

Damián Santibáñez

# ENABLING WORK INTEGRATION OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS INTO LO- CAL FIRMS

How can Patteri ES help?

Bachelor's thesis

Degree programme in Digital International Business

2024



South-Eastern Finland  
University of Applied Sciences

Degree title	Bachelor of Business Administration
Author(s)	Damián Santibáñez Ávalos
Thesis title	Enabling work integration of international students into local firms. What are the issues?
Commissioned by	Patteri Entrepreneurship Society ry: Let's Go International
Year	2024
Pages	42 pages and 9 pages of appendices
Supervisor(s)	Jagat Kunwar

## ABSTRACT

The aim of this research was to facilitate the integration of international students into the local workforce in Kymenlaakso, Finland, by identifying and addressing the challenges they face. Commissioned by Patteri Entrepreneurship Society, and in the context of the Let's Go International project, the study explored what are the most effective, needed and impactful activities and support systems that can reduce the friction for work integration between international students and local companies.

While previous research has addressed some of these issues, this project emphasizes the need for a localized approach and seeks to collaborate with other initiatives sharing similar goals, by advocating for enhanced collaboration among projects and adopting a more targeted approach to supporting international students. This study aims to contribute to a comprehensive understanding and the development of improved integration strategies and actions.

Secondary data from previous studies about this issue in Finland has been explored, along with primary data collected via surveys and face-to-face interviews with Xamk students and local companies, the research identified key obstacles such as language barriers, limited support structures, lack of recognition for previous experience, and unfamiliarity with Finland's "hidden job market." These findings guided the Let's Go International project in providing and funding activities that are targeted to enhance the integration process from a well-informed basis.

**Keywords:** international student integration, workforce adaptation, local firms, work life

# CONTENTS

1	INTRODUCTION.....	5
1.1	Background .....	5
1.2	Research questions, objectives and aims.....	7
1.2.1	Aims .....	7
1.2.2	Objectives.....	8
1.2.3	Scope .....	9
1.3	Research method .....	9
1.4	Framework and limitations.....	11
2	FROM INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS TO WORKERS IN FINLAND.....	12
2.1	Social capital networks .....	16
2.2	Job seeking signaling and self-marketing .....	17
2.3	The perspective of the employers.....	18
3	RESEARCH METHODOLOGY .....	20
3.1	Research development process .....	20
3.1.1	Survey design.....	21
3.1.2	Survey structure .....	22
3.1.3	Interview design.....	23
3.2	Data collection.....	24
3.3	Data analysis.....	25
4	RESULTS AND ANALYSIS.....	26
4.1	Survey results.....	26
4.1.1	Students' surveys .....	26
4.1.2	Companies' surveys .....	28
4.2	Interview results .....	29
4.2.1	Students' interviews.....	29

4.2.2	Companies' interviews .....	31
5	CONCLUSIONS .....	33
5.1	Key results and findings .....	33
5.2	Managerial implications .....	34
5.3	Reliability discussion and future development .....	37
	REFERENCES .....	39

Appendix 1. Survey for students

Appendix 2. Survey for local companies

Appendix 3. Semi structured interview guidelines: students

Appendix 4. Semi structured interview guidelines: companies

## **1 INTRODUCTION**

To help the project Let's go International, by the commissioner Patteri ES, this research seeks to understand better the situation and challenges that international students (IS) face when looking for a placement for training during their studies and in their integration process to the working life of the Kymenlaakso region, Finland. It is intended through this research to capture both perspectives, the employers, and employees on the challenges that both parties face when having to find each other and sign a contract together.

From the findings of this work, a series of suggestions of relevant activities for the IS are drawn, for the commissioner to realize the project and fund activities with a sound base of the needs that such activities cover.

### **1.1 Background**

The author has more than a decade of experience working and studying in an international context which has provided insight on how intercultural exchanges and communications are dealt in different contexts. In a more specific scope, the author has lived in the Kymenlaakso region, area of research, for 5 years, from which 3 has been spent studying Digital International Business at Xamk University of Applied Sciences and working in a few local companies. This experience has offered him first hand insight on some of the challenges and processes when having to obtain a training position or a job in this context. This work searches to enhance this insight to a more comprehensive perspective.

On the other hand, Patteri Entrepreneurship Society ry and their Let's Go International project that act as commissioner of this research work, have hired the author not only to understand this issue and provide concrete solutions, but also to reflect those solutions into reality through activities directed to the students and a network event at the end of the project where students and local companies come together providing a context of enabling these connections. The research work is oriented to provide better results in those activities through the insight

gathered. This provides the perfect opportunity to apply the results and suggestions of this thesis in a real context.

### **Patteri Entrepreneurial Society and the LGI project**

Patteri ES is a student community that operates inside the ecosystem of the South-Eastern Finland University of Applied Sciences (Xamk) with their help, but as an independent organization. It is responsible but not limited to boosting, encouraging and supporting students that are interested in entrepreneurial path, to create connections and invigorate the network of students and activities that compose it.

Since it was created in 2015, Patteri ES has been responsible of multiple projects and initiatives to pursue this mission and support students among themselves and with local businesses, offering the students the possibility to network with local companies that the society collaborates with (Akhmetova 2022). They operate in all four cities where Xamk has campuses (Savonlinna, Mikkeli, Kouvola and Kotka) and they are notably involved in the yearly organization of \*ship Festival, a pitching competition held in Kotka, where every year hundreds of entrepreneurs come and compete for a startup grant.

In 2022, Patteri ES has been awarded a fund by the Otsakorpi William and Ester Foundation, which helps with the development of educative and entrepreneurial initiatives. The fund granted is for a project named **Let's Go International (LGI)**, consisting in 3 work packages: the first is a research to identify the needs of international students to reach opportunities with local companies (which is the subject of this work), the second work package is from the suggestions of the research, organize activities that help the students with the most urgent needs for their work life integration, and the third package is a final networking event where local companies can meet students.

In order to plan the second and third work packages of the LGI project is that the data and conclusion that this thesis presents was gathered.

## **1.2 Research questions, objectives and aims**

The purpose of this mixed methods research will be to understand the current challenges, friction and network generation issues that international students have to face when looking for a training place or a job placement in local companies of the Kymenlaakso region. From this information, insights on what are the factors to be addressed by other projects and institutions trying to address the same issues are expected to be drawn. Concrete action plans on how to reduce the friction and augment the retaining rate for international students in the Kymenlaakso region regarding job and training opportunities with local companies are expected to be found from the data gathered.

Understanding where information is lacking, what are the skills that should be better provided and how could the companies be more prone to hire and work with international students, as well as understanding the issues and fears that the companies face is the focus of this thesis work. The main questions that want to be solved with this study are: What are the main challenges for IS to find a workplace (or training place) in the area? How can these frictions be diminished? How can local companies and the region benefit from cooperating with IS? How would a concrete action plan for LGI look like, so that cooperation is maximized and risk for the local companies diminished enhancing thus professional integration?

