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Developing cooperation between Lappish companies and international students while supporting the employment opportunities of international talents

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Lapland University of Applied Sciences' Responsibility in Business and Services competence group is currently conducting research into the possibilities and obstacles of International Business students' employment opportunities in Lapland. The ultimate goal of the research is to support the employment of international degree students and international alumni in Lapland to ensure that jobs and tasks correspond to education, while supporting the internationalisation of companies. The competence group also aims to create a functioning working life network between Lappish organisations and IB students by seeking companies and organisations that are willing to collaborate with Lapland UAS's students. The research results in suggestions for improving International Business education and Lapland UAS' communications with its stakeholders and students. Actions to better the employment of international students and international alumni will be implemented as practices in Lapland UAS's International Business education during 2022.

Based on the research that we currently undertaking, we will eventually have a better understanding of the development needs, not only to work towards bettering the employment opportunities of international degree students but to help them acculturate in Lapland. The integration of skilled and educated people in Lapland may also have an impact on the projected shortage of employees. As the northernmost UAS in Finland, we want to support the stay and acculturation of international experts in Finnish Lapland.

Supporting the immigration and acculturation of skilled workforce is also a national phenomenon, because the Ministry of Education and Culture has contributed to a strong national desire to promote the acculturation of people with academic and international capital in Finland. The realisation of these goals will only happen when we can offer international talents jobs that correspond to their education. To support this work, the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment and the Ministry of Education and Culture have launched a national Talent Boost programme, in which higher education institutions participate through separately agreed measures. To support the growth and internationalisation of Finnish companies and other organisations, solutions are being sought to promote the immigration of a talented workforce, and the acculturation and employment of skilled international workers. The goal is to make Finland an internationally attractive place to work, study, conduct research, and invest (Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment 2021). From the perspective of northern actors, Finnish Lapland is an internationally attractive destination for future employees. We are now working to promote this and to find ways to support our international students to stay in the area after graduation.

The views of students and entrepreneurs are at the heart of development

Developing an International Business study programme and mutual practices for international students at Lapland UAS starts with finding out what needs to be improved, and the areas in which we are currently performing well. The views and experiences of Lappish entrepreneurs and organisations on collaborating with Lapland UAS's International Business students play a major role in our students' employment issues. As part of our research, we prepared a survey for both Finnish and English-speaking entrepreneurs and organisations to find out about their collaboration experiences with BBA students and their wishes concerning future collaboration.

Alongside the survey for Lappish entrepreneurs, we prepared a survey for International Business students and alumni. During the autumn of 2021, we also interviewed entrepreneurs and BBA alumni in semi-structured theme interviews to get a better idea of their views on the employment opportunities of international students in the Lapland region. The results of this research are currently being analysed, and they will help us develop collaboration between international students and working life, and eventually the employment of International Business students and graduates in the Lapland region.

Students' skills are an asset for developing businesses

Entrepreneurs and organisations can collaborate with International Business students in various ways. For example, they can provide students with thesis ideas and topics, offer practical training positions, and participate in different sorts of events and even lectures. From the entrepreneur's perspective, the information about the collaborating opportunities provided to them is crucial.

Students' skills should be considered an asset for developing businesses. Even more importantly, Finnish entrepreneurs should not be afraid of using English as a working language with students. According to Lapland UAS's International Business student Tyimofejev (2021), finding a Lappish company where the student does not necessarily need Finnish language skills to complete an internship is hard. Working with an international student may at least require readiness to communicate in English. It is important to recognise that entrepreneur's English language proficiency does not need to be at the highest level when starting collaboration with international students. Entrepreneurs may even find themselves improving their own English-speaking skills by using the language with our students.

It is also important to recognise, for example, that many Lappish SMEs deal with things and business processes such as some background operations and marketing tasks that can be undertaken by someone who does not necessarily speak Finnish (Lapland UAS 2021a). The time spent orienting and guiding students during their practical training can pay for itself many times over (Lapin Yrittäjät 2020).

Sustainability is a cross-cutting theme in Lapland UAS's International Business study programme (Lapland UAS 2021b). At its best, collaborating with an International Business student gives entrepreneurs and organisations great perspectives on developing their operations more sustainably. For students, the collaboration can be the most important link for gaining employment in Finnish Lapland. Some students can also find themselves pursuing a career as entrepreneurs in Lapland after graduating. All the networks created in the Lapland region during their studies are therefore important.

The feedback on our ongoing development work to better the opportunities for collaboration between students and Lappish companies and improving the employment opportunities of

International Students has been positive and encouraging. Positive feedback and our clear goals for future development support the work we are currently conducting and in the coming years.

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