Sciences</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rovaniemi University of Applied Sciences</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Lapland</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other*</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>363</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* The 8 other institutions include 7 cases of institution unknown and 1 from Diakonia University of Applied Sciences.
Gender and age

The gender distribution of the respondents is quite even (M 51%/F 49%). In the national population of tertiary education graduates, the share of females is slightly higher at 54.7% (Statistics Finland, 2011). In the survey, a slightly larger share of university graduates were men (54%), whereas more UAS graduates were female (53%). The mean age of the graduates was 27.5 years; 28 in the universities and 27 in the UASs. The distribution percentage of age groups (at graduation) of all respondents is shown in Figure 2-1.

![Figure 2-1. Distribution of age groups](image-url)
Study field

The distribution of respondents by study field is displayed in Table 2-2. The field of Engineering, Technology and Communication is the most popular with 31% of the graduates, followed by Business and Administration (21%). The popularity of these two fields is in line with the number of degree programmes offered in English (see CIMO, 2011).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Study field</th>
<th>Type of HEI</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Univ.</td>
<td>UAS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>13</td>
<td>6.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>83</td>
<td>37.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>21</td>
<td>9.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>21</td>
<td>9.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>15</td>
<td>7.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>20</td>
<td>9.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>16</td>
<td>7.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>222</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>124</td>
<td>57.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>93</td>
<td>56.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2-2. The distribution of respondents by study field

For further analysis, the study fields are categorised into hard (more empirical) and soft sciences, according to Becher & Trowler’s (2001) classification. In both sectors, the majority of the graduates studied hard sciences. In the universities, 57% of the respondents had a hard science as a major and in the UASs, 44% respectively. In both sectors, the majority of students studying hard sciences were male (U 65% / UAS 58%). However, among the soft disciplines, the share of males (42%) was higher in the universities than in the UASs (36%).
Length of study

The survey results show that, in general, international students are efficient in terms of the length of their studies. Approximately 80% of those who pursued Master’s degree studies in universities graduated within four years, half of whom graduated within two years. Although, the survey did not ask about the normal length of the Master’s degree programme, the international Master’s degrees in Finnish universities generally last two years. If this is the case, the graduation time of international university graduates in Master’s programmes is relatively long on average.

Among UAS graduates with Bachelor’s degrees, 80% graduated in four years and 20% in four to six years. All students graduated within six years, which is quite fast as compared to the national population. According to Statistics Finland (2011), in 2008, only 40% of the new students in UASs graduated within 4.5 years. The average lengths of study in both Bachelor’s and Master’s degree programmes and in both the university and the UAS sector are presented in Table 2-3.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of institution</th>
<th>Degree level</th>
<th>Average length of study (in years)</th>
<th>Number of respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>University</td>
<td>Bachelor</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Master</td>
<td>3.52</td>
<td>196</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UAS</td>
<td>Bachelor</td>
<td>3.74</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Master</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2-3. The average length of study by degree level and institution type

Language of instruction

The language of instruction was mainly English in both sectors (Table 2-4). It seems that the international student population in UASs is almost exclusively studying in international English language programmes. In universities, 14% of the graduates studied in Finnish language programmes. It is interesting that there is not a single graduate who studied in Swedish at the university.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of institution</th>
<th>Language of instruction</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>University</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>188</td>
<td>85.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Finnish</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>14.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>219</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UAS</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>127</td>
<td>96.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Finnish</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Swedish</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2-4. Language of instruction in different institutions
Nationalities

The respondents represented 75 nationalities from all continents. The distribution of nationalities was extremely wide. Only nine countries had more than ten informants. The top ten nationalities included China (N=68), Russia (33), Germany (23), USA (13), Estonia (11), India (11) and Nigeria (11), Kenya and Pakistan (10) and Italy (9). The shares of nationalities are shown by continent in Figure 2-2. According to CIMO (CIMO, 2011b), the biggest countries of origin are slightly different, although the top two ones remain the same: China, Russia, Nigeria, Nepal, Estonia, Vietnam, Sweden, Germany, India and Bangladesh. Among the respondents, 11.1% of the graduates acquired Finnish citizenship before their graduation. The percentage was a bit higher in the universities (12.7%) than in the UASs (9.0%). The distribution of respondents by home continent is shown in Figure 2-2. The number of respondents by country and their distribution into categories can be seen in Appendix 4.

Motivations to study in Finland

When analysing the reasons for coming to Finland to study, we were mainly interested in the “pull” factors to see what attracts potential international students to Finland. According to the results of the International Student Barometer survey conducted in Finland in 2010 (CIMO, 2011a), what matters to students when choosing a study place are teaching and research quality, cost of study and institutional reputation. Apart from gaining a degree, students were also motivated by “a chance to find relevant employment either internationally or in Finland” (ibid.). In the VALOA survey, the top five reasons why the respondents chose Finland as a destination for study partially coincide: 1) Free of charge education, 2) Possibility to study in English, 3) A chance to improve employability, 4) A chance to explore a foreign country, and 5) Reputation of higher education institution(s) (Figure 2-3). It should be stressed that in both studies “to improve employability” is one of the most important motivations driving international students to choose Finland as a study destination. This reason to study in Finland is especially important in the case of UASs, as 50% of UAS graduates considered “a chance to improve employability” to be the main reason for them to take up studies in Finland. The major motivations to study in Finland corroborate those identified by the International Student Barometer survey.
FIGURE 2-3. Main reasons for taking up higher education degree studies in Finland by type of institution
The reputation of Finnish HEIs is also quite influential in student choice behaviour. The attractiveness of Finnish higher education is confirmed by the fact that Finland was the first choice among study abroad destinations for 60% of the respondents and that after graduation the vast majority of respondents (86.7%) would recommend Finland as a place of study to their friends or relatives.

In Chapter 5, some examples are given on how potential students may choose to study in Finland based on the interviews. In fact, only half of the respondents spent less than half a year in Finland before taking up studies, the rest had been in Finland longer. This means that 50% of graduates might come to Finland for reasons other than study (Figure 2-4).

![Figure 2-4. Length of staying in Finland before taking up studies in Finland](image)

Post-graduation mobility

Despite the public debate in the media stating that up to 70% of international graduates leave Finland (Houston & O’Sullivan, 2011), the results of the current survey show the opposite. Among the international graduates of 2009–2010 who participated in the survey, only 22% returned to their home countries or moved elsewhere. This is consistent with the theoretical sample data received from the Finnish Population Register, according to which only 11.7% of graduates are residing abroad. With 6.4% of the surveys returned marked “address unknown”, the possible percentage of those leaving Finland turns out to be even lower than that of the survey sample and does not exceed 18%. However, we cannot be sure that we received all the “unknown address” envelopes back, as some of them might have remained with the wrong addressees. We therefore compared our data to the CIMO (2012) report, based on the Statistics Finland data from 2008. According to this report, 67% of university and UAS graduates are still in Finland one year after graduation. This is quite comparable to our finding.

Another positive fact supporting “Finland as an attractive place to live” is that half of those who left the country indicate that they would like to return to Finland for further studies or work. The breakdown of post-graduate mobility by type of institution differs slightly and is shown in Figure 2-5.
If we compare the post-graduation mobility by country (Figure 2-6), it becomes clear that the graduates from South, West and Central Asia (including India and Pakistan) and those from African countries tend to be more likely to stay in Finland and not return to their home countries.

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**How does the VALOA data represent the population?**

It has been acknowledged that the response rate in the VALOA survey was relatively low (21.3%), which is one of the limitations of the study. Although a lower response rate does not mean lower survey accuracy, we tried to include comparisons and cross-references to other statistical data and previous studies where it was possible. In general, the data presented in this report is comparable to other data sources provided by CIMO and Statistics Finland in terms of distributions per type of higher education institution, gender, nationality and post-graduate mobility etc., and thus the findings can serve to highlight the major trends and challenges in international graduate employability. Nevertheless, further studies are needed when making generalisations about the whole population of international graduates in Finland.
Chapter 3. Employment situation of the graduates

The survey contained a set of questions that provide insight into the current employment situation of international graduates in Finland and help define the success of transition from higher education to work. In the following, the employment rate is presented by the most important determinant variables, such as gender, major disciplines (hard/soft), continent of origin, residence after graduation and type of HEI attended. Additionally, we focus on the employment experience, such as the length of job search and the number of work positions held after graduation. The field, sector and character of employment are also analysed along with job satisfaction, which allows us to draw a clearer picture of the international graduates’ transition from university to work.
**Employment rate**

Of the 363 respondents, 253 graduates were currently employed, corresponding to an employment rate of 69.9%. In addition, 37 of the employed graduates (14.6%) were also undertaking further studies. The 110 graduates who were not employed (when taking the survey) reported that they were involved in the following parallel activities:

- 67 (60.9%) undertaking further studies,
- 31 (28.6%) taking care of family,
- 12 (10.9%) doing internship, and
- 14 (12.7%) being in another situation.

From the above data, it can be inferred that continuing further studies appears to be the preferred strategy for enhancing one’s employability.

The employment rate of university graduates is 71.7%, which is only slightly higher than that of UAS graduates (68.4%). As noted in Chapter 2, both university and UAS graduates include Bachelor’s and Master’s degree holders. The employment rate of university Master’s degree graduates is 75.5%, and the employment rate of UAS Bachelor’s degree graduates is 68.0%. As compared to the employment rates of local students, the trend is similar, although the local employment rates are higher: 88% for those with university Master’s degrees and 86% for UAS Bachelor’s degree graduates (Statistics Finland, 2012b).

There is also a small difference between the employment rates of male graduates (72.1%) and female graduates (67.2%). Male graduates have a higher employment rate than female graduates in the university sector, while the situation is opposite in the UAS sector (FIGURE 3-1).

![Graph](image)

**FIGURE 3-1. Employment rate of graduates by gender**

When comparing the employment between disciplines, the graduates from the hard sciences generally have higher employment rates as compared to those from the soft sciences, and this difference is more visible in the university sector (FIGURE 3-2). When taking separate disciplines into account, the employment rates of graduates who majored in Engineering, Medical Sciences, Arts, Social Sciences and Agriculture and Forestry are higher than the average rates of the sample. No generalisation can be made about Law, Psychology and Sports Science majors as they were represented by only one respondent each.
In terms of the students’ continent of origin, the variations are quite large, as shown in Figure 3-3. The graduates from South East Asia, Oceania and Latin America are grouped in the category “Other”, because the numbers of respondents from each continent is relatively small and it is hardly reasonable to make generalisations about the employment rate based on a few individual cases. Although North America is listed in the figure, with only 18 respondents, one should be cautious when generalising the results.

However, when examining the employment rate by institution type, there are major differences between graduates from certain regions (Figure 3-4). For instance, East Asian graduates from universities have an 83.3% employment rate, while those from UASs have an employment rate of only 33.3%. It can be attributed to the fact that the latter prefer to continue their studies in the Master’s level. In terms of EU graduates, the situation is opposite so that the employment rate of UAS graduates (89.2%) is clearly higher than that of university graduates (61.2%).
It was discovered that graduates are more often employed either in Finland or in their home countries than in other countries. As shown in Figure 3-5, 71.7% of the graduates who settled in Finland are currently employed. This is almost the same as the employment rate of those who returned back to their home countries. By comparison, the employment rate of those who moved elsewhere is low, only 54.5%.

When comparing the employment situation between university graduates and UAS graduates (in Figure 3-6), the employment rate is almost the same between the graduates from the two sectors among those who settled in Finland. However, in terms of those who returned to their home countries, the employment rate of UAS graduates is much higher than that of university graduates, while the university graduates seem to have more advantages as compared to UAS graduates when it comes to employment in other countries.
When comparing the employment rate by age group, university graduates aged 40–44 tend to be the most employable (Figure 3-7). UAS graduates are more employable than university ones only in the age group 35–39.

When comparing the employment rate by gender and age group, male employability tends to be higher than female employability in all age groups and steadily increases until the age of 40–44 (Figure 3-8). Female employment rates show two peaks at the ages of 30–34 and 40–44, the first one of which can be explained by the preceding childcare period. According to Statistics Finland (2012a), the average age of women at first childbirth was 28.4, while at all childbirths the average age was 30.3 years in Finland.
Employment experience

Although 69.7% of the international graduates are currently employed, 86.8% (88.0% male and 85.2% female) have been employed at least once since their graduation. This rate is named the rate of employment experience. It is higher among university graduates (90.7%) as compared to the graduates from UASs (82.0%), as shown in Figure 3-9.

It is worth noting that the graduates find jobs more easily when returning to their home countries as compared to either staying in Finland or moving to a third country. As shown in Figure 3-10, more than 95% of graduates have been employed at least once in their home countries. When comparing the graduates from the two sectors, the university graduates clearly have a higher rate of employment experience as compared to their counterparts in the UAS sector.
Based on the gap between the current employment rate (69.7%) and the rate calculated by employment experience (86.7%), it can be inferred that many students have had a short employment contract or have changed jobs. This employment mobility is reflected in Figure 3-11, which shows how many different jobs the graduates have taken since graduation. For instance, about 45% of the graduates have taken more than one job since graduation. When taking into account the fact that the survey focused on recent graduates – one to two years after graduation – we can assume that they are quite mobile in terms of employment.
Status of employment

One of the reasons that explains why more than half of the graduates did not stay in their first job even after one or two years after graduation is that only a small number of them (33.3%) got their first job on a permanent full-time basis, as shown in Figure 3-12.

The trend of temporariness in work positions, reflected in Figure 3-13, is not only typical for international graduates, but is in line with the fact that nowadays it is becoming a characteristic feature of the working lives in the Western world. The study on “permanent temporariness” by Rasmussen & Håpnes (2012) suggests that we have entered an age of insecurity in relation to employment and that the reasons for this lie in the employers’ strategy to use human resources flexibly or to “buy” workers rather than give them a long-term contract (Allen & Van der Velden, 2007). On the other hand, graduates may change their employers voluntarily as a means to acquire new knowledge, new competences and new experiences, and in order to find a satisfactory job or a more satisfactory job (ibid.). However, in the case of international graduates who extend their residence permits based on the length of the employment contract and who often cannot rely on social benefits to support their unemployment periods, the reasons for taking on temporary jobs can be reduced to ones related to survival. On the positive side, such employment mobility tends to reduce with time, because more graduates get permanent full-time jobs further on in their careers, as shown in Figure 3-13.
Job searching methods

In the transition from higher education to the world of work, it can be assumed that one’s job search strategy may affect the employment success. As shown in Figure 3-14, the majority of graduates got their jobs in a traditional way by responding to a job advertisement or by contacting the employer directly (sending open applications).