### **1.2.1 Aims**

With this research, the main aim of the author is to find concrete action plans and develop the “tool kit” of students when having to find a training place or in a more evolved stage a working, place in the Kymenlaakso region. This by getting to the main non addressed issues that the IS must face when looking for a placement.

The insights gathered from the data collected in 2023 were used to facilitate the Networking Event that took place in the second half of 2023. That, combined with the in-depth research here presented are offered as guidelines for the commissioner endeavours.

This will provide a solid basis for the execution of the commissioner project and help the mission of Patteri ES to generate a network of companies more prone to work with IS and shed light on the reasons why other companies are less prone to this, and how could the value of this relationship be highlighted by other projects and institutions that are looking into the same issue.

### **1.2.2 Objectives**

The first objective is to sample in an effective way the population to be studied. In other words, reaching the IS and companies that are willing to collaborate and provide insight. Achieving this participation is the first objective and contacts of partner projects, Xamk students and the authors' own reach out will be used to gather data from the target group.

Using an iterative process of at least 2 rounds, to collect data and code the important issues is a must to understand deeply what hinders collaboration. Coming back to the data gathering tools, modifying them, and adapting them to touch the relevant subject is an important part of the second objective which is to identify the key issues that the topic arises.

The situation from where IS started to get a training place when in the second year of their studies, and how that situation could be improved is a first issue to be understood during the research. Later, going back to those students with more specific cases of solutions, and relate the coding to their realities is a proof for real applicable solutions.

Finally, the third objective is to provide relevant insight from and for the companies when dealing with IS, ideally generating a clear offer, through signalling, of the value that training IS can have for companies that are reluctant to take this step. The study wants to understand where this reluctance comes from, if present, and how it could be reduced.

### **1.2.3 Scope**

The study will consider exclusively the situation of the Kymenlaakso region, focusing mainly on Kouvola IS studying at Xamk and coming from abroad, and companies of the region. The study will consider the insight already generated by other studies in Finland relating work life integration and compare it to the local reality.

Even though the literature will derive from the experience of the people interviewed and surveyed and the topics they bring up, the focus is on the skills and channels that the students need to manage to facilitate the process of finding a training place or a work position related to their studies.

Additionally, to provide insight drawn from experience, the experience of alumni and students that have successfully secured training places and/or working places will be also gathered to create a reference point on what “success” or “an ideal situation” would look like and how could it be provided for different students.

### **1.3 Research method**

This is qualitative focused research in which the experience of the writer is considered as part of the construction of the results, but just as an observer and data gatherer (Ellis et al. 2011). It uses Mixed Methods as proposed by Cresswell and Clark (2018) because of its advantages to analyze the subject from different angles, including previous work by other authors on the subject, surveys and interviews, and analysis of them decoding the most important subjects.

An initial exploratory stage on the literature referring the issues that international students face when integrating in the work-life of Finland was conducted. Also, three projects' managers whose projects or working positions in Xamk had similar work life integration objectives as the Let's Go International project were contacted and interviewed with the aim of helping navigate the subject and resources. From this secondary data, two different surveys have been carried out, one for local companies and the other for local international students. A total of

30 international students answered the survey (N=30) which were contacted through different electronic channels such as WhatsApp and Discord forums exclusively for Xamk students and international programs. Of them, 4 students agreed to follow up with an interview. Through a stakeholder manager of Xamk (which was interviewed during the initial phase) and undisclosed amount of local companies from the region were contacted directly through email, from which 6 (N=6) answered the survey that was sent. Of them only 2 agreed to a further interview. It is worth mentioning that it proved hard to get local companies to participate through official channels, attributed to a constant lack of time from their behalf.

The semi-structured interview (Kallio et al. 2016) was prepared beforehand and conducted over a coffee in a semi-formal set-up. They were recorded and electronically transcript and later corrected and analyzed. Notes were also taken during the interviews, which were on average 1 hour long.

From this primary data gathered, a grounded theory approach to analyze the data through initial and focused coding (Charmaz 2006), this way identifying key elements and topics where students could be supported by the commissioner through its activities. As agreed with them and the project, activities were suggested and executed, of which some are still today active.

To create a positive impact, this research work is going hand in hand with the project "Let's Go International" which will provide and execute the activities that the researcher will suggest for a better integration of International Students.

Here below in Figure 1 is presented an overview of the research process:

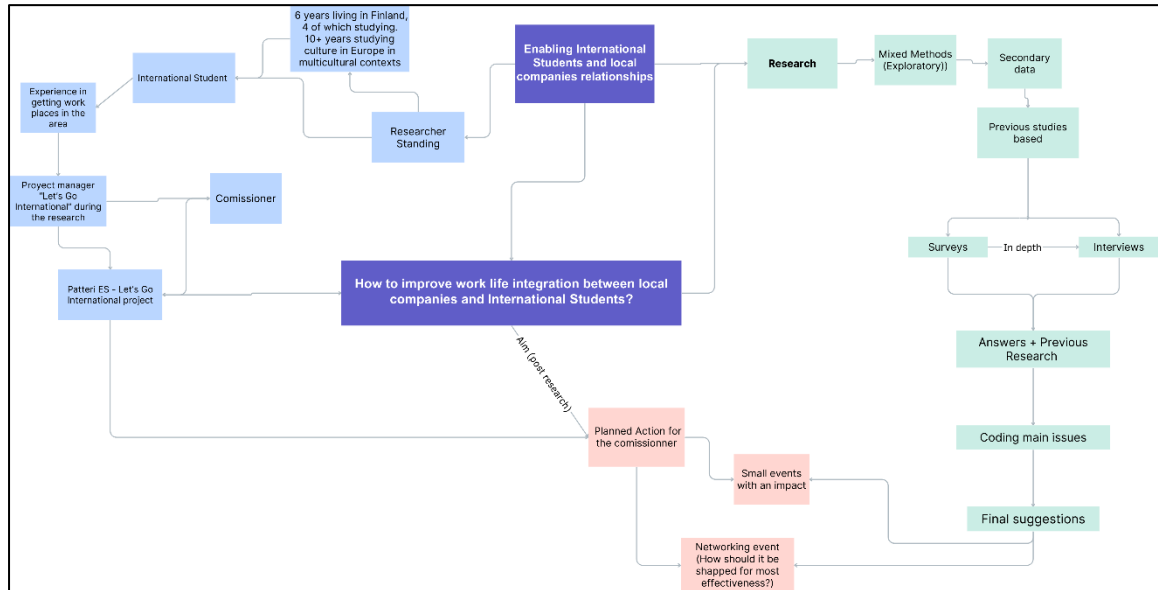


Figure 1. Research overview.

