



# **UniBuddy Programme**

## **A Guidebook for UniBuddies**

### **Welcome to the UniBuddy Programme!**

This guidebook provides comprehensive guidelines for volunteers participating in the University of Helsinki's UniBuddy Programme, which pairs them with international newcomers to facilitate their integration into university life and the Helsinki community. It emphasises the importance of cultural exchange, respectful communication, and empathetic support, while also setting boundaries for the volunteer relationship.

The guide offers practical advice on initiating meaningful interactions, respecting diversity, and fostering independence among newcomers, ensuring a rewarding experience for both parties involved in this vital integration initiative.

**The UniBuddy Coordinators Team**



## UNIBUDDY PROGRAMME GUIDELINES

Welcome to the UniBuddy Programme at the University of Helsinki! As a UniBuddy, you play an important role in assisting new international staff members in their transition to the University and the vibrant city of Helsinki. Your support will greatly contribute to their successful integration and overall experience. To ensure a smooth and rewarding journey, we've put together the following guidelines:

### **Diverse Backgrounds Welcome:**

You do not need to match your buddy's academic or professional background. The programme aims to foster cultural exchange and provide insights from various perspectives. Embrace the opportunity to learn from one another's diverse experiences.

### **Commitment and Communication:**

It is recommended to have a minimum of three meetings with your buddy over the course of a semester. Consistent communication helps build trust and familiarity, making the integration process more effective.

### **Cultural Exchange and Unofficial Insights:**

While sharing information about the University is important, also consider introducing your buddy to the unofficial side of living in Finland. Share your favorite local spots, customs, and cultural events that might not be covered in official orientations.

### **Listening and Empathy:**

Your buddy might have questions, concerns, or challenges related to their new environment. Be a patient listener, offer guidance, and provide reassurance whenever possible. Your empathy will be highly valued.

### **Respect for Boundaries:**

Everyone has their own comfort zones and personal boundaries. Respect your buddy's preferences regarding the frequency and nature of interactions. If either party feels uncomfortable, encourage an open discussion to find a suitable balance. Also, remember that conversations in the UniBuddy Programme are confidential.

### **Language and Communication:**

Be mindful of language barriers. Speak clearly and avoid using slang or complex jargon. If language becomes a challenge, explore alternative communication methods such as using translation apps or arranging group activities where language is less of a barrier.

### **Cultural Sensitivity:**

Recognize that cultural differences exist and can influence perspectives and behaviors. Approach conversations with cultural sensitivity and encourage open dialogue to bridge any gaps that may arise.

### **Sharing Experiences:**

Feel free to share your personal experiences of adapting to life in Helsinki / Finland or at the University. Sharing stories of your own challenges and triumphs can provide valuable insights and make your buddy feel more at ease.

### **Encourage Independence:**

While your guidance is important, empower your buddy to explore and discover things on their own. Help, but also encourage them to seek out resources and build their own network within the University community.

## Feedback and Practicalities

- The activities during the programme take place at participants' own cost.
- The UniBuddy pair is recommended to meet at least three times during six months.
- If you encounter any issues or have suggestions for improvement, don't hesitate to reach out to the programme coordinators.
- We appreciate any feedback - it is invaluable in enhancing the programme for future participants.

## Fostering Commitment and Consistency in the UniBuddy Programme

The success of the UniBuddy Programme relies on the commitment and engagement of both UniBuddies and newcomers. This journey we embark upon together is enriched by consistent interaction, mutual respect, and a genuine interest in cultural exchange. Here's how we can all contribute to a more fulfilling and effective programme:

### Initiate Regular Follow-Ups:

After your initial meeting, take the initiative to schedule follow-up gatherings or check-ins. Consistency is key to building a meaningful connection.

### Be Present:

When you commit to being a UniBuddy, your presence—whether physically or virtually—makes a significant difference. Show your newcomer that you are there for them, ready to support and guide.

### Communicate Openly:

If you're facing time constraints or challenges, communicate this openly with your newcomer. Finding a solution together fosters understanding and respect.

## Final Words

We value your commitment to the UniBuddy Programme. The essence of the UniBuddy Programme is to foster a supportive community for newcomers, helping them integrate into their new environment with ease and confidence. This goal can only be achieved through our shared commitment and persistence. Let's work together to ensure that every participant feels welcomed, valued, and supported throughout their journey in Helsinki.

### Thank You for Your Commitment

Thank you for your dedication to fostering an inclusive and welcoming environment at the University of Helsinki. Your role as a UniBuddy is instrumental in making a positive impact on the international staff members' experience. Enjoy the journey of cultural exchange and friendship-building!

For more information and assistance, please don't hesitate to reach out to the UniBuddy Programme team at [unibuddy@helsinki.fi](mailto:unibuddy@helsinki.fi).

**University of Helsinki** *UniBuddy Programme Coordinators*