Previous studies show that social networks play an increasingly important role in finding a job (Granovetter, 1983). Our findings also confirmed the fact that personal connections and recommendations from the teaching staff helped some graduates. Yet, it was reported that it is difficult and time-consuming to build a genuine network in this rush world. On the whole, the top methods of job search coincide with the ones identified in the CHEERS and Reflex surveys (Teichler, 2009, p. 241), while the help of careers/placement offices in HEIs was less frequently used.

![Figure 3-14. Methods of job searching (first job)](chart)

Those who have been employed got their first jobs very fast (see Figure 3-15). 90.3% of them got their first jobs within 6 months of graduation and 58.6% even found jobs during their studies.
When comparing the figures between the graduates from universities and from UASs (FIGURE 3-16), it is clear that more university graduates get their first job during their studies, but those from UAS catch up to the same level within one month of graduation.
In spite of the promising report, only half of those who have been employed after graduation still remained in their first job when the survey was conducted. This means that the first jobs are likely to be changed within one-two years after graduation. By comparison, more university graduates (54.4%) stayed in their first job than UAS graduates (42.1%). Figure 3-17 shows that those who remain in Finland are more likely to stay in their first jobs than those who leave Finland after graduation.

![Figure 3-17: Percentage of graduates staying in the first job by location](image)

**Fields and sectors of employment**

In terms of the professional fields of the graduates’ current jobs, the situations between university graduates and UAS graduates are quite different (Figure 3-18). For instance, 28.7% of university graduates are working in the academic/research field, while this percentage is very low for UAS graduates (7.5%). This perfectly reflects the dual model of Finnish higher education. While the university is academically oriented, universities of applied sciences mainly prepare the students for professional working life. The figure also shows that the top three fields of employment of UAS graduates are Business & Sales (28.4%), Engineering and Computer Science (25.4%) and Health & Medicine (19.4%), while university graduates are mainly employed in the fields of Engineering & Computer Science (29.7%), Academic/Research (28.7%) and Business & Sales (15.8%). This echoes the different study fields between the two higher education sectors in Finland.
The distribution of graduates’ current employment in terms of sectors is described in Figure 3-19.
Satisfaction with jobs

Most of the graduates who are currently employed are satisfied (25.3%) or very satisfied (43.7%) with their jobs (Figure 3-20). When comparing the average satisfaction level of male and female graduates with their current job, the latter (3.8) are slightly more satisfied than the former (3.7).

Remarkably, the satisfaction level is higher with the current job as compared to the first job. This can be explained by the fact that first jobs are more often temporary or part-time (see Figure 3-21).

It is also interesting, as seen in Figure 3-22, that self-employed respondents were most satisfied as compared to the other groups, even in the case of “forced” entrepreneurship, whereas a permanent full-time position is only in fourth place. Hence, there is no direct link between job stability and satisfaction, as one may initially assume. Unfortunately, the number of entrepreneurs among the survey respondents is quite low – only 4%.
Among those employed in Finland, a significant difference was also noticed in the satisfaction levels by the geographic origin of respondents, with the highest one among North American and EU respondents and the lowest among respondents from African countries (Figure 3-23). The higher satisfaction level of the first two groups could be attributed to their easier integration to the labour market in terms of bureaucracy. The Erasmus Mundus survey of international graduate employment (Hemmer et al., 2011) showed similar results in terms of greater job satisfaction among graduates from industrialised countries. The other side of the spectrum might be a reflection of the ethnic discrimination existing in the recruitment process that was mentioned by the graduates as one of the obstacles to getting a job. We assume that not only fewer jobs are available to the graduates with “non-European” looks, but also the quality of the available jobs may differ.

It is also interesting that those who settled in Finland are more satisfied with their jobs than those who left either for their home countries or elsewhere (Figure 3-24). This might be due to a higher standard of living in Finland and the fact that the majority of graduates would like to stay in this country, while going back or elsewhere could be a forced step for some who could not find a job.
The relevance of one’s job to the field of studies also significantly affects one’s job satisfaction. Being able to use the knowledge and skills gained during studies was mentioned as a positive attribute of one’s work (Figure 3-25).

Furthermore, those who have a chance to use their intercultural competencies at work feel more satisfied with their jobs, and the university graduates even more so than UAS ones (Figure 3-26). Studying abroad develops language skills and an understanding of different cultures, and it is natural that many graduates would like to make use of these abilities to benefit both their home and host countries.
Interestingly, the satisfaction level in the 40–44 age group is the lowest, although the employment rate of this group is the highest, as previously mentioned (Figure 3-27).

Relevance of current job to the field and level of study

The survey contained questions related to higher education/work matches in terms of the field and level of studies taken, which are referred to in literature as horizontal and vertical matches respectively (Teichler, 2009). As seen in Figure 3-28, the majority of graduates see their jobs as relevant to their fields of study.

The vertical match (Figure 3-29) pictured below represents how one’s level of education (Bachelor/Master) matches the job requirements. Again, the majority of graduates found their education to be adequate to the level demanded by the job. Nevertheless, around 23% of university graduates have had to take jobs that require a lower degree of education or no higher education whatsoever. As with the skills mismatch discussed below, we believe that this is the result of underemployment, meaning that the international graduates often have to lower their job expectations in a foreign labour market due to e.g. insufficient language skills.
The job did not require a higher education degree
A lower level higher education degree could be used in this job
The job was at the same level to my own education
The job was at a higher level than my own education

Income

In terms of international graduates who settled in Finland, the most typical salary level in their first and current jobs is 2,001 to 2,500 euros (a detailed income distribution is shown in Table 3-1). In their first job, the share of graduates who earn less than 2,000 euros is considerably high, as this is a reality for more than half of the respondents. In the current job, the share of graduates working on a salary that is less than 2,000 euros is still ⅓. The distribution of salaries was more even among UAS graduates, while for university graduates, the salary increase was faster and the deviation was higher.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of institution</th>
<th>Current job</th>
<th></th>
<th>First job</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>University</td>
<td>UAS</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0 - 1000</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1001-1500</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1501-2000</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001-2500</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2501-3000</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt; 3001€</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 3-29. The relevance of current job to the level of education attained in Finland

Table 3-1. Income distribution of employed graduates who settled in Finland
The median salary in Finland was 2,890 euros in 2010 (Statistics Finland, 2011b). Therefore, the international graduates earn less on average. This is also reflected in the respondents' rating of their salary level as compared to the local average in their field (Figure 3-30). Compared to those who settled in Finland, the graduates who returned to their home countries or moved elsewhere have a higher salary level in relation to the local average. A positive finding is that the salary level rose in the current job as compared to that in the first job.

**Figure 3-30. Salary level compared to the local average in the field**
Chapter 4.
Skills and factors related to employment

Successful transition from higher education to work is determined not only by access to professional networks or favourable conditions in the labour market, but also by a number of factors that shape the labour market-relevant skills, competencies, values and attitudes. This chapter discusses both the skills and experiences that facilitate graduates’ employment, such as study abroad, work experience, Finnish language courses and internships pursued during studies, and the factors that hamper their employment.
Competencies and skills relevant to employment

In the survey, the respondents were asked to rate their own level of Competencies & Skills (17 items) by choosing between 1 (very low) – 5 (very high) on the Likert scale. As the number of those who selected 1 or 2 was very small, we recoded the 1–5 scale into two categories. The values of 1, 2 and 3 were grouped in the category “low”, as we consider the levels of Competencies & Skills to be relatively low, if the choices are in the range of 1–3. Correspondingly, the values of 4 and 5 were grouped in the category “high”, as we consider the levels of Competencies & Skills to be relatively high, if the choices are in the range of 4–5. By using the new values of Competencies & Skills, a cross-tabulation of all seventeen items of Competences & Skills with the employment status (employment/unemployment) shows that there are significant differences in the employment rates between graduates with a higher level of skills and those with a lower level of skills in terms of most Competencies and Skills items (Table 4).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Competencies &amp; skills: Own level</th>
<th>Valid number</th>
<th>Chi-square test Exact sig (2-sided)</th>
<th>Employment rate among “Low” competencies &amp; skills</th>
<th>Employment rate among “High” competencies &amp; skills</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. Mastery of your own field or discipline</td>
<td>351</td>
<td>0.001**</td>
<td>52.9%</td>
<td>74.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Knowledge of other fields or disciplines</td>
<td>347</td>
<td>0.007**</td>
<td>62.7%</td>
<td>76.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Analytical / Research skills</td>
<td>349</td>
<td>0.048*</td>
<td>61.3%</td>
<td>72.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. Ability to rapidly acquire new knowledge</td>
<td>348</td>
<td>0.049*</td>
<td>55.8%</td>
<td>71.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e. Leadership skills</td>
<td>350</td>
<td>0.005**</td>
<td>61.8%</td>
<td>76.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f. Team working skills</td>
<td>348</td>
<td>0.001**</td>
<td>45.0%</td>
<td>72.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>g. Problem-solving skills</td>
<td>349</td>
<td>0.157</td>
<td>61.4%</td>
<td>71.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>h. Ability to coordinate activities / projects</td>
<td>348</td>
<td>0.010*</td>
<td>59.0%</td>
<td>73.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i. Creative/innovative thinking</td>
<td>347</td>
<td>0.346</td>
<td>65.5%</td>
<td>71.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>j. Communication / Social skills</td>
<td>348</td>
<td>0.127</td>
<td>61.3%</td>
<td>71.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>k. Presentation skills</td>
<td>349</td>
<td>0.451</td>
<td>67.0%</td>
<td>71.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>l. Ability to write reports and documents</td>
<td>347</td>
<td>0.891</td>
<td>69.1%</td>
<td>69.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>m. Inter-cultural competences</td>
<td>344</td>
<td>0.004**</td>
<td>52.7%</td>
<td>73.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n. Foreign language proficiency</td>
<td>348</td>
<td>0.274</td>
<td>66.1%</td>
<td>71.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o. Computer skills</td>
<td>347</td>
<td>0.007**</td>
<td>55.4%</td>
<td>73.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p. Entrepreneurial skills</td>
<td>343</td>
<td>0.618</td>
<td>69.2%</td>
<td>72.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>q. Work experience in the field</td>
<td>347</td>
<td>0.000**</td>
<td>58.9%</td>
<td>79.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.1. Cross-tabulation of competencies & skills and employment status

** Significant at the 0.01 level
* Significant at the 0.05 level

Although the graduates with higher skills have higher employment rates in all items, the differences are insignificant among the following competencies and skills:

g. Problem-solving skills. Creative/innovative thinking
j. Communication / Social skills
k. Presentation skills
l. Ability to write reports and documents
n. Foreign language proficiency
p. Entrepreneurial skills
Whereas the analysis indicates that there are significant differences in employment rates when the levels of the following competencies and skills are compared:

a. Mastery of your own field or discipline
b. Knowledge of other fields or disciplines
c. Analytical / Research skills
d. Ability to rapidly acquire new knowledge
e. Leadership skills
f. Team working skills
g. Ability to coordinate activities / projects

h. Inter-cultural competences
i. Computer skills
j. Work experience in the field

In spite of the results, we should be cautious when concluding causal relations between these competencies and employment. It should be noted that the level of competencies & skills only records the graduates' self-evaluation at the time the survey was conducted. Therefore, the competencies and skills can be developed after the respondents' employment. Nevertheless, it is safe to say that these skills are more relevant in the workplace.

Among the competencies and skills, “work experience in the field” renders the most significant difference between the lower and higher levels of competence groups. This is also reflected in the comparison of employment rates between graduates with work experience during their studies in Finland and those without (Figure 4-1). The Chi-Square test shows that the significant level is 0.031 (1-sided.). Figure 4-2 further shows that the work experience is more likely lead to employment if it is relevant to the graduates’ fields of studies.

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**Figure 4-1. Comparison of employment rates between graduates with and without work experience**
It is interesting to find that language proficiency does not really matter in employment. When comparing the employment situation of those settled in Finland in terms of the levels of Finnish language skills perceived by the graduates themselves, no significant differences are found (Figure 4-3). This seems to be in conflict with the consensus that Finnish language skills are a key factor affecting employment in Finland (Vehaskari, 2010). This is strongly supported by the interviews and open-ended responses in the survey, which will be further presented in Chapter 6. This might be explained by the situation that the majority of those employed in Finland are working in companies that do not require Finnish language skills.

**Figure 4-2.** Comparison of employment rates by the relevance of work experience to the field of studies

**Figure 4-3.** Comparison of employment rates by the level of Finnish language skills
Graduates’ own skills and the skills required in the workplace

The informants were asked to estimate their own level of skills, skills that are required in their current job and how these skills developed during their studies. In general, the international graduates are quite confident about their skills. They estimated that their skills are at higher level than what is required in their current job (Figure 4-4). This can be attributed to them being overeducated, but in the case of international graduates who often have to take on any job available, the situation rather reflects their underemployment.

The only competence that should be enhanced according to the graduates is work experience. Entrepreneurial skills have been a hot topic in Finnish discussion. However, our findings provide new, interesting insight to the issue. The results do confirm the well-known problem of the lack of entrepreneurial culture and teaching at the university, but they also suggest that these kinds of skills are not required in the workplaces of graduates, at least compared to more traditional academic skills and work experience. In future, it would be important to study how this result could be explained. Is it really the case that entrepreneurial skills are irrelevant for the majority of higher education graduates or are they simply employed in places where these skills are not needed, because they do not have these skills?

*Figure 4-4.* The level of skills and competencies possessed by graduates and those required at work (graduates’ perceptions)
Finnish language skills

Although it is well-known that in Finland the Finnish language is a necessity for many occupational prospects and one of the main aspects of the internationalisation policy of higher education has been the recruitment of talented youth to the Finnish labour force, language studies are not provided on a sufficient level. The students were unsatisfied with the general availability of Finnish language courses (Figure 4-5). Among UAS graduates, 24% of the respondents were very dissatisfied or dissatisfied with the availability of courses. Among university graduates, the percentage was lower: 19% were dissatisfied.