## 1.4 Framework and limitations

In this section the theoretical framework that was decoded from the academic work surrounding IS in an international context is presented. The issues are linked with a theoretical aspect that could help alleviate them which are exposed in Chapter 2.

There are two broad social theories: human capital theory and networking theory. The first from the perspective on how work seekers sell their own skills through self-marketing (Manai 2011) and how signaling plays a role when looking for a job (Spence 1973). The former, to demonstrate that social capital and networks are very important to get positions, especially weak ties which plays an important and often looked over role in finding a job in Finland (Granovetter 1973; Newman 2003).



Figure 2. Theoretical Framework based on previous work on IS work-life integration.

How this subject is mentioned in the research that has made in Finland on work-life integration is discussed in the next chapter. And although the survey and interviews were focused on identifying the positioning, understanding and use of the IS respect to these subjects, and how the local companies have experienced from their position as recruiters these issues, this work does not suggest how to improve the specific issues, but rather how these are theoretical points that could be developed while at the same time working on the more concrete consistent problems that keep appearing, such as adaptation, language and cultural skills and other practical abilities. One of the big common trends, as exposed in Chapter 2, is the importance of soft skills in the Finnish work market, which can be developed and reinforced in instances, like the activities hereafter proposed, having a double soft-and-hard skill development focus.

## 2 FROM INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS TO WORKERS IN FINLAND

The need of immigrants as labor force for Finland is a proven fact, an aging population, a decreasing working force and the increase of skilled workforce needs for companies, makes a pressing issue the search and recruitment of the increasingly scarce workforce (Valtonen 2023). Not only in Finland, but it is agreed that

any modern economy needs an increasing amount of skilled workforce to allow economic growth. The sending country benefits from possible returning students with new knowledge, while the hosting country can integrate some of the graduating students into their workforce (Tremblay 2005.) The European Commission (2023) highlights this need, especially attaining small and medium enterprises, and plans for integration of skilled labor force. This generates an environment where countries are competing to attract potential candidates and need to apply politics that makes them more attractive than other possible destinations. Elements such as cost of studies, bureaucratic hassle, salary, racism or cost of living are some important considerations for candidates choosing a studies destination.

In this regard, Finland appears to keep healthy position. The country has seen an upward trend every year (except for 2019). However, at the date that this work is written, there is incertitude if Finland will keep its position as an attractive country for international talent, as the requirements for residence permits are announced to be tightened by the actual government in a proposal to be submitted to Parliament in the Spring of 2025 (Finnish Government 2024), which contradicts the declarations of the same government about making efforts to encourage international students to come and stay in Finland by mitigating racism, making paperwork easier, and employment services reforms that seek to help integration across the table (Finnish Government 2024; Yle News 2024).

Foreign students in UAS and Universities in Finland by Sector of Education, Information and Year.

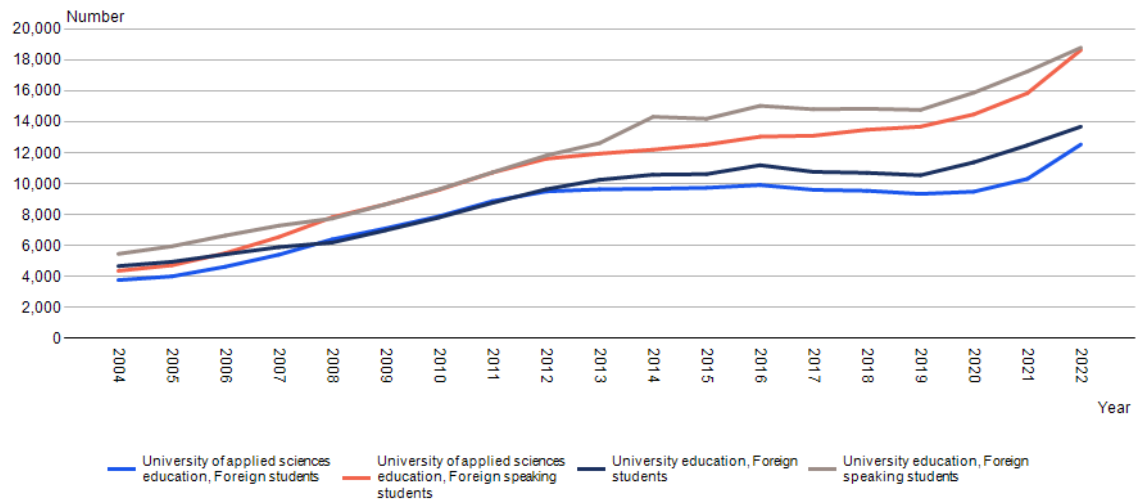


Figure 3. Foreign students in Universities and UAS (Statistics Finland, students and qualifications)

With the purpose of understanding better the phenomena of attracting and integrating as skilled workforce international students, in the last years a vast number of research have been conducted about integrating international students (IS) to the workforce in Finland (Abdurasak 2016, Alho 2020, Alper 2018, Anttila 2022, Arzamastseva 2021, Cai et al. 2018, Karhunen & Mathies 2021, Li 2020, Majakulma 2011, Ollanketo 2018, Zewde 2018). In this thesis work, IS are considered those born outside Finland and whose mother tongue is other than Finnish, Swedish or Sami (OPH 2024). Studies agree that IS can be a valuable resource for hosting countries' companies. However, the lack of recognition of skill-sets, networks and opportunities make it difficult for an appropriate integration into the Finnish workforce when we look at the students' own experiences (Alho 2020; Anttila 2022; Karhunen & Mathies 2021; Valtonen 2023).

Time and time again studies conclude that, although Finland is considered a country with a high English language skill proficiency (EF 2023) Finnish language and understanding of the culture is an "extremely important skill" for employers. (Majakulma 2011; Veera 2022; Alho 2020). Companies do not want to adapt their working culture and are looking for already well integrated foreigners that under-

stand Finnish culture and language, although the local population of Kymenlaakso is decreasing, due to locals leaving the region which gets balanced by an influx of immigrants from abroad (EURES 2023).

Another highlighted difficulty in the studies considered is the lack of social networks that could help the graduating students to find work positions. As Alho (2020) exposes in his paper titled “You need to know someone who knows someone”, weak ties, meaning the ones that you build outside the close sphere of family (which are strong ties) play an important role in finding employment in Finland, accounting for 73% of the job positions actually found in the country (SITRA 2017), in contrast to the traditional methods of finding employment. In a society where “going by the rules” is a core value, it is a counterintuitive reality for people integrating, as traditional job search methods are a lot less effective than the so called “hidden” job market.

Considering this, the idea of finding work through non-traditional means is explored in this thesis work. The participants were questioned about their experiences in the subject, to assist in establishing what level of awareness is on the topic. Using social capital as a bridge for opportunities (Bourdieu 1986) and in which way it can be done and facilitated was explored with them.

