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Pia Jünger & Anna-Karin Jansson: ”700 international students a resource for our region”



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How can our region secure its future welfare and competitiveness at the same time as our society experiences challenges with a decrease in nativity and in the working age population, a brain drain of highly educated people to other parts of Finland and abroad, and the ongoing pandemic disturbing many levels of society?

Five higher education institutions in Vaasa – **University of Vaasa, VAMK UAS, Novia UAS, Åbo Akademi University** and **Hanken School of Economics** – have joined forces to provide part of the solution.

The project “**Vaasa International Talents**”, funded by the **City of Vaasa** and coordinated by Novia UAS, wants to make a great untapped potential existing amongst us visible and connect it with the region’s companies and other actors. We want to highlight that around 700 international students from practically all corners of the world are studying for a degree at various English degree programmes at the higher education institutions in Vaasa.

It is a widely known fact: we simply cannot afford to leave outside working life anyone who wants to work. Many reports show that one major obstacle for the growth and internationalisation of companies and organisations is the lack of needed competencies.

At the same time, the competition for the best talents is harsh and global. The good news from a Finnish perspective is, however, that according to the results from the fresh international student survey Eurostudent VII, about half of the international degree students plan to stay in

Finland after having completed their studies, whereas 40 per cent of the respondents had not yet made up their minds.

We know that many of our international students would be interested in staying in our region after graduation, but to be able to do so, they need to get a foot in the door of our working life.

In other words, can we afford not to make use of our international students as a resource? Of course not.

The vision of the project “Vaasa International Talents” is that we to an increasing extent make use of our region’s already existing ecosystem of networks to help our students get access into our society and working life. In addition to increasing awareness of the international talents in Vaasa, for connecting the region’s actors with students, the project aims at piloting ways to exchange knowledge, wishes and ideas.

Partial funding of internships for a certain number of students will be available thanks to the support from the City of Vaasa, as will also other types of support and guidance to both employers and students.

This is also why we work closely with the regional Talent Coastline ecosystem coordinated by ELY Centre and TE Office, as part of the national Talent Boost programme. The aim is to attract international expertise to Finland and to get international experts to stay in the country.

The Vaasa region has what it takes to become much better at making use of the untapped potential of the international talents in our higher education institutions, and at integrating and retaining these.

Employers and other actors: let us know if you want to join this innovative project! Contact details can be found on novia.fi.