![Diagram showing the level of satisfaction with the availability of Finnish language courses by type of institution.](image)

**Figure 4-5. The level of satisfaction with the availability of Finnish language courses by type of institution**

As shown in Figure 4-6, the number of students who took extracurricular Finnish courses is surprisingly high. In the UASs, 20% of the informants had studied Finnish outside their official study programme. Among the university graduates, there were considerably more students who did not study Finnish at all during their studies than in UASs. It seems that university studies are usually organised on a voluntary basis and, at least in theory, most students have opportunities to study Finnish, if they wish. In the polytechnic sector, studies are usually obligatory, but most likely insufficient in order to be beneficial, because availability is still considered a problem and students are studying outside their own institution. It also seems that some UAS graduates have not understood the meaning of the word “major”. In UASs, it is not possible to study the Finnish language as a major. In addition, the percentage of majoring students in the universities seems quite high.
The ability to communicate in Finnish was better among UAS graduates than university graduates (Figure 4-7). Almost 3/5 of UAS graduates considered their language skills to be at least in the intermediate level. In the universities, the corresponding share was less than half of the students. In the universities, the share of students with an advanced level of Finnish was greater than in the UASs. The reason probably lies in the different grounds for decision-making when choosing the study destination and the large number of students majoring in the Finnish language. It is notable that 5% of UAS graduates (4 to 6 years of studies) and 8% of university graduates (average 2 to 3 years of studies) from Finland indicated that they do not have any Finnish skills.
Internship

When comparing the relationship between internship experience and employment status, there is no indication that internship has a direct impact on employment (Figure 4-8). However, it is clear that the graduates with paid internship have a higher employment rate (73.7%) than the ones with only unpaid internship experience (62.8%). This might be due to the fact that paid internships often lead to company-based thesis work and/or salaried positions (actual work). The difference is more significant for graduates who settled in Finland (78.8/62.9%)

Figure 4-8. Internship status vs. employment rate.

Here, we briefly describe the nature of internship as a part of Finnish degree education. According to the survey, more than 2/3 of the respondents participated in an internship. Because the internships are an essential part of UAS education, it is clear that the numbers differ significantly depending on the higher education sector (Figure 4-9).

Although internship is becoming a common practise in universities, 45% of the international graduates still did not participate in any internship. In many degree programmes, internship might be placed on the first tier of studies, so there are no possibilities for internship in the Master’s level. In the universities, most of the internships took place in Finland. This is believed to be due to the funding instruments for internships, which do not support working for a foreign employer as part of one’s internship.

In the UASs, only 9% had not participated in any internship. In the UAS statute, practical training is defined as an obligatory part of the Bachelor’s degree. Therefore, the 9% who had not participated in any internship probably includes students from Master’s degree programmes and students who have not considered their trainee period as an internship. In the UASs, a considerable share of the students (19%) did their internship abroad. The majority of them did it as their own choice. The length of the internship varies between the sectors. In the universities, the median length of an internship is three months and, in the UASs, five months. This might be explained by the fact that university students, whose programmes do not require internship, voluntarily take on a summer job and consider it as an internship.
The salary forms one of the major differences in the nature of internships between the sectors. In the UASs, only one third of the internships were salaried, while in the universities, internship was unpaid only for $\frac{1}{8}$ of the students. The differences between the disciplines in the universities were considerable. Practically all internships in the hard sciences were paid, while in the soft side, $\frac{1}{3}$ were unpaid (Figure 4-10).

![Figure 4-9. The locus of internship by type of institution](image)

FIGURE 4-9. The locus of internship by type of institution

Only half of the university graduates considered their internship to be somewhat or fully related to their field of study, while in the UASs, $\frac{7}{8}$ considered the same. There were some differences between the hard and soft sciences. In the hard sciences, it was more typical that the internship was not considered to be related to one's field (Figure 4-11).

![Figure 4-10. Type of internship by type of institution](image)

FIGURE 4-10. Type of internship by type of institution
Internships are not the only way to gather work experience during studies. Among native Finnish students, working alongside one's studies is a common practise. For international students, working during one's studies also seems to be quite common. In both sectors, half of the students had gained some non-internship work experience during their studies. There were no major differences between the hard and soft sciences. The variation in the length of work experience during studies was high. The length varied from less than a month to a period equal to the whole duration of the studies. The median length of the work experience (for those students who reported the length of the work experience) during studies was 15 months in the universities and a year in the UASs.

As indicated in Figure 4-12, in both sectors, work experience was considered to be more relevant, on average, when the field of studies was among the hard sciences. In the UASs, there were more internships that were fully relevant to the field of study. However, it is slightly surprising that in the UASs, there were also more internships that were not at all relevant to the studies.
Study abroad experience

About one fourth of the students in both sectors had gained study abroad experience during their degree studies in Finland. In the universities, such experience was slightly more common in the soft sciences (35%) than in the hard sciences (21%). The logic works in opposite direction in the UASs (23% soft sciences/33% hard sciences). Even though the absolute share of those who studied abroad is the same in the universities and the UASs, there is a relative difference in the share of these experiences when considering the average length of studies in both sectors.

**FIGURE 4-12.** The relevance of work experience during studies by type of institution
**Barriers to finding jobs**

The graduates were asked to estimate what kind of obstacles an international graduate will face when seeking employment in Finland. As can be seen in Figure 4-13, most of the graduates thought that major problems are caused by a lack of domestic language skills. Other problems that are especially relevant for international graduates are residence permit problems and discrimination. In general, these problems were common for all respondents with some differences. In particular, graduates from Africa (61%) and North America (50%) felt that discrimination is a problem for international graduates trying to become employed; no gender differences were discovered. Residence permit restrictions were considered to be a problem by quite a large minority (~¼) of all nationalities other than European Union citizens (only 4%) and North Americans (11%). In general, it can be said that the graduates who were female and studying soft sciences in a UAS were more likely to encounter obstacles than male, hard science university respondents.

**Figure 4-13.** The major obstacles for international graduates to getting a job by institution
Relevance of education in Finland to labour market

Recognition of degrees

The degrees were generally well-recognised. Only 6% of university and 14% of UAS graduates have had some difficulties in the recognition of their degrees. When the graduates who had problems in degree recognition are analysed, there are proportional differences between different nationalities, genders and fields of study. According to the open-ended comments provided by the respondents, the major problems were related to newly-established, interdisciplinary programmes or recently merged universities (e.g. Aalto) that employers had not had time to get used to yet. Also, the fact that the majority of Finnish HEIs are not yet well-known outside Finland contributed to challenges with recognition. However, the most interesting issue with graduates who had problems with degree recognition is that the problems were not necessarily linked to employment abroad. Especially in the UASs, some graduates (N=9) employed in Finland reported problems with degree recognition. This can be explained by the following comment:

"Employers feel that foreigners take some different degree than Finnish students. Some Finnish employers feel that our study does not match to that of Finnish students." (ID: 72)

Skills gained from Finnish higher education

The strength of Finnish higher education seems to be in the academic development of the students. The graduates thought that they have developed the most in their ability to write reports, in their analytical skills and in the mastery of their own field (Figure 4-14). The development of entrepreneurial skills, work experience and leadership skills were the weakest dimensions of Finnish education. Quite interestingly, from the point of view of the working life, the skills that should be developed the most are problem-solving skills, team working skills, communication skills, information acquisition skills and organisational skills (RAUTOPURO ET AL., 2011). In Finland, these generic skills were, until recently, often considered to be the first and foremost contents of compulsory and upper secondary education.
Criticism of Finnish higher education

The areas that the graduates considered as weaknesses of Finnish higher education mainly include: lack of certain courses in English and lack of practice in social skills and customer services (as shown in Figure 4-15).

![Figure 4-14](image.png)

**Figure 4-14.** The extent to which the skills were developed in higher education studies in Finland

![Figure 4-15](image.png)

**Figure 4-15.** The defects of Finnish higher education in relation to working life by type of institution
Chapter 5. Graduates’ voices

The graduates’ voices are based on an analysis of both the interviews of the graduates and the respondents’ answers to some open-ended survey questions (Q 38, 41, 42, 43 and Q 52). These questions mainly cover the topics, such as the initial motivation to come to study in Finland; feedback on living, studying and working in Finland; integration in the Finnish society; employment experience and recommendations for potential graduates and Finnish higher education institutions and employers. The answers to the open-ended questions of the survey are coded ID 1–363 according to the submission number. The graduate interviewees’ responses are coded G1–10 and their characteristics are presented below (Table 5-1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution type</th>
<th>Major</th>
<th>Nationality</th>
<th>Current status</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Resides in</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>G6</td>
<td>Uni Computer Science</td>
<td>China</td>
<td>Employed, (on maternity leave)</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Fi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G5</td>
<td>Uni Engineering</td>
<td>India</td>
<td>Aspiring entrepreneur, unemployed</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Fi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G10</td>
<td>Uni Economics</td>
<td>Estonia</td>
<td>Employed</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Home country</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G2</td>
<td>Uni Social Sciences</td>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>Trainee/unemployed</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Fi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G1</td>
<td>UAS Business IT</td>
<td>Nigeria</td>
<td>Further studies</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Fi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G4</td>
<td>UAS Engineering</td>
<td>Latvia</td>
<td>Employed</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Fi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G8</td>
<td>UAS Business Admin</td>
<td>Russia</td>
<td>Employed</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Elsewhere</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G9</td>
<td>UAS Communication</td>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>Employed</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Fi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G7</td>
<td>UAS Business</td>
<td>Russia</td>
<td>Employed</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Fi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G3</td>
<td>UAS Tourism</td>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Home country</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5-1. List of graduate interviewees
Initial motivation and reasons to come to Finland

The survey analysis has already showed a number of reasons for pursuing higher education degree studies in Finland. The interviewed graduates also told their own stories on what initially drove them to come to Finland. Basically, they came to Finland through four paths: as tourists, as workers, as exchange students or as (joint) degree students. Their motives to pursue degree studies here were, among others: easier visa procedures, the opportunity to study in English, interesting programmes, geographic proximity, institutional agreement, etc. Below are some accounts of the interviewees’ stories and the choices they made.

Two graduates (g2, Italian, female; g8, German, female) first came to Finland not for study purposes, but as tourists. As the German said, “I came here for fun. I just packed to have a holiday”. Then she became interested in the country and took a one-year Finnish language course at the University of Helsinki. Afterwards, she worked as a cleaning lady for another year. Then she decided to study in Finland and applied to several universities of applied sciences. Finally, she chose HAAGA-HELIA from the three offers she received, because it offered better opportunities for learning Finnish. The Italian student had a similar experience. After visiting the country as a tourist, she decided to stay and found a job as a teacher of Italian. After working for some time, she applied to study International Relations and Sociology at the University of Tampere as a visiting student and then, after six months, she applied as a degree student and was accepted. Fortunately, the study credits she earned in her home university were recognised in Finland.

Only one interviewed graduate (g3, Spanish, female) came to Finland to work as an au pair/cleaner and then applied to Bachelor studies in HAAGA-HELIA. However, she had to finish writing her thesis in Spain, because she could not find any work to support her studies financially.

Four interviewees did come to Finland for degree studies (g1, Nigerian, male; g5, Indian, male; g7, Russian, female; g10, Estonian, female), but the motives that brought them to this country were different. The respondent from Nigeria was considering two countries: Sweden and Finland. He was actually already accepted to a Swedish university, but ended up in Finland because his friend advised him that the visa procedures in Finland were less complicated. So he applied for Bachelor’s studies in the Kemi-Tornio University of Applied Sciences and then continued to pursue his Master’s degree in Åbo Akademi University. The Indian graduate had been studying in Russia for two years before he realized that Finnish education might be better. This happened after the presentation of a Finnish professor on the Finnish higher education system. The opportunity to have more study abroad opportunities and to study in English attracted him to apply for Bachelor’s studies in Mikkeli and then pursue Master’s degree studies at the Tampere University of Technology. Notably, in both cases, the respondents changed the type of institution and municipality. However, in the first case, the interviewee continued on to second tier studies, because he could not find a job, while in the second case, the respondent found a job after Bachelor’s studies and decided to pursue a Master’s degree in parallel. It was remarked that the university studies in the IT field were quite flexible, and it was possible to combine work and studies. The 3rd and 4th interviewees in this group just wanted to study abroad, and Finland was chosen mainly for its geographic proximity and free education.

Two of the interviewed graduates came to Finland as exchange students (g4, Latvian, male; g6, Chinese, female), mainly to improve their English language skills, and then transferred to degree studies. The Latvian graduate mentioned that Finland was the only option for him and that he liked it so much that he decided to settle down after graduation. The Chinese graduate, on the other hand, applied to different universities around the world after her exchange study period in China and she was admitted again in Finland.
No matter what initially motivated potential students to come to Finland, it is important that the majority of them considered the country attractive enough for them to consider pursuing studies and staying here. The quote below from the German interviewee currently working in the international office of a Finnish HEI supports this:

“Some students come here for exchange, then like here so much, they don't want to come back”
(G9, German, female)

Graduates’ feedback

In the survey, 86.7% of the respondents would recommend studying in Finland to their friends and relatives. However, it is very interesting that these interviewed graduates provided more critical feedback than positive comments. Such contrasting results mean that, despite all the criticism, Finland is seen as an attractive country to obtain a higher education degree. The interviewees’ positive feedback reflects the attractiveness of Finland to international students and can be further developed for the purposes of marketing Finnish higher education in international student markets.

Positive feedback

The positive feedback shows that, in general, Finland is a good place to live, study and work.