This work explored these issues, specifically in the area of Kymenlaakso, from the bilateral perspective of the International Students and the local S&M companies. And from their experience the guidelines for concrete activities were suggested to the commissioner to help these groups to better connect, diminishing friction and augmenting the probability of students staying as a workforce in the region where they conducted their studies, by suggesting a set of activities to the commissioner.

## 2.1 Social capital networks

Having the social component, ergo, “knowing someone” has such a strong influence in finding a job in Finland, that the work of capitalizing our social connections through action (Bourdieu 1986) has been emphasized, encouraged and discussed in the interviews with the S&M companies that agreed to talk and the IS. Social capital defined as “resources embedded in a social structure which are accessed and/or mobilized in purposive actions” (Lin 1999, 35) being the resources opportunities or information about opportunities, the social structure facilitated to be build and reinforced through the activities that this study proposes keeping in mind that the purposive action, is the action of seeking and finding a job place inside those activities or reinforce the skills necessary for that end goal.

As this was focused on students that were coming from abroad, the ties strength as proposed by Granovetter (1973) is focused on weak ties, as often students who go to another country to study do not have access to close family or friends, must, often, start from scratch. The time, emotional intensity and mutual confiding are minimal when starting to form ties, and when in the urge of looking for a job, the reciprocity of service wants to be maximized in the little time that is used for interactions with a weak tie (Granovetter 1973), calling into a sense of urgency to help these relationships to form and connect candidates with possible employers.

It is important that, through repetition and reinforcement of the opportunities to form these ties, the network that the commissioner looks to deploy gains resilience where there is opportunity for individuals to gain strong allies, as in the opposite case when individuals are left out, the network of contacts, and hence opportunities, decreases. Connections are lost and there is a risk of them to be completely gone and severed from the group (Newman 2003). Also is worth considering that social connections bring happiness and mental well-being (Cacioppo & Patrick 2008) and this at the same time predisposes a person to be better suited to find employment and have positive interactions with others, increasing their chances of success, while the opposite is also true and poor mental health can hinder the search for a job (Karsten & Moser 2009).

## 2.2 Job seeking signaling and self-marketing

When looking for an opportunity, through the valuable networks previously mentioned, it is not only about being in the right place with the right people, but also knowing how to present ourselves in the best and most appealing way, self-marketing and signaling play their role when forming weak ties with possible employers and employees.

Excluding the definition of self-marketing as the one in which celebrities, politicians or other public figures use a publicist or marketer to promote themselves, self-marketing is understood here as the activities and actions that an individual takes to make themselves visible in the marketplace, usually with the aim of employment (Shephard 2010). These activities could be considered in a macro-scale, such as the image we project of ourselves in social medias, clothing or other “signals” projected and developed in time, almost naturally. Or more important in the context of this work, in a more specific and concrete setting, such as the way communication is undertaken, the approaching of people and how one differentiates from the rest in real life. A vastly cited article on this subject is “The brand Called You” (Peters 1997), where the author invites the reader to undertake the task of taking charge of the self-brand, so that others will not do it for them, by making ourselves the same question a company would make themselves: What differentiates you from the rest? What can you give that others cannot?

This means that one must influence the way a possible recruiter perceives us. A company, or a recruiter, does not know what he is dealing with when hiring. Is dealing with a bet that can go either way, but in any case, money and time will be invested by the company on this bet (Spence 1973), is in front of them a viable candidate or just a waste of resources?

In his work, Spence (1973) makes the distinction between *indices*, attributes that the employer can perceive at first glance, but that the applicant cannot change, such as age, physical looks, ethnicity, or others; and *signals* which are also ob-

servable attributes but that the person can influence. This distinction is where applicants can capitalize and learn how to decide how they are perceived, having better control over the first impression they give off in, for example, a network event.

### 2.3 The perspective of the employers

Although focused on the perspective of the IS, this research wants to understand both sides of the equation when getting a job, the job seeker, and the job giver. The employer plays the ultimate role in letting candidates into their work force and deciding to leave others out for different reasons, being a relevant cost opportunity situation for them. They shape the opportunities offered in the labor market by dealing with the signals given by the job seekers and the structural forces that play a role in them. This brings its own baggage of challenges, when waging the options available to their hiring processes, the cost opportunities that must be taken into consideration and the specific challenges and opportunities that the Kymenlaakso region offers.

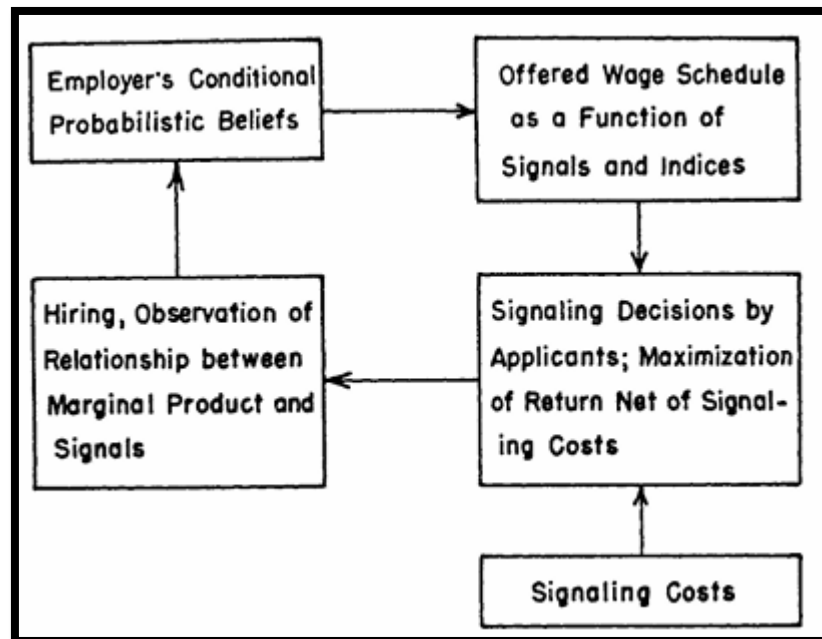


Figure 4. Informational Feedback in the Job Market (Spencer 1973)

When posting a job offer, the employer *signals* their needs to potential job seekers. As expressed in Figure 4, in the work by Spence (1973) there is an iterative loop, in which the employer inputs what they are looking for and adjust their expectations, needs and “ideal hires” in each iteration and in relationship with their previous hiring experiences over time. Companies, in theory, refine their strategies based on the observed performance of previous hires and signals from employees. Yet, a quick look into hiring websites and announcements, such as [duunitori.fi](http://duunitori.fi) or [oikotie.fi](http://oikotie.fi) makes apparent that one of the main requirements for most jobs in the area are for example, Finnish skills (Villa et al. 2016) which can be considered unrealistic for students coming from abroad for a relatively short period of studies (around 3 years). Besides this concrete challenge, employers need to keep in mind training costs, integration efforts and their own resource limitations, all of which make it more difficult from their perspective the decision to hire an international student.

Although some studies state that more and more companies are willing to overlook language skills (Aalto University 2022) it is a challenge for regional S&M companies to adapt to newcomers, as resources are limited and as shown in the SME Barometer (Ministry of Employment and the Economy 2023, 44) Kymenlaakso faces a specially challenging situation, being more directly impacted by the war in Ukraine than other regions in the country. Small and Medium companies are often managed in tight-knit circles, family businesses or friends ventures are a common in a low-density area like Kymenlaakso. This environment based on networks and strong ties makes it harder for outsiders to integrate (Granovetter 1973), and for companies to be willing to adapt for newcomers. Besides this, other broader structural forces, like labor laws, immigration laws, and demographic shift are constantly influencing the capacities of hiring and the risk that companies are willing to take.

As Anttila (2022, 58) concludes in his studies, companies could benefit from the added value that IS could bring to a team, such as foreign language abilities and

contacts, projects and visions and tasks related to a possibly home country market. Cai et al. (2014, 13) also remark the benefits of having an IS hired, as it can help with innovation and marketing (especially younger generations), and international ventures when the person has experienced already the local politics of Finland and can compare them to their home country in case of it being a target for the company. This can help solve the skill shortage that is prognosticated in the country due to aging population (EURES 2023). This skill shortage applies as well to the Kymenlaakso region, but the possibility of employers taking IS as new workers gets conditioned by the students' capacity to learn quick the language and adapt to the Finnish working culture.

### **3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 Research development process**

To frame the target population of the study, two groups were selected as mentioned in Chapter 1. The first and main group, International Students (N=30), were framed as students undergoing an international program in the South-Eastern Finland University of Applied Sciences (Xamk). These international programs have a high percentage of their students coming from abroad to study in Finland, for which reason they seem relevant. Student with a non-international background (Finnish students) were asked to refrain from answering. The second target group, representatives of small and medium-sized enterprises (S&M) with operations in Kymenlaakso region. The company representatives were reached through an intermediary from Xamk staff, a stakeholder representative who acted as an intermediary to facilitate the dissemination of the survey (Groves et al. 2009, 44-45).

This research respects confidentiality (Babbie 2008, 70) to avoid identification of the participants by the readers.

### 3.1.1 Survey design

Following an initial review of qualitative research on international students and their employment challenges, particularly the work by Alho (2020), a mixed-methods survey was developed to gather both quantitative and qualitative data. The survey aimed to explore the experiences, challenges, and strategies in seeking employment in the region. A mixed-methods approach was chosen because it allows for a comprehensive understanding of both numerical data (quantitative) and the subjective personal experiences of the respondents (qualitative) (Groves et al. 2009; Creswell 2009).

The survey consisted of two versions tailored for each group. The first one, targeted at international students, was more comprehensive, aiming to explore their backgrounds, experiences and perceptions in the local labor market. The second version, data survey, was created to screen through international students in the region about their experiences, challenges and strategies to look for work. The second version used for the S&M companies, was in a much shorter format, following advice from the stakeholder responsible of Xamk, to address in less time-consuming manner the representatives and owners of S&M companies and assure a higher level of participation.

The content of the survey was discussed with the commissioner and a Talent Boost project worker for an assessment. The Talent Boost project has the same integration objectives as the commissioner of this work. The content of the S/M tailored survey was briefly discussed with the stakeholder representative to ensure validity and a correct approach with professionals.

Both surveys concluded with an optional question asking participants if they would be willing to participate in a follow-up interview, offering this way an opportunity for a deeper exploration of certain topics.

### 3.1.2 Survey structure

The survey for international students was divided into three sections, ensuring a comprehensive approach to capturing both demographic data and insights into employability challenges.

The first section was focused on quantitative data, including basic demographic information age, origin, program of studies, and (if any) practical experience in the local job market. The idea was to collect data about their experience in practical training or work in Finland, considering they were students, and in which field (same field of studies or another). An open-ended question was included to recollect how they got the position. The aim of this section was to understand the background of the students and their practical approaches to finding work.

The second section was focused on qualitative data collection, through open-ended questions, they were crafted to evaluate the understanding of essential skills to get work in Finland, drawing from the work of Yorke (2006) the idea was to uncover which skills, both soft (such as communication, adaptability, and teamwork) and hard (such as technical, language, or field specific) they considered necessary for employability according to their experiences, and which are most challenging to develop. These responses were compared with findings from previous studies with the idea of identifying gaps in student awareness or emphasis on certain skills that might be critical but often overlooked.

The third section was focused on the challenges present in employment and market integration. Open-ended questions were put on about the difficulties faced when finding practical training or work placement and the challenges present when already employed. This section aimed to gather insights into barriers specific to international students, such as language proficiency, cultural differences, and networking difficulties. The qualitative data gathered here offered a deeper understanding of the real-world barriers faced by the target group.

The survey for S&M companies had a different focus. Because of its short nature, questions were limited and most of them were of a qualitative nature. Except for

the first question asking directly about the willingness of working with IS. The survey aimed to explore the interest of companies in hiring international students, potential challenges they foresee, and the perceived value of international students in the workplace.

### **3.1.3 Interview design**

The follow up in deep conversation was designed as a semi structured interview (Annexes 1 & 2). Two sets of questions were crafted, one for students and one for companies (See the Annexes), and printed out as guide for the interview. The aim was to get a descriptive and interpretative view of the interviewees in the subject of integration and get to know their subjective vision on the subjects at hand (McIntosh & Morse 2015, 4) in a deeper and more personal manner.

The semi-structured interview format was chosen to balance the need for consistency across interviews with the flexibility to explore specific topics in depth. This approach allowed interviewees to share their unique experiences and provide detailed answers to open-ended questions, which is particularly important when dealing with subjective topics such as challenges in the labor market and skill development (Miles et al. 2014). By asking both students and employers similar questions, it was possible to draw comparisons and identify gaps between student perceptions and employer expectations.

Each individual set of questions was tailored before each interview, referencing subjects that could have appeared as answers in the surveys, or the field and experience of the interviewee.

The five interviews (three international students and two companies' representatives) were conducted in a semi formal setting, lasting around an hour long each and they were all recorded and later transcribed and analyzed from the recordings. The objective was to have a face-to-face conversation, that could offer a better qualitative understanding on the subject, explore some experiences and possible solutions from their individual personal views following a phenomenological approach guided by the interviewer (Kvale & Brinkmann 1994).

### 3.2 Data collection

To understand better the specific difficulties and experience for international students to acquire and retain a job place, the sample of international students was taken by analyzing and listing the available programs that Xamk has with an international orientation (taught in English and with a high percentage of international students enrolled). A total of four programs were identified in Kymenlaakso, one in Kotka, and three in Kouvola, the capital of the region. The identified programs included Digital International Business, Game Design, post-graduate Diploma in Business Management and the Nursing program in Kotka. Although there were attempts to reach the Kotka bachelor program in nursing, it was not possible to reach their channels to share the survey link. Nonetheless, the survey was also shared via the school email, and with the help of the commissioner, and a few answers came from the nursing program in Kotka.