A good place to live

The positive feedback about Finland as a place to live can be illustrated by the following quote from our graduate interviewee:

“Since the first week, or the first day I liked Finland very much and I decided to stay here... I felt like at home here after a few days, I did not feel like a foreigner.” (G4)

The feeling of safety and the good social system was especially appreciated by some female graduates:

“When we have a child, this is a much more reliable society than in China I believe. I can get all the services here” (G6)

A good place to study

Even though there were more recommendations on what could be improved in Finnish higher education (because we specifically asked for these in the survey), there has hardly been a better time to study in Finland for foreigners, as there are around 400 degree study programmes available in English. Consequently, respondents gave praising comments such as the one below:

“I think the Finnish higher education system and institutions are perfect the way they are. I'm very happy with the education I have received and it has helped get into a Master's degree program, develop contacts, and get a high quality managerial position in a large, global manufacturing company”. (ID: 65)

Some graduates had the opportunity to compare the education in Finland with that of their own countries. As a result, Finnish higher education appeared better, because of its flexibility, better care for students and more independence in choosing one’s study track, that is, greater academic freedom.
“I had a great time in Finland and I am extremely grateful for the opportunity I had. Compared to Canada, Finnish universities offer a lot more employment services for recent graduates so I really can't complain at all.” (ID: 12)

“Finnish education encourages students to be more independent, not so much like reading a book, but putting concrete terms to what we are learning, you have a chance to talk more, to practice, to improve your language skills” (G2) – (as compared to Italian education)

Studies in Finland looked good in the CVs of several respondents, meaning that some employers associated them with quality education. Also, the practicality of Finnish UAS programmes was appreciated, along with the opportunity to participate in projects with business or industry. Finally, the opportunity to complete an internship was regarded as very useful for finding a job later; therefore the institutional help in organising work placements was highly valued where it was available.

A good place to work

Finally, when speaking about working in Finland, flexibility, multiculturalism, the opportunity to develop one’s potential, the opportunity to use the knowledge and skills gained during studies and the democratic working environment were appreciated:

“I like to work in Finland, I like the working atmosphere, the attitude and work ethics here. It’s like home, you work, you show yourself. I would say that Finland is a great country for opportunities, that people can use and show their talents in different profession.” (G4)

“I am quite satisfied with my current job. It fits my background, I could use my knowledge. On the other hand, I like my multicultural working environment.” (G6)

These perceptions of pleasant and non-competitive work environments are in line with Hofstede’s (1991) interpretation of Finland as a country of feminine culture. In feminine cultures (the Netherlands, Sweden, Denmark etc.), the philosophy is “work in order to live”, aiming for a welfare society, whereas in masculine cultures (USA, Japan, Italy etc.), it is “live in order to work” with the focus on performance (Raunio & Sotarauta, 2005).

Negative feedback

The interviewees’ negative feedback mainly lies in the challenges of integration or some weakness of Finnish higher education. However, in addition to the criticism, they also gave corresponding recommendations.

Challenges of integration and recommendations for overcoming them

The integration challenges mentioned by the respondents in the survey and interviews can be subdivided into the challenges of integrating in the Finnish society, of coping with the differences of academic culture and of Finnish working culture. Below are some examples from each category.

a) Finnish society

According to a previous study by Kärki (2005), 50% of the students felt that they integrated in the Finnish society very well or fairly well and around 20% not very well or not at all. Although the VALOA survey did not include a question directly related to integration, the interviews showed that it was difficult for some
respondents, especially in the beginning when they did not know anyone. Naturally, the Finnish language was mentioned as the main obstacle to proper integration and finding friends. Also, the Finnish society was perceived as rather cold, especially by the graduates from warmer countries.

“It was quite difficult especially when I was living in the North” (g1)

“For my wife it was quite difficult to integrate in the beginning, but so far, she started to adapt, and she is comfortable here.” (g4)

b) Differences in academic culture

The international students have a variety of experiences of teaching and learning styles that they are used to. In Russia, for instance, the system of intensive lectures and oral exams is more common, and the students might find it difficult to study independently, complete written assignments or work in teams. Similarly, in China, the education seems to be more guided:

“In China, the teacher [...] will tell you which chapter or paragraph is important. [...] Here, nobody tells you that, you have to read the whole book and get the idea by yourself. In China, the teachers are available any time, 8 hours a day in their office; you could reach them whenever you need. But here in Finland, you have to reserve a time, make an appointment, maybe just a 15 minutes talking.” (g6)

There was also some criticism on the flexibility of higher education stating that, with such academic freedom, one can easily get lost and therefore more guidance with individual study plans is needed.

c) The differences in working culture

Even though the interviewed graduates did not mention any challenges of integrating in the Finnish working culture, the peculiarities thereof were well-described by the employers who stated that it is often challenging for people from other countries (especially Asian ones) to adapt to Finnish straightforwardness, flat hierarchy and a lower degree of supervision.

In relation to the above challenges, the interviewees provided suggestions to overcome the identified integration challenges. Based on the graduate feedback, learning Finnish is of paramount importance for securing a job unless you are in the IT field. The problem is that some students may not realize that they want to stay in Finland until they graduate. Still, it is recommended that international students use every opportunity to learn the language, because even if one does not become fluent, at least one will make new friends. Also, in order to enhance social integration, respondents advised international students to join a student organisation, e.g. AIESEC, which helps foreign students and graduates to meet Finns, network and integrate.

The positive effect of having mixed classes was noted by some respondents. HEIs should therefore strive to provide more courses to both Finnish and foreign students, especially in the form of seminar and group work, where they will have more chances to communicate. The system of providing help from international tutors, mentors and host families also seems to be a good practice. In this way, the Finnish tutors/mentors/families learn a lot about their own culture as well.

Finally, an interesting suggestion was given for integrating in the workplace:

“In your workplace, join Finns for coffee or smoking sometimes, even though you don’t drink coffee or smoke. It helps the social integration and the solutions to tasks are often found there in a more relaxed environment.” (g5)
Weaknesses of Finnish higher education and recommendations from graduates

The major areas for improvement identified by graduates for Finnish higher education institutions can be divided into five categories:

1) Provide more opportunities to learn the Finnish and Swedish language

Lack of local language skills is one of the main obstacles for not being able to get a job or integrate in Finland. The majority of respondents mentioned in one way or another that they would like to have more opportunities and diversity for learning the Finnish language. A radical solution, suggested by two interviewees and some open-ended responses in the survey, is to offer half/one year of intensive language studies before Bachelor’s studies, which students will then pursue in Finnish later. Another suggestion is to make Finnish language classes compulsory.

“More training in Finnish + improved teaching of Finnish language. Many Finnish language courses are grammar-heavy and not very practical. The opportunity to participate in, for e.g., an immersion year or half year would be excellent.” (ID: 345)

“Without Finnish language skills employment is very difficult. The curriculum should include more electives of Finnish language if the graduate wants to stay/work in Finland.” (ID: 372)

Also, it should not be taken for granted that students realize the importance of learning Finnish. Very often they do not even know whether they will be able to stay in Finland. Therefore, they might not start learning the language until by the time they graduate or even after this. In this way, students' awareness of the importance of learning Finnish should also be raised by university administrators in the orientation weeks.

2) Provide more help and guidance with finding internships, jobs and networking

The comments from the international graduates showed that there is a clear need for better career services in Finnish HEIs. In more than 40 comments, a special emphasis was placed on the lack of support with finding internships. It was advised to make work placements compulsory even at the Master’s level.

“If most students would be given the opportunity to carry out internships and other placements in the industries by their institutions, then the level of employment of foreign students in particular might increase.” (ID: 189)

Other comments indicated difficulties with access to labour market information and professional networks - things that graduates believe HEIs can help with:

“In order to retain international students, it would have been nice to have more career guidance on what is actually available in terms of jobs, or at least suggestions of websites where to find the type of specialized positions engineers are looking for […] I did have the opportunity to continue as a PhD student at the same university, but beyond that I would have had no idea where to work.” (ID: 300)

“There was a distinct lack of networking and coordination of our Masters programme within the university and with the wider Finnish community. It was an international Masters, but I have a poor network and find it very difficult to become employable. I have not had one interview outside of my current job as a freelance English teacher. If it weren’t for family ties, I would not stay.” (ID: 238).
3) Improve the relevance of the curricula and the quality of teaching

A) Enhance the labour market relevance of higher education studies

It appears that there is a perceived gap between higher education studies and the labour market demands especially in terms of soft and generic skills and particularly in the hard sciences:

“As far as the labour market is concerned with all the soft and hard skills needed the Finnish universities are not even close. The hard skills become obsolete very fast, so I would not say that it’s very important to know, e.g. the programming very well. That would change in 6 month. But the soft skills, for example, how to sell yourself, how to keep up your continuous learning, how to recognise your personal advantage and weakness, how to work within a team and so on… that I have not seen in the curriculum, that’s what is required.” (g5)

Many graduates would prefer to see more practical studies that are closer to the industry. They regretted that, most of the time, courses were solely informative and did not teach how to really work with the technologies.

“They seem like salesman presentations” (ID: 145).

At the same time, the over-reliance of Finnish HEIs on industry was criticised by one graduate and one employer. It was suggested that:

“At the Master level you don’t need to rely on the industry, you can go out and create your own industry, create new service, find something revolutionary.” (g5)

Therefore, the balance between the labour market-tailored and academic content is yet to be reached and should be pursued with the help of the stakeholders, involving not only employers, but students and graduates as well. In addition, as knowledge becomes obsolete and the majority of job-related expertise is developed at the workplace anyway (Tynjälä, Välimaa & Boulton-Lewis, 2006), the focus of higher education should be placed on developing study skills that the graduates would be able to use in their lifelong learning. Potential students could receive more information on the difference between Finnish universities and universities of applied sciences, which would help them to make a more rational choice in case they want their education to be more practice-oriented. The interviews showed that only two respondents made their choice based on knowledge of differences between these sectors.

b) Make the curriculum offered in English equal to that offered in Finnish

The idea that the curriculum for English programmes is quite different from Finnish ones came across in one interview (g1) and several open-ended survey responses. A previous study by Ciulinaru (2010) also states that oftentimes the courses that are advertised as taught in English are offered only in the form of a self-study and book exam option.

“Most of the things being taught by Finnish students are more detailed than for the international students.” (ID: 269)

“Because of less courses offered in English, graduates in Finland obtain a sort of 2nd zone degree compared to Finns. cf. book exams vs. lectures, professors with poor level of English, etc.” (ID: 368)

Interestingly, in one case the Finnish employers demonstrated a similar feeling, i.e. that the English language programmes are somehow different from the Finnish ones. This lack of trust in the pro-
grammes offered in English is understandable as many of them are quite new. As noted by the Head of the International Office in one HEI, there are still quite a few challenges related to developing the international programmes, including their marketing, funding, organising teaching in English and ensuring the programme’s continuity. In addition, the employer might need to get used to the interdisciplinary character of many new programmes. Therefore, some international students might feel like guinea pigs in this process. In this context, employers should be more actively persuaded to become interested in the process of curriculum development and teaching in English. Also, if there are more mixed classes for Finnish and foreign students, the perception of differences in the curricula will fade away.

The lack of courses in English was one of the main defects of Finnish HEIs, mentioned by 40% of the survey respondents who commented as follows to the survey’s open-ended questions:

“Many important courses are available in Finnish or Swedish but not available for international programmes. In some cases, the teachers cannot impair knowledge in English and are more comfortable using Finnish or Swedish.” (ID: 137).

“Lack of flexibility in arranging study plan for foreign students. More degree programmes needed entirely in English.” (ID: 367)

One interviewee even reported that the language of instruction was changed to Swedish during his studies, while he was enrolled in the international programme. (G1)

c) Improve the quality of teaching (in English)

The quality of teaching received around 25 critical comments in the open-ended questions, and the main concern was related to the teachers’ English language skills:

“Many lecturers don’t have required English language skills, are not able to fully explain the matters and often switch to Finnish even though the students don’t understand.” (ID: 315)

Several respondents suggested employing more foreign lecturers, so that students could obtain diverse viewpoints. The lecturers’ presentations skills, their knowledge of the subject matter and feedback skills were also criticised, but these comments are subjective and cannot be generalised.

4) Administrative and policy recommendations

The respondents occasionally felt that they were poorly informed about the importance of learning Finnish, the situation in the labour market, the study opportunities (e.g. opportunity to take minor courses in another institution), the social benefit system and paperwork, as commented below:

“It was not easy to go abroad on exchange because the information was posted in Finnish, and there was not enough administrative support.” (G1)

“Provide information at the beginning time in Finland, about Finnish job situation and importance of local language and course.” (ID: 204)

“It would be good to have international graduate webpage by countries including job info, alumni information sharing.” (ID: 231)

The latter would be highly important for studies like the one in question and for employers wanting to reach out to the pool of foreign talent. As the efforts of alumni associations are not always directed to
international graduates, there is a need at least for a web-based portal for all international graduates in Finland.

Some graduates also expressed their opinion on the topic of charging tuition fees:

“Imposing high tuition fee (like Sweden) will not encourage students to come at all!” (ID: 80)

“I hope that tuition fees won’t be imposed on foreign students in the future. There should be a foreign quota and competitive entrance exams, the more competitive the better. Free education will continue to be an incentive along with quality education, but the people willing to compete for admission will likely want to be in Finland for reasons other than free education.” (ID: 333)

The cost of living is reportedly high in Finland, and the students’ concerns related to tuition fees are understandable, because even now:

“Many people that come to study in Finland do not graduate at all due to having to work during the studies to finance the living and thus they’re absent from school and fail courses. The jobs they can get without too much Finnish skills (cleaning, McDonald’s etc.) are not flexible in combining work and studies.” (ID: 60)

In light of the difficulties that some graduates majoring in the soft sciences experienced in finding a satisfying job, it was also suggested that fewer international students be accepted, especially in Social Sciences, and equal opportunities in terms of skilled employment should be provided to those who are accepted.

**Employment experience**

The employment experiences of the interviewed graduates differed in terms of their job success; however, only three out of ten graduates left Finland. The reasons for leaving were: not being able to find a job in Finland, finding a job in one’s home country already during studies and being in Finland only as part of a joint-degree programme that was completed in the partner university. In general, the interviewees represented a variety of possible employment statuses from being employed full-time (n=5) to being self-employed (1), unemployed (1), completing an internship supported by the unemployment office (1), pursuing further studies because it was impossible to find a job (1) and being on maternity leave (1).