In Kouvola, the communication WhatsApp channels of three classes from the Digital International Business bachelor were reached, and through Discord the bachelor program in game design was reached. Additionally, a WhatsApp channel of the international diploma program in business was reached. All WhatsApp channels had between ten and forty participants and the Discord ones had more than a hundred people on them. These channels were chosen because they appeared then to be the most effective way to reach as many students as possible in a short period of time. Nonetheless other channels as more effective alternatives are discussed in the discussion **section in Chapter 5**.

Companies were contacted via email through the stakeholder's representative of Xamk, and the survey was shared with the ones that answered the emails. The sample was at the end based on willing to participate in the study, rather than other parameters.

The forms tool from Microsoft environment was used to create both versions of the surveys, from which a public link was generated and was shared across the platforms with international students.

An interview date was set with the respondents that agreed to a follow up conversation.

### **3.3 Data analysis**

For the quantitative data collected from both international students and S&M companies, descriptive statistical analysis was applied. This allowed for a clear overview of the demographic distribution, including age group, area of origin, and employment status among students. The analysis also focused on key variables such as the perceived importance of Finnish language skills and challenges in hiring international students. The companies were asked about their experience, possible challenges and perceived benefits of working with IS

For the qualitative data, coding from Sharmaz (2006) grounded theory analysis was used to identify recurring patterns and themes in responses to open-ended questions. Through initial coding, themes such as "language barriers," "cultural integration," "soft skills challenges," and "opportunities for international students" were identified. This in turn allowed for leading the interviews with a focused coding of the topics and getting a conversation to unveil and compare the perspectives of international students and the local companies.

All the themes obtained from the coded data were compared with the already existing codes from previous studies (Babbie 2008, 445), to allow for a direct comparison if the recurrent subjects of studies done some years ago were still present in the data collected here and now.

The interviews were transcribed to text using online software, and then revised for ensuring word-by-word corrections as suggested by McIntosh & Morse (2015, 8) and formatting for easier readability. The analysis of trends, patterns and the common subjects mentioned above were then analyzed from the transcribed versions of the interviews. Because of the small volume of answers from S&M, a bigger emphasis was given on the analysis of their interviews.

## **4 RESULTS AND ANALYSIS**

### **4.1 Survey results**

In this section the results from the surveys are presented and an analysis of their relevance is discussed. The demographics, only gathered from international students  $N=30$ , are here briefly presented but are not part of the analysis further below to avoid researcher bias considering the relatively small sample and the possible social justice implications that could be drawn from such conclusions (Babbie 2008, 439). For contextualization the respondents average age is around 25 years old, and the places of origin are diverse, including Latin America, Asia, Africa and Europe, being the main predominant group from Asia.

#### **4.1.1 Students' surveys**

Of the 30 international students that answered the survey ( $N=30$ ), 20 (66.6%) had done practical training or had some kind of experience as employees. Some of the results presented here are relevant only to this group (international student, done practical training) so is going to be presented as  $N=20$  sample group. The remaining students were coursing either programs that do not require practical training or were yet to have their first experience in the workforce, only recently having started their studies. Of the ones that had some experience ( $N=20$ ), 13 of them (65%) indicated networking and contact as how did they found the opportunity. Some of the methods mentioned were finding a training place in their home country, sending emails until some company gave them a chance, or other more context specific answers such as "being part of Patteri"; "Networking at Xamk"; "While in exchange in Erasmus" or taking a "door-to-door approach". Social media LinkedIn was also a channel that is mentioned a few times in the answers, considered in initial coding as networking, as it involves reaching out to contacts.

Traditional job search was the alternative way to find a position, through a more traditional channel to search such as, Google search; competition to win a place

in Xamk games studios; Erasmus website; and Jobly.fi which is mentioned several times.

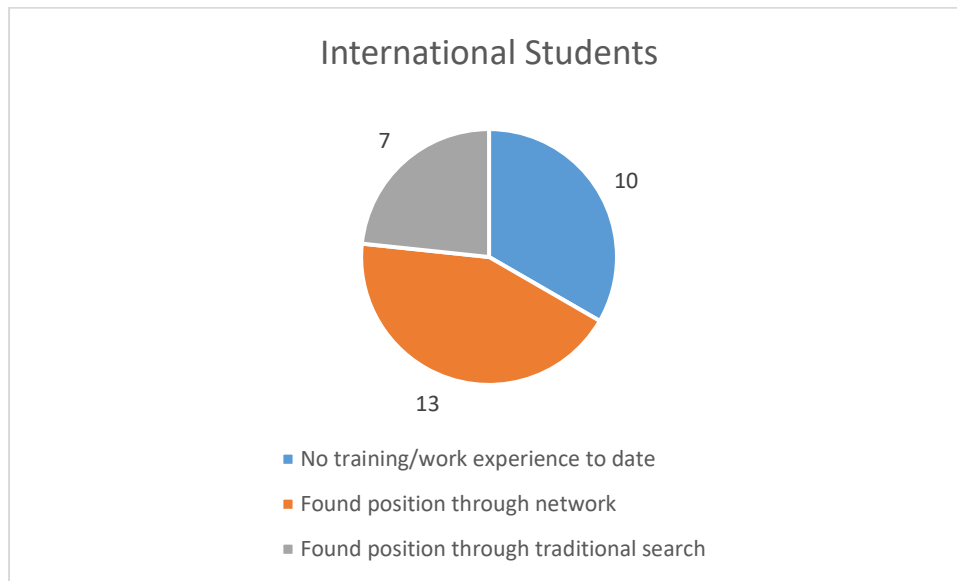


Figure 5 Method of finding a position according to survey (N=30)

When asked about their challenges, language is placed as the most common difficulty mentioned across the answers, being pointed as a difficulty when looking for a job 18 times (N=30) and as an important skill to land a job 20 times (N=30). The language barrier is perceived as the number one barrier to finding employment and training positions by a large margin. The issue of finding a place being the most challenging part arises again. It is possible to conclude that even though some challenges are present, once the training is started the most difficult part is already behind. Many have mentioned a possible difference on the relevance on these two difficulties and the area of study being rather a small city, and other than the capital area.

Other common difficulties and challenges identified are limited assistance and support from coordinators and companies and a limited number of available positions in the region; lack of experience or recognition of previous experience acquired abroad; perceived bias from employers based on origin, language proficiency or nationality; lack of positions for English speakers or non-Finnish speakers; high competition for the few available offers and the impersonal aspect of some recruiting processes.

Nonetheless, the respondents with a training experience (N=20) rated their experience on an average of 3,9 out of 5, which indicates generally good experiences once in the labour market.

When referring specifically to *where* to search, 8 out of 30 respondents said that they did not know where to find a practical training position or work, but only 4 respondents knew about the term of “hidden” job market (Alho 2020). Together with the fact that respondents knew about networking as one of the most important ways to find job can be considered as a lack of awareness of the term of “hidden” market as proposed by Alho (2020), and the reality of jobs existing but not being listed through traditional channels is something that the students had a notion of.

#### **4.1.2 Companies’ surveys**

From the companies’ respondents (N=6) the most challenging issue pointed out was language. Finnish is used by the companies in internal information dissemination and client services, so it is considered almost a must have in those cases, but not always an absolute defining parameter. When asked, on a scale from 1 to 5, being 5 an absolute consideration for the Finnish language skills of a prospective employee, the average is 2,5. With two of the respondents indicating that language is not that important and they can adapt and one in the opposite end of the spectrum, considering Finnish an absolute must. Other challenges mentioned were bureaucratic (work permits and tax issues), English competence and understanding of the local work culture, as a low power-distance (defined as “flat management” by the respondent) and high necessity of self-initiative.

The most common benefit seen of working with international students is the diversity that such an experience brings to the table. Marketing and problem solving are areas mentioned where international students can contribute with their different point of view, international perspective, understanding problems from a non-Nordic perspective and what the international students bring to the firm culturally are mentioned in all 6 answers.

Only 2 out of the 6 firm representatives that answered the survey agreed to a further interview.

## 4.2 Interview results

The interviews for both students and companies that can be found in the Appendices 3 and 4 is the guide structure that was followed to conduct a total of 6 semi-structured interviews, 2 with companies and 4 with international students. The idea was rather to follow a conversation on the relevant topics that were identified previously in the study, keeping the flexibility to let other topics surface if the person deemed it relevant. (McIntosh & Morse 2015, Kvale & Brinkmann 2009.)

### 4.2.1 Students' interviews

Students had in general a critical view of their work life situation and experiences in Finland. Across the table, many mentioned that the number of challenges that they had encountered during their studies to pierce into the working environment had discouraged them and demotivated them. Language, culture gap, difficulties to establish networks with locals, bureaucracy, location (a small town versus more opportunities in a bigger town) were the issues that were repeated in all 4 interviews.

Table 1 Subjects mentioned on IS interviews, frequency

Challenges	Student #1	Student #2	Student #3	Student #4
Language	✓	✓	✓	✓
Network and connections	✓	✓	✓	✓
Location	✓	✓	✓	
Difficulties in finding suitable workplace	✓	✓	✓	✓
Bureaucracy	✓		✓	
Motivation	✓	✓	✓	✓
Training	✓		✓	
Culture gap	✓		✓	
Expectations unmet	✓	✓	✓	✓

It was pointed out that most opportunities, especially in smaller towns were inaccessible without proficiency in Finnish language, that although was taught as part of their studies, it was hard to apply in everyday life, because of being insert in an English speaking environment. It was also pointed out that, from their perspective, the cultural nature of the locals made it tougher to practice, feel included and find networking opportunities. This led to discouragement and disappointment in the situation and a lack of expectations met.

Networking was mentioned as crucial, but often lacking component for gaining access to local network opportunities. There was a mixed feeling of on one hand not being enough networking opportunities available, and in the other hand not knowing how to properly leverage and generate opportunities from the existing ones. There was a feeling that most of the events in the university environment were not enough tailored and moderated for them, often focused on Finnish speaking students.

Location was mentioned frequently and compared to the lack of opportunities in this region, compared to larger cities, like Helsinki or Tampere. With fewer opportunities and most of positions being directed to Finnish speaking peers a feeling of expectations unmet was mentioned on several occasions, referring both to the preparation in their studies for the working life in the region and the working life inaccessibility in itself.

Finding employment, or training places, that match their education was also mentioned as disheartening, as many of the jobs (whether part-time, internships, or full-time) they had access were basic labor oriented or cleaning related. Another hassle mentioned as hindering was the complexity of navigating bureaucratic processes, which exacerbated the feeling of not belonging, when finding government offices, figuring out how they work and not finding English oriented services is mentioned as additional challenges. Many students felt underprepared for networking and were unsure of how to present themselves effectively to potential employers. Although some had relevant experiences back home, they found it

challenging to translate these into the Finnish context, especially without adequate workshops.

Some suggestions for improvement were pointed out. Students would like more preparation before going to networking events, said in other words, workshops for networking skills. There were suggestions of having in their studies smaller company visits, or mini internships, that could acclimate them to the local Finnish environment, without having to fully commit to a full internship. Further on, they would like targeted job fairs, especially tailored for international students' work life with companies with an interest in them. Finally, more language preparation, on top of what is already given, is also mentioned as an improvement possibility.

#### **4.2.2 Companies' interviews**

Both people interviewed were responsible, or high up manager of their respective S&M companies. One of them was Finnish and had many other ventures going on at the same time and the other was of foreign origin, already living a long time in Finland and working on a niche field. They both had many decades of experience working in this environment.

Regarding international students integration into the work place, the main issue that was mentioned in multiple occasions, and through different examples, experiences and wishful thinking was the adaptation to the Finnish work culture. Self-initiative and understanding of the rather flat and equalitarian way of working in little enterprises in Finland were emphasized as very important. However, the big difference in work culture between S&M and bigger companies was also pointed out.

The networking component of insertion into working life was pointed out as important but it should be curated more carefully. Reaching out is deemed possible, and even though the language barrier can make the gathering of information a bit challenging, there are plenty of organizations and companies ready to try. Networking is also pointed as a good method to know better the working culture in Finland for international students, and the creation of bridges with companies that

are interested in this is deemed as an effective method to improve the situation if it is properly hosted and facilitated. By the words of one of the interviewees “is not enough to just throw people in a room and wait the magic to happen”. The events should be detailed and effectively orientated between interested parts to be effective bridges between them.

Interest as a mindset (together with autonomy) was also mentioned many times in both discussions. Interest between students and companies should match and special curation could be given to interest-matchmaking. Both companies value candidates who have realistic expectations about their industries and are genuinely interested in contributing. International students need to research the companies they apply to, understand the industry, and demonstrate enthusiasm for the specific type of work the company does. The student should be interested in what the local companies are doing, and not just try to “fill the hours”. This kind of behavior was exemplified through negative experiences where the match did not work when working with international students in the past. Yet, the opposite is also true and other international students were highlighted as good contributors, and excellent workers. Giving a representation of both good and bad experiences, as an uncertainty of the quality of workers companies can expect and one more element they need to face when working with international students.

Yet high competitiveness in the market to attract talent is playing both in favor and against the international students. “Quality” of an intern is highlighted as a need when companies put their resources into training someone. Other mentioned factors that can hinder that “quality” are communication and digital communication issues, such as younger students not answering emails, big gap in working culture with student from high power difference cultures and generational gaps. It is pointed out that many of these gaps could be provided with specific training before any “real life” training in companies begins.