It is natural that those who managed to find a stable, satisfying job quite fast sound positive and confident. However, first jobs are often harder to get for international graduates due to the limited professional and social networks and the reported lack of trust on behalf of the employers. This is true for both those who stayed in Finland and those who went back to their home countries or elsewhere, as in both cases the graduates missed out on some opportunities due to having to integrate into a new society or being away from home. That is why, for international graduates, it is not so much about getting a satisfying job, but rather accessing the labour market in general, where a better scenario is largely dependent on one’s persistence and luck:

“It is all about the 1st job. Finnish employers are hesitant to employ a foreigner mainly due to cultural and language related issues. Once a foreigner is able to get his/her first job and receive good references for the future a 2nd employer is more willing to take an applicant because the risk factor has been minimized/vanished.” (ID: 23)

Even though the unemployed graduates were more reluctant to be interviewed, the following comments were elicited in relation to the barriers to finding non-casual jobs after graduating from Finnish HEIs:
Obstacles to getting employed in Finland

An analysis of the open-ended questions corroborates the statistical data in terms of the main factors impeding the successful employment of international graduates. Each category received 30–60 mentions in the open-ended comments. As most of these barriers have been discussed in the section on recommendations for HEIs, the following only serves as a brief reminder:

- the lack of adequate Finnish/Swedish language skills
  “My Finnish language has been the obstacle for me to get the job during the interviews” (ID: 71)
- the lack of work experience (especially through internships)
  “Internship placement is very difficult for international students in Finland” (ID: 71)
- the lack of the right networks
  “Limited networks for foreign students are one of the problems while studying in Finland” (ID: 150)
  “Finnish classmates informed that ‘connection’ is definitely needed for finding a job in Finland” (ID: 159)
- the weak links between higher education and the labour market
  “It is not just inviting companies to market themselves in schools that matter, the institutions of higher education in Finland should have a closer collaboration with the corporate world in promoting their product, who are the students. In other words, even though it seems as though there is a link between the schools and companies, that link is only seen to be in favour of the local students” (ID: 284)

In addition to the above-mentioned obstacles, 13 graduates highlighted once more the problem of ethnic discrimination and the employers’ unwillingness to hire foreigners. This is expressed with varying degrees of bitterness as exemplified below:

- Employer feels reluctant to hire international graduates especially when there is possibility to hire locals.
- Employers are not giving foreigners a chance, even though the actual job wouldn’t require Finnish skills.
- Racism, skin colour discrimination, employer’s doubt among foreigners
- Total discrimination

Also, the interviews show that despite the Bologna Process provisions, Bachelor’s degree graduates from universities are not employable, as employers are still used to Master’s degree graduates from this type of institution. Hence, in line with the coping strategies described by Lindeman (2008), the ones who did not find a job after their Bachelor’s studies naturally considered the opportunity to continue their studies at the Master’s level (or pursue a second Master’s degree in some cases).

“I was forced to go to further studies, due to unemployment” (ID: 159)

Some interviewees mentioned having gone through a number of fixed-term jobs, often unrelated to their studies, or internships offered by the unemployment office. Those eligible for unemployment benefits can have a maximum of three internships in this scheme. It is no wonder that such unsettled life full of uncertainties results in a feeling of frustration and thoughts about leaving the country.
“Despite gaining a 5/5 grade in my studies, after 5 years in Finland, I still have to use every bit of my entrepreneurial skills, networks, and talents to stay afloat. Hence being a journalist, copywriter, acrobat, cultural producer and more! It is exhausting and bears no relation to my degree. Doubtless, some political science grads are expected to simply leave Finland after graduating as even with good Finnish skills employers will still never choose a foreigner over a Finn, even if Finnish is not actually required in the job.” (ID: 352)

The limited job opportunities and the small labour market were mentioned as an objective obstacle:

“I had to quit my doctoral programme in Finland after a year because of lack of scholarship and working opportunities in Finland. I applied to Germany and immediately I got a very good doctoral position and job at a German university. I wish I had the same opportunities as I have in Germany now in Finland. I lived in Finland for three years and had to leave the country in tears because of its limited job opportunities.” (ID: 94)

Finally, the following argument supports the problem of underemployment, as discussed in Chapter 4, which revealed a gap between the knowledge and skills possessed and required at work:

“People with MBAs and different cultural knowledge work as cleaners and have no chance of getting proper job, because the job market is not ready for international candidates, or does not have enough vacancies.” (ID: 14)

And the fact that certain major graduates are more employable than others:

“Only graduates from special fields of study are able to be gainfully employed in their fields of study upon graduation, e.g. Nursing, Social Services. But others who study e.g. Business Administrations, Gender Studies, etc. have difficulties getting employment and end up leaving the country or working as cleaners!” (ID: 318)

How to overcome the obstacles to employment

The challenges related to graduate employment cannot be solved by HEIs alone as the transition process from HEIs to work involves many stakeholders, such as employers, policy makers, project managers, recruitment agencies, immigration authorities and the graduates themselves.

Thus, the interviewed respondents recommended that other international students and graduates be active in job search; not give up; believe in themselves; call the employers when applying for a job if that is appropriate and, of course, learn Finnish intensively to enhance their employment opportunities. Other possible solutions to employment barriers are to become self-employed or apply for PhD studies. The latter tends to be a more common solution as the academic environment is less discriminatory (Pulkkinen, 2003).

Yet another option would be to become an entrepreneur or self-employed. Even though the number of graduates who became entrepreneurs is rather small, our data shows that they are the most satisfied with their jobs. One of our interviewees even voluntarily quit his job (in Metso) to become an entrepreneur:

“I have been working in the same position for over 6 years; maybe it was time to look for something more challenging. I wanted a career that my company couldn’t provide. So I thought, maybe I could run a company myself.” (G5).
The entrepreneurial experience turned out to be encouraging for him as there is infrastructure and support available for start-ups, e.g. in the form of business incubators that provide advice, helpful student teams and office facilities. Funding is also available for start-ups, but it was argued that, at least in the Tampere region, the focus of business development is on telecommunications, while other fields might find it slightly more difficult to secure funding for developing their business idea.

The immigration authorities should make the residence permit application process easier

As mentioned in the introduction to this report, international graduates can currently extend their residence permit for six months after graduation to look for a job. Unless they have family ties or are employed, they are not eligible for the social benefits, which makes this group extremely vulnerable. If our goal is to benefit from foreign talent, policy makers should try to support recent graduates in terms of processing residence permits.

"Making the residence permit process flexible enhances the interests of international students because it is a big headache, even after arriving in Finland. Complexity in getting RP bothers in study process and innovative thinking." (ID: 144)

"Improve residence permit law. After graduation, foreign students [should be able to] apply for permanent residence like Australia, U.S.A, UK and others" (ID: 204).

"The Finnish government should extend the stay of a Foreign student, after graduation, at least one year instead of the current six months, so as for them to achieve the purpose of free education, which is internationalization of Finnish economy. This will give the graduate enough time to secure job and blend into Finnish culture." (ID: 162)

Stakeholders should join forces

The importance of sharing success stories concerning international graduate employment was highlighted by one respondent:

"We seldom see highly successful foreigners in Finland. I do not know if this is because of lack of information or it is the truth. Thus the international students feel it is hard to get a good position for a foreigner." (ID: 324)

Lately, a number of linking agents have appeared in the form of the EU and nationally co-funded projects that aim to enhance international graduate employability by providing networking forums for immigrants, HEIs and employers. These projects organise a range of activities, including mentoring programmes and skills development sessions for immigrants, informative sessions on “How to find a job in Finland”, company visits and work placements, studies on cultural diversity in the workplace and employers’ views on hiring foreign talent. Examples of such projects include VALOA1, MONATTA2 and WorkPlace Pirkanmaa3. However, the HEIs themselves are becoming more active and starting to implement best practices such as mentoring programmes and events featuring the sharing of success stories.

One of our interviewees was even on his way to such an event as an invited speaker in his HEI when we called him. It is our recommendation to make these sessions regular and implement them in every HEI.
Employers should become more open-minded

It was hoped that employers would become more lenient towards international graduates and try to de-emphasise the knowledge of the Finnish language as a criteria for employment. As discussed before, international graduates represent an important pool of talent that can help Finnish companies internationalise.

“I think Finnish employers should be educated by providing cross cultural communication/management courses from government. That would enhance their view then possibly give job chance to immigrants.” (ID: 159)
Chapter 6. 
Employers’ views

As mentioned in the Introduction, the majority of the interviewed employers were selected from the organisations employing the respondents of the survey. The interviews were categorised according to the main questions of the survey, which focused on the peculiarities of hiring and working with international graduates, the main channels of cooperation between HEIs and employers and the recommendations for HEIs on how international graduate employability can be enhanced.

The interviewed employers represented small and large companies in different sectors, namely in IT (2), Production (3), Services & Consultancy (3) and the public sector (2). The responses have been transcribed and coded E1 through E10. The percentage of international employees was hard to estimate for the majority of the interviewees, but in eight companies it ranged from less than one to 15% of the total number of employees. There was one exception where 82% of the staff was international, which was due to the type of services provided by the company. One of the companies was very small and had two international employees out of four in total. Therefore, we can predict that the degree of internationalisation in terms of employed staff differs greatly in Finland, yet is lagging behind when compared to other countries. According to OECD data, foreign labour force accounted for only 2.7% of total labour force, which is in 5th place from the bottom among OECD countries (OECD, 2010).
Motivations and rationales for employing international staff

When asked whether there was any special strategy for hiring international employees, all of the respondents claimed that it was either an integral part of their practices (to recruit internationally) or that they are just looking for the best talent, not excluding foreigners. Only one employer mentioned that he once intentionally recruited 30% of foreigners for international services, but he was a foreigner himself. Therefore, usually no special strategies are devised for recruiting foreign labour force, apart from the emphasis on diversity. Yet there is a perceived shift in recruitment strategies from hiring from abroad to hiring foreigners who already reside in Finland:

“...our goal is always recruiting from Finland. The last hiring from abroad we made was 2006. It takes extra effort if we are hiring from abroad because the adaptation will take more time” (E6)

“In case of the hiring from abroad, the biggest issue is cost related (working permit process or relocation cost), that is difficult and we try to avoid it” (E9)

Even though there was no explicit strategy for hiring international graduates, the advantages of having them around, especially in terms of cross-cultural and native language skills, are realized and acknowledged. Also, the novelty of the different ways of working that might be used in another culture was appreciated:

“New people can bring new issues for us, new values to us, and new ways of thinking, new dimensions. Especially when we deal with elderly people, new cultures always bring us a lot of new information how to be with people” (E7)

“It will broaden your own view, improve understanding of different cultures. […] you will think out of the box” (E8)

Finally, it seems to be impossible to penetrate the foreign market without employing experts from that country. China, Russia and India were mentioned as the most common potential markets or partner countries, and it is a big advantage to have someone who knows both the Finnish and the local cultures and can explain the differences in the working cultures.

Working language

When speaking about the official language of communication used in the companies, three options were mentioned in the interviews: English, mainly in IT and larger international companies; Finnish, e.g. in the public sector; and a combination of English and Finnish in some companies where only certain departments such as finance and marketing are international.

Similarly, the language in which jobs are advertised largely depends on the position and whether the supervisor is local or an expatriate. The percentage of foreign applicants can be more than 50% when a job is advertised in English. However, even when a job is advertised in Finnish, some foreign nationals apply, and they even have a chance of getting the job or an internship with limited Finnish language skills – and vice versa: even when the official language of the company is English, Finnish language skills are sometimes required.
Recruitment channels

The main recruitment channels mentioned in the interviews are online portals such as: www.mol.fi; www.justrecruitme.com, from which the ad is directly linked to the university recruitment pages; www.oikotie.fi and www.monster.fi. In addition, the employees of some companies support a system of referrals, which makes it important for students to create professional networks during their studies. A couple of interviewees also mentioned the benefits of using the unemployment office (ET) and recommended it to others:

“...because the service is free for employees, there are also specific services for immigrants who are looking for job in Finland. This is our primary [recruitment] channel. Of course, companies must have some values and social responsibilities; the main goal is to get somebody from unemployment to the working life even just for a short period.” (E6)

Some companies also mentioned hosting the trainees as part of the integration programme implemented and financially supported by the Employment and Economic Development Office.

Skills appreciated by the employers and recommendations for HEIs

Apart from professional (subject-specific) skills, qualifications and educational background, the employers are interested in the following set of attributes:

“Energy, ambition, ...evidence of being an achiever, and goal minded person. Self-motivated characteristics and attitude”, “negotiation & presentation skills (engineers sometimes lack these)” (E1)

“fluent social skills, understand the economic matters” (E2)

“innovativeness and the independent research skill” (E3)

“good team working skills and communication skills” (E5)

and

“ability to work without supervision” (E9)

On the whole, the employers positively assessed the skills possessed by international graduates from Finnish HEIs:

“If they studied in Finnish universities, especially the University of Applied Science they normally get enough knowledge for the work.” (E5)

When asked about the differences in preparation of university vs. UAS graduates, the employers had different perceptions. Some did not distinguish between the types of institutions in terms of the quality of training, others believed that UASs are more flexible and hence have more opportunities to adjust their curricula to the demands of the labour market, e.g. in terms of programming skills. One interviewee mentioned that, e.g. in the field of Finance, UAS training does not offer enough practical skills or theoretical training. Still, the employers were happy with the graduates they eventually hired and generalisations about differences in skills cannot be made here.
Also, in the recruitment process, international applicants who studied in Finland seem to be more prepared – based on their CVs – as compared to others who studied elsewhere (E9). The fact that they have often studied abroad before coming to Finland and have some work experience in addition to their studies in Finland makes these applicants special. But the competition is fierce, especially now that a series of layoffs have taken place in key employing companies in Finland. Therefore, one really needs to track the trends in this rapidly changing, knowledge-based economy and invest in self-study to distinguish oneself from the pool of applicants.

**Recommendations for Finnish higher education institutions**

In addition to the graduates’ recommendations discussed in Chapter 6, the employers were also asked to give some recommendations for Finnish HEIs in terms of enhancing the labour market-relevance of their programmes. The importance of soft skills and knowledge of the Finnish culture were emphasised.

“I think they [both HEIs and students] should focus on multicultural skills and communication skills, and project skills.” (E5)

“there should be some courses …on Finnish culture and society [including working culture]” (E9)

Every employer highlighted the need to teach the Finnish language more intensively:

“Focus more on language teaching. Give students more opportunity to learn Finnish language” (E7)

Some specific recommendations were given in the field of software development studies:

“There should be more courses about Java; this should be the obligatory course for all the master degree students in IT field. For those who study software development, it’s amazing for me that the universities won’t teach anything about the test automation, which is something really fundamental now, these things should be clearly covered such as TDD (test driven development), ATDD (Acceptance Test Driven Development) should be a part of very basic studies in software developments programme. Also Lean software development, value stream based analysis, Scrum, and return on investment.” (E9)

The same interviewee was disappointed that there were not even any books in the library on these topics. Also, it was claimed that some HEIs focused too much on serving the needs of Nokia and could not foresee the changes related to software.
Recommendations for international students and graduates

A number of self-explanatory recommendations were given by interviewed employers for those who want to stay in Finland:

“Ambition is good, but get any job available, it doesn't matter which and don't keep saying that it doesn't help in CV or process, but you have to start somewhere to learn the rules of the game” (E7)

“Open your eyes for different opportunities don't just focus on one or two companies” (E10)

When applying for a job, one interviewed graduate recommended making a personal contact by phone in addition to a tailored, compact CV and a motivation letter. However, the employers counterbalanced this advice with another sound recommendation: follow the application guidelines described in the job advertisement or on the career pages of the company.

Finally, if you cannot find a relevant job in Finland, you may consider exploring and putting your entrepreneurial skills to practice. Remember:

“If you want to become an entrepreneur in Finland – look for partnership with Finnish entrepreneurs. It is very difficult to survive alone!” (E11)
Cooperation with HEIs: Good practices

In our interviews, we also asked about the types of cooperation that companies develop with HEIs. Usually, such cooperation involves the following activities:

- Study visits of students to companies (usually offered by larger companies as small ones do not have the capacity to host guests)
- Internships are usually compulsory in universities of applied sciences, while in universities they are voluntary.
- Joint projects: companies approach certain departments in HEIs with project ideas for students to work on or use innovative platforms (e.g. Demola4) to form teams of students from different HEIs and majors. Such projects allow the students to develop innovative skills and earn study credits.
- Summer jobs are a popular way for students to get acquainted with the company, but they are also quite competitive (e.g. 170 applications for two positions, according to one interviewee). Also, international graduates usually need to speak fluent Finnish in order to get a job, unless it is in an international IT company.
- Thesis writing in the company. Here, there are two options. Firstly, when the thesis topic is suggested by the company or, if the student has already been employed in the company, s/he may continue with the thesis project, e.g. working in the company 4 days a week with one day assigned for thesis writing. In this case, thesis writing is salaried. Secondly, there are cases of unsalaried theses, where the students just use empirical data from the company. Especially in the first case, those who have good recommendations from professors are at an advantage, because candidates for thesis work are primarily searched for via networks and references from university lecturers.
- Representation in HEI’s Advisory Board gives employers an opportunity to review and influence the curriculum. In general, at least 40% of a university’s Governing Board must comprise representatives of external stakeholders, which ensures that educational programmes are more closely linked to labour market needs.
- Offering some teaching in HEIs.
- Individual mentorship by company representatives was recently offered to international students within the framework of projects initially funded by the EU (e.g. WorkPlace Pirkanmaa). In the mentoring programme, several pairs are formed from mentors (representatives of Finnish companies) and international students, who have around five individual and three facilitated group meetings. The mentoring process seems to be a success even though it is not directly meant to secure employment for the graduates. The main outcomes of the programme are that the mentees learn new things about the Finnish working culture and expand their professional networks, the mentors improve their understanding of their own and other cultures and, on the whole, awareness is raised about the challenges that international graduates face in Finland.
Finnish working culture and the possible challenges of having international employees

Based on the interviewees’ responses, the Finnish working culture is characterised by straightforwardness, openness, lack of supervision, trust and flexibility, but foreign employees might be used to a different kind of working environment. Below are examples of some challenges that arise around the issues of giving and getting feedback, being proactive and perceptions of trust:

“We are open and honest people here, pretty straightforward. It’s just a Finnish way of being and also the small company culture. But sometimes, I am afraid we may not have understood different expectations from different cultures so well. One example was with Asian employees, giving or getting feedback is different for them…and it was a bit of a struggle for the line manager.” (E1)

“For the international students who had no previous experience of working in Finland, to get them on the board of Finnish way of working, might be a challenge. They might expect much more bureaucratic leadership than Finns. Sometimes they don’t get that we really expect proactive and intuitive approach from them, they are too much waiting for guidance, and shut their mouth when they are asked about their opinions” (E5)

“I would say that in Finland we trust our employees a lot, but not everybody treats that trust as a benefit. Not necessarily even with bad intentions, they consider that flexibility. And there is flexibility but only if you act within the limits of trusts” (E6)

Another challenge is related to language issues. It turns out that, even in companies where the official language of communication is English, the higher management might be reluctant to hire employees who do not speak Finnish:

“…if you hire the foreigner who doesn’t speak Finnish, this will make the work in whole team more complicated. Because they have to change the language for one person. That is something really preventing the manager to hire, because they have to think how much extra work we have to do because of one person.” (E8)

Finally, the size of the company matters when deciding on whether to hire international employees:

“Smaller companies are usually not willing to hire foreigners as compared to the large companies because they don’t have the resources to support foreigners in the beginning” (E8)

Smaller companies may also require more versatile skills from their employees:

“In a smaller or middle size company, we require people to take larger responsibilities. If you are going to work in some big company, there are always some colleagues, tools, and functions that give you the frame, so your tasks are manageable, and you can focus on what you are doing. But for small company, we need people are easy to take some new tasks, we require people to understand some business, even some engineers should have such basic skills” (E1).
Chapter 7.
Discussion

The aim of this chapter is to discuss how the findings from the quantitative and qualitative parts of the study support or are in conflict with each other and the findings of other studies. The following topics are highlighted here: 1) post-graduation mobility, 2) the differences in the perception of skills required at work between graduates and employers, 3) factors leading to employment, 4) the disciplinary background and employment, 5) the relevance of Finnish higher education to the world of work, 6) job search methods and 7) job satisfaction.
Post-graduation mobility

The topic of how many international students stay in Finland after they graduate has been quite important in this study, along with the employment rate. The news is good here: 78% of graduates stayed in Finland for one-two years after graduation. Only two of the interviewees found that Finland was not attractive enough. The answers to the open-ended questions of the survey suggest that even more graduates would stay in the country if they had more job opportunities.

A special study entitled “Mobile Talent” has been conducted in five European countries, namely Germany, France, the Netherlands, the UK and Sweden, on the staying rates and reasons to stay in the host country (Sykes & Chaoimh, 2012). The study results show that those who are interested in staying “tend to be younger; they also often have prior work experience in the country of study and are less likely to have children. Respondents from countries in Asia (e.g. China, India, Iran and Sri Lanka) and Eastern Europe (e.g. Ukraine and Serbia) are generally keener to stay on than those from North America, Latin America and Africa”. The results from the VALOA study can be compared to these only in terms of the continent of origin. There is a slight difference between the results in that those who came from African countries are rather eager to stay in Finland.

However, we should also bear in mind that 50% of the respondents spent more than half a year in Finland before starting their studies, which means that they may have other reasons to move to this country than study, e.g. family ties. In this case, we can concur with the International Student Barometer results (CIMO, 2011) in that Finland is chosen by foreign talent rather as an attractive place to live to begin with. To sum up, there is a need to investigate international students’ post-graduation plans along with the reasons for staying or leaving in future research.
The differences in the perception of required skills

An interesting outcome was revealed in relation to the way graduates and employers perceive the importance of various skills in the labour market. International graduates believe that their own level of skills is generally higher than those required at work. At the same time, it was discovered that the skills required by employers at work, based on the interviews, are generally at a higher level than those perceived by the graduates (see Figure 7-1). This discrepancy in perceptions can be attributed to the under-employment of recent international graduates (25% of whom are employed in jobs that demand a lower level or no higher education) and the possible inability of recent graduates to adequately evaluate the required level of skills due to a lack of experience.

It was also interesting to note that, statistically, foreign language proficiency did not seem to have any correlation with employment rates; however, the qualitative data proved the opposite. This was attributed to the fact that the majority of the employed graduates are engaged in fields where English is used as a working language (e.g. in the fields of IT, telecommunications, international trade and academic research). Thus, they can cope without knowing Finnish.

![Figure 7-1. The skills required at work by employers’ expectations and graduates’ beliefs](image-url)
Internship experience and employment

While previous work experience had a significant positive correlation with the employment rate, participating in an internship (except in the case of paid ones) did not seem to have any effect. However, the qualitative data showed a great need for more internship opportunities and help with finding them. The findings from the qualitative investigation are in line with other research (CAI, 2012), which stresses the importance of internships for international students in Finland in terms of finding jobs in Finnish companies. Due to the limited data used in the quantitative analysis, the minor influence of internship experience on employment can be caused by many reasons. Nevertheless, this is a subject worthy of further investigation.

Furthermore, a number of skills, such as communication skills, the ability to rapidly acquire new knowledge, team working skills, problem-solving skills and creative/innovative thinking, proved to be important for successful employment in the quantitative part of the study. The interviews and answers to open-ended questions in the survey highlighted the importance of knowing the Finnish language (for those hoping to work in Finland) and one's personality traits. The latter was reported by employers to play an essential role in the job interviews, where difficult choices often have to be made between equally skilled candidates. Therefore, in addition to developing their professionalism, students were recommended to cultivate the right attitude towards their future job, accompanied by an adequate level of ambition, motivation and goal-mindedness.

Nowadays, when competition is high, employers also point out the need to invest in self-study in order to distinguish oneself among other job applicants. Participating in the mentoring programmes that are becoming largely available to international students these days might also be a good opportunity to ask for advice on what courses and books would be most relevant from the point of view of enhancing one's competitiveness in the labour market.

Disciplinary background and employment

As shown by the survey results and interviews as well as literature (SYKES & CHAOIMH, 2012), when it comes to employment, clear differences between fields of study are also apparent, with those pursuing degrees in science- and technology-related fields (i.e. Engineering, Mathematics and Natural Sciences) being more likely to be employed and stay in the host country than Social Sciences, Art or Humanities students. The respondents perceive the former fields as providing better employment opportunities in Finland due to the characteristics of the local industry and the fact that the Finnish language is often not required in IT companies. On the other hand, the respondents majoring in Business felt that there was an overproduction of graduates in this field:

"It's very different for Business majors here [in Oulu]. 90% of my class (Finns) are unemployed, back at school or in a job unrelated." (ID: 160)

In this respondent’s opinion, overproduction was noticeable in other fields as well:

"In my opinion it seems that every Finnish village has a Polytechnic issuing hundreds of Diploma every year in Business, Tourism and IT. The result of this is high unemployment among graduates (most even return back to their home countries)." (ID: 83)
These views are corroborated by a recent study according to which the future labour market needs in individual fields such as technology, transportation, health and social services will increase considerably in Finland.

“In contrast, the labour market needs for social science, humanities and education graduates will decline, in some cases by 25%, and the expected future intake of new staff within business and administration is expected to drop in basic education by 50%!” (Davies et al., 2009, pp. 61-62).

Therefore, the future intake of international graduates should be planned accordingly.

Relevance of Finnish higher education to the world of work

Although 2/3 of the employed graduates managed to find a job that is relevant to their studies, does this necessarily mean that Finnish higher education is labour market-relevant? The qualitative data indicated two major weaknesses here: the lack of training in the soft skills and the over-reliance on the Finnish industry (especially Nokia) in some cases, which leads to outdated content. In general, the UASs were duly acknowledged as more flexible and working in closer cooperation with the industrial and the business sector. The opportunity to engage in real-life projects was appreciated by the UAS graduates. At the same time, the employers did not really distinguish between graduates from different types of HEIs and were quite satisfied with the level of training and skills obtained by all graduates. Still, when asked about the cooperation between employers and HEIs, the main impression was that the HEIs could be more active in consulting employers when developing the curriculum, invite them to teach or simply organise more company visits for their students.

Job searching methods

As stated in some answers to the open-ended questions and the interviews, international graduates often need to make compromises with their first job and lower their expectations, but once they are “in the system”, it becomes easier to find a job, because employers start to trust them more and their networks are expanded.

Responding to the job ads posted online tends to be the most popular job search method. However, individual strategies may differ. Some graduates just send out application documents and wait; others try to call or even personally visit the company to find out more about a vacancy. In any case, the interviewed employers recommended that applicants follow the protocol defined in the job ad or on the career web pages of the company. With smaller companies there might be a possibility to call, while in bigger companies, recruitment is often automated. However, job fairs might be a good opportunity to meet the employer in person. Finally, obtaining references from a professor, another employer or a friend who is already working in the company might help a lot.

Unfortunately, university Career Services still play only a minor role in helping international students to find a job. Here, there is room for improvement, as more assistance is expected according to reports.
Job satisfaction

The quantitative study indicates that the majority (69%) of the respondents are satisfied with their current jobs. The graduate interviews further explained what the graduates appreciated: the democratic working environment, work ethics and the possibility of utilise the knowledge learned from school, among other features.

Finally, when speaking about working in Finland, flexibility, multiculturalism, the opportunity to develop one’s potential, the opportunity to use the knowledge and skills gained during studies and the democratic working environment were appreciated:

“I like to work in Finland, I like the working atmosphere, the attitude and work ethics here. It’s like home, you work, you show yourself. I would say that Finland is a great country for opportunities, that people can use and show their talents in different profession.“ (G4)

“I am quite satisfied with my current job. It fits my background, I could use my knowledge. On the other hand, I like my multicultural working environment“ (G6)

These perceptions of pleasant and non-competitive work environments are in line with Hofstede’s (1991) interpretation of Finland as a country of feminine culture. In feminine cultures (the Netherlands, Sweden, Denmark etc.), the philosophy is “work in order to live”, aiming for a welfare society, whereas in masculine cultures (USA, Japan, Italy etc.), it is “live in order to work” with the focus on performance (Raunio & Sotarauta, 2005).

The statistical data showed that the level of job satisfaction depends on a number of variables. Thus, if we consider the extreme cases in the range of satisfaction against the background variables presented in Chapter 3, the profile of a person most satisfied with their job would be as follows:

• a 30–34-year-old female from North America who is self-employed in Finland, has graduated from a university, is working in the field that she has studied and has a chance to use intercultural competencies at work.

The least satisfied person would be:

• a 40–44-year-old male UAS graduate from an African country who has left Finland and is freelancing in a country other than his home country, where his work is unrelated to his studies and provides no chances to use intercultural competencies.

Naturally, these are the best and the worst scenario, whereas, on average, those who stay in Finland and manage to find a job related to their field and level of education value the democratic work environment, the flexible hours and the opportunities to develop and show their talent.
Chapter 8. Conclusions

The current report represents an analysis of the findings of the VALOA international graduate employability study conducted in Finland. The study involved a survey of foreign nationals (N=363) who graduated from Finnish HEIs in 2009/2010 and 20 complimentary interviews with representatives of employers (N=10) and international graduates (N=10). The concluding chapter will summarise the main outcomes and provide some recommendations for the involved stakeholders and further research.
Employment situation of international graduates

The study shows that 70% of the international graduates are currently employed. Among those who are not employed, 61% are undertaking further studies and 11% are doing an internship. That means that 88% of the 2009 and 2010 graduates are either employed or pursuing further studies. This figure is comparable to that of other higher education systems in spite of some differences in statistical methods. For instance, a survey of non-EU 2010 international graduates from universities in the UK indicates that 86% are employed or pursuing further studies (Archer & Cheng, 2012). Similarly, a survey of the employment situation of the Erasmus Mundus graduates (Hemmer et al., 2011) shows that the level of unemployed/job seekers was 22% in 2010. In this respect, the results concerning international graduates educated in Finland correspond to an average international level.

In terms of the higher education sector, university graduates’ employment rate (72%) is slightly higher than that of UAS graduates (68%). Previously, Majakulma (2011) investigated the employment of international graduates who graduated from Finnish UASs in 2002–2006. She discovered that the employment of international graduates from the English programmes of Finnish universities of applied sciences is only 58%. When comparing this VALOA survey with Majakulma’s study, there is a 10% increase in the UAS graduates’ employment rate.

According to the survey, the employment rate is much higher among the graduates who either settled in Finland (72%) or returned to their home country (70%), as compared to those who moved elsewhere (55%). This is in line with the findings of existing studies in literature on the relationship between international education attainment and labour market outcomes, as reviewed by Cai (2012, p. 21), i.e. that international education experience helps students to be employed either in the host countries or in their home countries.

Another positive finding is that among those who are employed, 90% found jobs within six months after graduation. According to the Finnish immigration policy, international students can be granted a six-month residence permit after graduation to find a job in Finland. According to this study, the length is quite reasonable in spite of some suggestions to extend the length of the visa, expressed by some interviewed graduates. It is evident that if the graduates have the relevant skills and qualifications, it is not too difficult to find a job. However, it is important to know what skills help the graduates to find a job.

Skills leading to employment

According to the survey, the graduates with a higher level of the following skills and competencies have better chances to be employed: 1) work experience in the field or discipline, 2) team working skills, 3) mastery of own field, 4) inter-cultural competences, 5) leadership skills, 6) computer skills, 7) knowledge of other fields or disciplines, 8) ability to coordinate activities/projects, 9) analytical/research skills, and 10) ability to rapidly acquire new knowledge.

However, the analysis of the qualitative data indicated that a special emphasis in terms of achieving job success for international graduates in Finland should be placed on three things: knowledge of the Finnish language, relevant work experience and attitude. By attitude, the interviewed employers referred to ambition, motivation, energy and evidence of being an achiever, which they pay attention to during the job interviews. The employers were generally happy with the quality of international graduates and did not make a big difference between the type of HEI they come from or the applicant’s country of origin, as they were rather looking for the best talent in the field and the high competition for job vacancies always
offered them a good choice of candidates. The international graduates were considered to be flexible, highly adaptive and in possession of good intercultural skills owing to their experience of living and studying away from home. Moreover, the comparison of own and required levels of competences made it evident that the graduates perceive their human resource potential to be higher than what is required at work. Hence, from the perspective of employers, the graduates appear to be adequately trained, apart from the cases of technical students who could use more training in soft skills and some subject-specific knowledge that is not taught in HEIs due to an overreliance on one industry, namely Nokia. However, 25% of the surveyed graduates identified the problem of underemployment reflected in the fact that their job could be done by someone with a lower level of education.

**Development of employability during studies in Finland?**

Apart from developing their subject-specific skills and competences, international students have three main ways of developing their human resource potential and consequently becoming more employable: 1) through internship opportunities or other work experience, 2) through study abroad experience, and 3) through Finnish language studies.

The first tool was utilised quite well with more than 2/3 of the respondents participating in an internship (four months long on average) and almost half of the graduates having other work experience, lasting 12 to 15 months on average, depending on the type of HEI (UAS and university data respectively). The UAS students naturally had more internship opportunities as the majority of placements are done at the Bachelor level and form a compulsory part of most UAS programmes. Curiously, the internship experience did not prove to have an effect on the employment rate of those who completed it, although many respondents would prefer to have more internship opportunities or more support with finding them.

The study abroad opportunity was used by a quarter of the graduates in both types of institutions. Only one case described the difficulty of going abroad on an exchange due to the fact that the information concerning study opportunities abroad was posted in Finnish only. Otherwise, international students appear to have the same opportunities to study abroad as national ones. Employers value the flexibility and high level of adaptability of international graduates, and this can be attributed to the fact that they study away from home. Their intercultural skills and the knowledge of a foreign language were considered to be an asset, especially in companies with international operations (China, India and Russia being among the primary target markets). Therefore, even though additional studies abroad can add even more value to these graduates, it might be better for international students in Finland to focus on learning the Finnish language in case they want to stay in Finland.

In terms of Finnish language training, which is seen as highly important for finding a job in Finland, the survey respondents appeared to be dissatisfied. Half of the respondents in UASs and 1/4 in universities were dissatisfied with the availability of Finnish language courses. Therefore, it appears that HEIs could invest more resources in Finnish language training and support with finding internships.

Finally, to compensate for the deficits in higher education, the employers recommended that international students dedicate more time to self-study, be more active and try to expand their social and professional network.
Key barriers to employment

According to this study, the main obstacles to finding a satisfying job after degree studies in Finland were the lack of adequate Finnish/Swedish language skills; the lack of the right networks and the lack of work experience (especially through internships). The weak links between higher education and the labour market were also mentioned, along with ethnic discrimination in the recruitment process. This list indicates that the HEIs alone cannot be responsible for enhancing international graduate employability. Instead, a commitment from various stakeholders is required to make the international students and graduates feel more integrated in the first place. An example of a good practice for linking students to employers is the mentoring programme that proved to be a success in the Tampere region (coordinated by the WorkPlace Pirkanmaa project). The programme helps to build confidence and expand one’s network in addition to providing practical training in employability skills through personal and group meetings for international students and representatives of employers. In addition to this, international students might also be advised to join a student organisation like AIESEC to boost their labour market-relevant skills.

Is Finland attractive to international students?

In accordance with previous research, Finland was found to be an attractive country to study, especially after the international students had some experience of living in this country, with 86.7% of the respondents willing to recommend Finland as a place to study to their friends and relatives. The opportunity to study in English is the second most important reason for choosing Finland as a study abroad destination, right after the free education. Furthermore, the students hoped that degree studies in Finland will enhance their employability. This expectation was met from the individuals’ perspective, as the majority (70%) of graduates were employed at the time of the survey and were generally satisfied with their jobs. Moreover, 90% of the graduates found their first job already during their studies or within half a year of graduation.

Does Finnish international higher education help solve the labour shortage in Finland?

In general, although Finnish HEIs provide good education, our study and the related literature indicate that Finland is still lagging behind in terms of attracting international, highly skilled labour force (DAVIES ET AL., 2009). This is due to a number of reasons, and HEIs are not the only ones that can be held accountable.

First of all, although 78% of the surveyed international graduates stayed in Finland, only 55% of all respondents were actually employed in Finland one or two years after graduation, which is basically in line with the Statistics Finland data (CIMO, 2012). When bearing in mind that every year around 2,000 international students graduate from Finnish HEIs (ibid.), the overall increment in the labour force would be around 1,000 people per year. Building up the capacity to host more international students might help, yet this may result in challenges when considering the possible introduction of tuition fees.
Secondly, as reported by the surveyed graduates, international education is perceived by some Finnish employers with mistrust, whereas various other countries value it highly. This paradox is based on the fact that international educational programmes often offer an “abridged” version of the programmes taught in Finnish. The lack of courses in English and the quality of teaching in English, along with the limited career guidance opportunities for international students and the limited availability of Finnish language courses were cited as the major hindrances on the way to greater employability.

Thirdly, the challenges identified with respect to finding employment result in the fact that the international graduates who wish to stay in Finland have to either lower their career ambitions and accept jobs unrelated to their field and level of studies, continue their studies in the hope that they will be luckier later or leave the country. In terms of education that is free from tuition fees, the latter option would mean investing into human resources and not benefiting from them.

Finally, most of the interviewed employers did not have any special strategy for attracting international graduates; however, they were not excluded from the job competition at least in the workplaces where the official working language was English. SMEs find it more challenging to internationalise than larger companies; therefore, incentives should be created for them at the national level.

**Recommendations for HEIs and other stakeholders**

Based on the identified employment challenges and the perceived defects of Finnish higher education, a list of recommendations for HEIs and other stakeholders can be summarised as follows.

1. International student marketing should be targeted especially to those critical areas of the economy where skilled graduate employees are in short supply and where global penetration is desired (Davies et al., 2009). Otherwise, the overproduction of graduates in e.g. business fields is already leading to growing dissatisfaction among graduates in terms of employment opportunities.
2. It is recommended that HEIs’ administrators and teachers explain the labour market situation and the importance of learning Finnish to the students at the beginning of their studies and create favourable conditions for efficient learning.
3. The role of career service centres in HEIs should be strengthened, as international students rank their usefulness quite low, e.g. the help of career/placement offices in HEIs is least frequently used in job search.
4. A stronger collaboration between HEIs and employer representatives should be encouraged, especially in terms of curriculum development and providing more internship opportunities. The VALOA and WorkPlace Pirkanmaa projects are examples of good practices in this respect, acting as linking agents between international students/graduates, HEIs and employers.
5. HEIs are encouraged to collect the contact details (particularly e-mails) and keep in touch with their international students after graduation. The recognised benefits of the managed alumni relations involve wider marketing channels, better links to the employers, help in fundraising and feedback on the quality and the labour market relevance of higher education.
6. Employers, in turn, are recommended to be more open-minded towards hiring international graduates and to give them a chance, e.g. through trial periods or test tasks (before hiring decisions are made) even though their Finnish language skills are still limited.
7. The graduates also hoped that the residence permit procedures would be further facilitated and at least enable a longer period for job search after graduation.
In the end, we want to cite Noorda’s (the President of ACA—Academic Cooperation Association) statement in his speech at the ACA annual conference held in Helsinki in June 2012: “Education, education, education isn’t enough, the construction of the job market is equally important”. He warned that if universities are not actively involved in job market creation, they will be soon left behind. Meanwhile he emphasised that the graduate job market is by no means homogenous, but it can be local, national and global (NOORDA, 2012).

**Limitations and suggestions for further research**

The main limitation of this study is related to the process of data collection and the accessibility of the respondents’ contact details. After contacting the targeted HEIs for research permits and requests for help to obtain the contact details, it became clear that the majority of institutions do not keep an up-to-date e-mail database of their international alumni. Although we collected the graduates’ postal addresses, it was likely that some would be incorrect. We did receive 97 undeliverable envelopes, but it is also possible that some envelopes with wrong addresses failed to be returned to us. Therefore, we assume that the response rate would have been higher if all HEIs had provided us with an e-mail database of their international graduates.

That is why one of our main recommendations to HEIs is to try not only to “graduate” the students, but also keep in touch with them and collect feedback after graduation. This practice might help with fundraising campaigns one day, help build networks and cooperation with employers and contribute to marketing campaigns in the case of both national and international programmes.

Besides providing some first-time evidence, this study also sheds light on the direction that further studies could pursue. The following areas for study, in particular, are identified:

- Regular studies conducted at the national level will allow for a comparison of the results and trends over time.
- The graduates’ career can be tracked at a later stage, e.g. five years after graduation, to see the effect of Finnish HEIs more clearly and find out where the graduates eventually end up.
- When comparable survey instruments are developed, international vs. local graduates’ employment situations can be explored.
- A separate study can be conducted on the international students’ post-graduation plans and reasons to stay in or leave Finland.
- The case of Finland can be compared to the cases of other countries.
References


KÄRKI, J. (2005). "If I had to pay I would require value for my money" a study on foreign degree students at the universities of Helsinki, Tampere, Turku, Jyväskylä and Helsinki University of Technology: The Student Unions of the Helsinki University of Technology, University of Helsinki, University of Jyväskylä, University of Tampere and University of Turku.


Appendix 1: Survey questionnaire

VALOA survey on employability of international graduates in Finland

Studies in Finland

In this section, please provide information on the studies that you completed in Finland in 2009/2010 by ticking and filling in the boxes that apply.

1. Which degree program have you completed in Finland in 2009 or 2010?
   - Bachelor
   - Master

2. Which year did you enrol in the program?
   __________ YYYY

3. When did you graduate from the program?
   □ 2009  □ 2010

4. What was the main language of instruction?
   □ English  □ Finnish  □ Swedish

5. Which higher education institution did you graduate from?
   □ Aalto University
   □ Helsinki School of Economics
   □ Helsinki University of Technology
   □ University of Art and Design Helsinki
   □ Hanken School of Economics
   □ University of Helsinki
   □ University of Lapland
   □ University of Oulu
   □ Tampere University of Technology
   □ University of Tampere
   □ HAAGA-HELIA University of Applied Sciences
   □ HAMK University of Applied Sciences
   □ Kemi-Tornio University of Applied Sciences
   □ Helsinki Metropolia University of Applied Sciences
   □ Laurea University of Applied Sciences
   □ Oulu University of Applied Sciences (OAMK)
   □ Rovaniemi University of Applied Sciences (RAMK)
   □ Pirkanmaa University of Applied Sciences (PIRAMK)
   □ Tampere University of Applied Sciences (TAMK)
   □ Diak University of Applied Sciences
   □ Other
6. What was your field of studies? (Please choose the most relevant category)

- Agriculture and Forestry
- Arts (Theater, Dance, Music, Design)
- Business and Administration
- Economics
- Educational sciences
- Engineering, Technology and Communication
- Humanities & Culture
- Law
- Medicine & Health sciences
- Natural Sciences
- Psychology
- Social Sciences
- Sport Sciences
- Theology
- Tourism, Catering and Domestic Services
- Business and Administration
- Psychology
- Economics
- Social Sciences
- Educational sciences
- Engineering, Technology and Communication
- Humanities & Culture
- Law
- Other

7. How long have you lived in Finland before taking up your degree studies there?

- < 1 week
- > 1 week - 1 month
- > 1 month - 6 months
- > 6 months - 1 year
- > 1 year - 3 years
- > 3 years - 5 years
- > 5 years

8. What were your main reasons for taking up higher education degree studies in Finland? Mark all that apply.

- a. Free of charge education
- b. Available funding (scholarship) opportunities
- c. Possibility to study in English
- d. Desired program not available in my home country
- e. Easier enrolment compared to programs in other countries
- f. Studying in Finland was part of my joint degree studies
- g. Reputation of higher education institution(s)
- h. Reputation of Finnish industry
- i. Reputation of Finland as a place to live
- j. An opportunity to learn Finnish/Swedish language
- k. An opportunity to learn other foreign languages
- l. A chance to explore a foreign country
- m. A chance to improve my employability
- n. A chance to immigrate to Finland
- o. Family ties
- p. My employer sent me to Finland to study
- q. Geographic proximity
- r. Someone's recommendation
- s. Other

9. Was Finland your first choice among study abroad destinations?

- Yes
- No
- Not applicable

9 a) If No, please specify what other countries you applied to for higher education studies

________________________________________________________________________

10. Have you had any study abroad experience during your degree studies in Finland?

- No
- Yes

If Yes, in which countries? _______________________________________________________________________

11. Is internship required in your study program?

- Yes
- No

97
12. Which of the following statements best describes your internship situation?
(Choose only one answer based on the latest internship)

- Internship in Finland
- Internship in home country as my own choice
- Elsewhere, as my own choice
- In home country or elsewhere because I didn’t have internship opportunities in Finland
- I did not participate in any internship. (→ go to Q.13)

12. a) To what extent your internship was related to your field of studies?
- not at all
- somewhat
- fully

12. b) The length of your internship: _____ months

12. c) The internship was:
- salaried
- unpaid

13. Have you had any other work experience during your studies in Finland (apart from the internship)?
- Yes
- No (→ go to Q.14)

13. a) If yes, please specify how relevant it was to your field of studies:
- not at all
- somewhat
- fully

13. b) The length of your work experience during studies in Finland: _____ months

14. Which of the following statements best describes your learning Finnish in Finland?
- I studied Finnish language as my major
- I studied Finnish language as a compulsory course in my study program
- I studied Finnish language as an optional course in my university
- I studied Finnish language outside my university
- I did not study Finnish at all

15. How satisfied were/are you in general with the availability of Finnish language courses in Finland?
(Circle the applicable number)

1 very dissatisfied
2 dissatisfied
3 neutral
4 satisfied
5 very satisfied

16. How would you evaluate your skills in Finnish language?
- none
- basic
- intermediate
- advanced
After graduation

17. After graduating from Finnish higher education institution you... (Please tick one of the options)
   - Settled in Finland
   - Returned to your home country
   - Moved elsewhere. Please specify where: _________________________________

18. If you reside outside Finland now, are you planning to return for work or further studies?
   - Yes
   - No

19. Have you had any difficulties with the recognition of your degree obtained in Finland?
   - No
   - Yes

19. a) If yes, please comment ____________________________________________

20. Which of the following best describes your current status? (Tick all that apply)
    - Employed (including self-employed and freelancing)
    - Doing an internship
    - Undertaking further studies
    - Unemployed / Taking care of the family
    - Other. Please specify _________________________________

21. Have you been employed at least once following your graduation?
    (including doctoral study contracts, internship, freelancing and self-employment).
    - Yes
    - No (→ go to q. 38)
Employment

22. How many different jobs have you had in total since you completed your degree studies in Finland in 2009/2010? (A job change is defined when your employer changes or your work task has changed substantially even under the same employer)

23. How long did it take you to find your first job after graduation in 2009/2010?

- [ ] I got the job during the studies
- [ ] up to 1 year
- [ ] less than a month after graduation
- [ ] up to 2 years
- [ ] up to 3 months
- [ ] more than 2 years
- [ ] up to 6 months

24. Are you still in your first job?

- [ ] Yes
- [ ] No

In the table below tick the boxes that apply and provide additional information. If you are still in your first job (=working for the same employer, in the same work position), please fill in the “First job” column only.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>25. How did you find this work?</th>
<th>First job after graduation</th>
<th>Current job</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Through a vacancy advertised in internet, newspaper, etc.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>By contacting employer on my own initiative</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Through employment agency</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I was approached by employer</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Through careers/placement office of my educational institution</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Through help of teaching staff of the higher education institution</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Through work placement/internship during studies</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Through personal connections (e.g. parents, relatives, friends)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Through thesis/project work in cooperation with companies/organizations</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I set up my own business</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other, please specify</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

26. What is/was the character of your employment?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>26.</th>
<th>First job after graduation</th>
<th>Current job</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a permanent full-time job</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a permanent part-time job</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a fixed term full-time job</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a fixed-term part-time job</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>self-employed by own initiative</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-employed because I could not find a satisfactory job</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>freelancing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other, please specify</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

100
27. **In which professional field is/was your employment?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Professional Field</th>
<th>First job after graduation</th>
<th>Current job</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Academic / Research</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture, Forestry</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Architecture, Construction</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arts &amp; Entertainment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business, Sales</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communications, PR</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education &amp; Training</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engineering &amp; Computer Science</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government, Politics</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health &amp; Medicine</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Languages, translation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social services</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tourism &amp; Hospitality Management</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other, please specify</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

28. **In which sector are/were you employed?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sector</th>
<th>First job after graduation</th>
<th>Current job</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Public</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-profit</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

29. **How satisfied are/were you with your work in general?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Satisfaction Level</th>
<th>First job after graduation</th>
<th>Current job</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>very dissatisfied</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dissatisfied</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>neutral</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>satisfied</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>very satisfied</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

30. **What is/was your gross monthly salary range (before the taxation)?**

If you reside outside euro zone, please provide an estimated equivalent in euro.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Salary Range</th>
<th>First job after graduation</th>
<th>Current job</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than 250 euro per month</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>251–500</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>501–1000</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1001 – 1,500</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1501 – 2,000</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001– 2,500</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.501–3,000</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 3,001 euro per month</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
31. How does your salary compare to that of the local average in your field?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Option</th>
<th>First job after graduation</th>
<th>Current job</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>much higher than average</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>above average</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>same as average</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>below average</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>much lower than average</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>not applicable / not sure</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

32. How relevant is/was your work to the field of studies taken in Finland?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Option</th>
<th>First job after graduation</th>
<th>Current job</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>not at all relevant</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>somewhat relevant</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fully relevant</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

33. How relevant is/was your work to the level of studies taken in Finland?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Option</th>
<th>First job after graduation</th>
<th>Current job</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The job was at a higher level than my own education</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The job was at the same level to my own education</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A lower level higher education degree could be used in this job</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The job did not require a higher education degree</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

34. Does/did your work provide opportunities to use your intercultural competences (e.g. establish professional collaboration between Finland and your home country)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Option</th>
<th>First job after graduation</th>
<th>Current job</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

34. a) If you ticked ‘yes’ in one of the columns of question 34, please give 1-2 examples of using your intercultural competences at work:

35. Which country are/were you employed?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Option</th>
<th>First job after graduation</th>
<th>Current job</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. Finland</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Home country</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Other, please specify</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

36. What is/was your title/position? (e.g. export manager, teacher of English)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First job after graduation</th>
<th>Current job</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

37. Could you please kindly provide your employing organization’s name(s). This is optional, but very important for our further research—a survey/interview of employers’ perspectives on the employability of international graduates from Finnish higher education.

Organization name(s): ________________________________
38. What do you think are the biggest obstacles to getting a job in Finland for international graduates? Multiple choices are possible.

- Lack of Finnish/Swedish language skills
- Lack of career guidance at higher education institutions
- Lack of access to job search information
- Lack of the right contacts / access to professional networks
- Lack of opportunities to gain relevant work experience (e.g. though internships)
- Lack of career advancement opportunities
- Small labour market
- Ethnic/cultural/religious discrimination
- Residence permit restrictions
- Other, Please specify ________

On the next page is a list of competences and skills. Please provide the following information:

- How do you rate your own level of competence?
- What is the required level of competences in your current job? (if applicable)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Competences &amp; skills</th>
<th>Own level</th>
<th>Required in current job</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>very low</td>
<td>← →</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Mastery of your own field or discipline</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Knowledge of other fields or disciplines</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Analytical / research skills</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. Ability to rapidly acquire new knowledge</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e. Leadership skills</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f. Team working skills</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>g. Problem-solving skills</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>h. Ability to coordinate activities / projects</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i. Creative/Innovative thinking</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>j. Communication / social skills</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>k. Presentation skills</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>l. Ability to write reports and documents</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>m. Inter-cultural competences</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n. Foreign language proficiency</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>o. Computer skills</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>p. Entrepreneurial skills</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>q. Work/practical experience in the field</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
39. To what extent did the higher education studies in Finland (completed in 2009/10) help you develop the following competencies and skills?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Competences &amp; skills</th>
<th>not at all</th>
<th>to a very high extent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. Mastery of your own field or discipline</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Knowledge of other fields or disciplines</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Analytical / research skills</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. Ability to rapidly acquire new knowledge</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e. Leadership skills</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f. Team working skills</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>g. Problem-solving skills</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>h. Ability to coordinate activities / projects</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i. Creative/innovative thinking</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>j. Communication / social skills</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>k. Presentation skills</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>l. Ability to write reports and documents</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>m. Inter-cultural competences</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>n. Foreign language proficiency</td>
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<tr>
<td>p. Entrepreneurial skills</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>q. Work/practical experience in the field</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

40. What other factors (not included in the above list) related to your experience of studying in Finland do you see as having improved your employment possibilities?

41. What do you think are the defects of the Finnish higher education, if any, in relation to working life?

- □ Lack of certain courses (in English)
- □ Lack of practice in social skills and customer service
- □ Too much theory
- □ Outdated content
- □ Other, please specify below

42. What changes would you recommend to higher education institutions in Finland that could improve the employment opportunities of future graduates?

43. Would you recommend your friends or relatives to study in Finland?

- □ Yes
- □ No
Basic information

44. Your gender
   - [ ] male
   - [ ] female

45. Your year of birth? 19________

46. Your home country (based on citizenship upon arrival to Finland) ________________________________

47. Have you acquired Finnish citizenship by the time of graduation?
   - [ ] No
   - [ ] Yes

48. What is/are your native language(s) __________________________

49. Would you agree to be interviewed as a follow-up study after the survey?
   - [ ] Yes
   - [ ] No
   
   Note: If you choose yes, please fill in the contact information below.

   By providing the email address you are entitled to participate in the prize draw. Also we will send you the
   survey results to your emails.

50. Your contact information:
   - Email address: ________________________________
   - Telephone number (If you prefer to be contacted by phone): ________________________________

51. Is there anything else we did not ask but you would like to share on the issues of international graduate employability in Finland?
Appendix 2: Interview questions (graduates)

1. Could you please tell us in short your story of ‘relationship’ with Finland: how did you end up here, why stayed/left after studies?

2. Have you experienced any difficulties with integrating into the Finnish society during and after your degree studies? (Language, making friends with Finns, practical issues)

3. Has your university helped you in any way to make connections to the Finnish labour market (job fairs, internship opportunities...), was this help enough?

4. Do you think the education you got in Finland is relevant to the labour market needs in general?

5. What was its added value to your life in general?

6. What was your job search strategy? Scope: one city, Finland, home country, global search?

7. What are your plans for the future? (Are you planning to stay in Finland?) Master studies later?

8. Are you in touch with your fellow students, teachers, university administrators, alumni association in Finland?

9. Have you had any work experience before coming to Finland for studies? How does it compare to working in Finland?

10. What do you value about your working in Finland?

11. What changes would you recommend to universities that could improve the employability of international graduates?

12. What would you recommend to other international students who want to find a job in Finland?
Appendix 3:
Interview questions (employers)

1. How many international employees do you have (in Finland) (or their %)?
2. What is the main reason behind hiring them in your company? (any special strategy?)
3. Do you get many job applications from foreigners? (if possible mention the average % of international applicants per vacancy)
4. What recruitment channels do you use?
5. What are the language requirements for job applicants?
6. Do you prefer Finnish higher education degrees to those obtained abroad?
7. What are your perceptions of international graduates from Finnish higher education in terms of their skills/fitness for work? (Are there any skills that require further development in recently hired international graduates?)
8. Do you network/cooperate with Higher Education Institutions? How?
9. Is there a need for intercultural competencies in your company (organization)? Please give some examples of the use of such competencies
10. What are the advantages of hiring international graduates?
11. Have you experienced any challenges/difficulties in working with them, as compared to Finnish employees?
12. What do you think should be improved on behalf of Higher Education Institutions (and policymakers) in order to facilitate the integration of foreign talent into Finnish labour market?
Appendix 4: Distribution of respondents by country

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>North America</th>
<th>18</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USA</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>South, West, Central Asia</th>
<th>44</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pakistan</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bangladesh</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nepal</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lebanon</td>
<td>2</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EU 105</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
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<tr>
<td>Estonia</td>
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<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
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<tr>
<td>UK</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bulgaria</td>
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<td>France</td>
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<td>Greece</td>
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<td>Luxembourg</td>
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<tr>
<td>Slovenia</td>
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<tr>
<td>the Netherlands</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Non EU 44</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Russia</td>
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<tr>
<td>Switzerland</td>
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<td>Kosovo</td>
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<tr>
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<td>South Korea</td>
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<table>
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<th>Africa 49</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>Other* 22</td>
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<td>Australia</td>
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<td>Mexico</td>
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<tr>
<td>Peru</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

* It was decided to group Latin American countries, Australia and South-East Asian countries in the ‘Other’ category as they had no more than 10 respondents each and statistical inferences cannot be made.