## 5 CONCLUSIONS

### 5.1 Key results and findings

The general insights uncovered from the surveys and interviews here conducted, do not differ so much from previous studies discussed in Chapter 2. However, the frustration component brought up by students related to location and difficulty to create networks and practice their Finnish skills which can lead at the same time to a feeling of isolation and disappointment not only make this a local problem with its own challenges, but also pin-point some urgent points that should be addressed. These points are discussed below by answering this studies' questions and in the managerial implications for concrete activity plans for the commissioner Patteri ES.

To answer the first question, "What are the main challenges for IS to find a workplace (or training place) in the area?" and its sub question "How can this friction be diminished?" a correlation line between both international students' and S&M companies and the previous literature revised is drawn. Integration, through the creation of Granovetter (1973) 'weak ties' require time to be generated, but as suggested by the S&M companies interviewed, they also require curation in situ and reciprocal interest from both parties. The investment of time suggest that single time opportunities are not enough, because to develop the skill of leveraging social encounters, and more so recruitment oriented encounters, practice is necessary. Through these encounters, the second most pressing issue that this study found from both parties can be addressed, getting to know the local work culture in Finland and Kymenlaakso.

The second question, "How can local companies and the region benefit from collaborating with IS?" is answered in both a geographically specific scenario and a common vision encountered in the data. The specific scenario refers to the specific needs that the developing economy of Finland requires, and the skilled labor needs, ever increasing because of geopolitical and demographic reasons, of the

Kymenlaakso region. Yet, richer and maybe less evident are the internationalization possibilities that international students can bring to companies, knowledge of other markets and techniques such as marketing that younger generations with a broader world view can bring to the table, if the company is interested, becomes then a necessity going back to the importance of mutual interest, and the need to identify which companies are ready for this, and prepare students to meet their working culture requirements.

Finally, the third question “How would a concrete action plan for LGI look like, so that cooperation is maximized and risk for the local companies diminished enhancing thus professional integration?” comes down to the preparation and implementation of what is previously suggested. There is a need for tailored integration, in which the local culture is served to the incoming students. Networks need to be created and kept alive for incoming students. These networks can relate to the local life, serve as a nucleus themselves and become ‘weak ties’ generators that can lead to forward opportunities. How this plan would look is discussed in the managerial implications below.

## **5.2 Managerial implications**

As a general approach there are some guidelines that can be suggested from the research as follows for all activities that Patteri ES could organize in the future. These suggestions come from the experiences that international students and companies shared and are here provided as suggestions for improvement. Later in this chapter a list of specific ideas, as agreed with the commissioner, are given.

The first important implication is to keep doing this work. One of the representatives of S&M interviewed was emphatic in suggesting that the kind of work done here, of going out and talking with the companies is very important for the whole integration process. Reaching out to the ones interested, opens a network that can be later connected with the international students that are, for example, affiliated to Patteri ES. The work of talking with them, and gathering new interested ones, and asking what they need and what their experiences are would help significantly in creating a network that then later the students could benefit from. It

could also establish clearer base lines to work with and keep refining towards what the students should be prepared for, to be integrated with ease in the local context.

The second implication is curating the events that are organized. It is not enough just to throw a set of people in a room and expect them to socialize and form ties. Different formulas (besides the ones proposed below) can be tested. Curating good moderators for events, themes, background music, space and setting a tone can be the difference between succeeding in integration and failing. Events should be carefully planned so that interaction is facilitated between different culture backgrounds in the Finnish culture environment. Added to this, it is suggested that this is made during the whole year, to keep nourishing the ties that Patteri ES affiliates could form between them.

Thirdly, and according to what was agreed with the commissioner and following the guidelines of the Let's Go International project, a set of activities is suggested because of this research process. The goal of the activities is to connect some of the local life with the students, sometimes sporadically and sometimes in a periodical manner. The other goal is to develop some of the skills that the research proved could be useful, to help students to reach out.

These ideas are focused on helping with the issues found during this qualitative research and are also considering the financial implications that organizing such activities could have. The first set of ideas is of a semi-periodical character that helps with the social integration of the international students, the sense of belonging, and their language and social skills. By having a set of activities, the students that are involved with Patteri ES can have in their calendar, especially in the darkest days of winter, a set of activities that keeps them connected.

These ideas include: a monthly **language coffee**; an informal gathering between international students to discuss about Finnish language and learn and practice some basics in a relaxed environment. The activity is hosted by 1 or 2 moderators that will guide the conversation through work life in Finland, and language

learning, tips about learning and encourage practicing the language itself. **Cultural visits in Finnish**; guided museum or city tours, maybe twice a year, in which a local guide, hopefully a fellow student or a professional, can show the students using a mixture of English and useful Finnish. **Network race** is an event in which students go around local participating companies, interviewing them, asking questions and generating networks in a field day. Companies could also ask questions from students.

The following are activities that were screened to have important relevance for the project, in the initial phase of screening the situation in the area, and that were already happening or planned to happen and which objectives align with the commissioners' objectives for which reason it would be important to participate.

**Kohoa campus week, activities organized by Booster project, and participation on campus of the työelämäpäivät** are some of the local activities that the commissioner is strongly advised to participate in. Besides, it is strongly advised that the ES organizes its own events directed to international students and locals alike, such as a **Patteri ES meeting** and a **pre-Christmas event** to introduce students to this traditional event that is done in all enterprises of the region. Patteri ES can organize own workshops directly related to the skills of reaching out and networking, such as key-note speakers about the work life in Finland, LinkedIn, pitch elevator. Once more, the emphasis is on how these activities are facilitated for maximum integration.

Having a base in which to work, and reaching out to companies as first suggested above, keeping the mindset of **matchmaking interests** is as a conclusion the way to help international students and local companies to connect in the local context.

Some of these activities are already being organized by the commissioner because of previous suggestions made soon after the interviews took place. Nonetheless, it is encouraged to check from here that the emphasis and application of them are in the right direction, what can still be improved and from this research

work, how working with companies and international students should look like when planning the future.

### **5.3 Reliability discussion and future development**

The collection and studies of the extensive work previously done on the subject, together with the gathering of data, both quantitative and qualitative, of the specific group that wanted to be researched with this work aligns with the guidelines proposed for Mixed Methods research, as proposed by Creswell & Clark (2018). The qualitative data collected seems valuable and relevant to the topic and for the commissioner's field of work and it explains and connects deeper the quantitative data collected through survey. Yet, the qualitative nature of the data collection instrument used for collecting the data limits the crunching of numbers for relevant quantitative conclusions.

The sampling size was not as big as initially hoped for. For this reason, the *secondary analysis* of data collected by other studies was used to support the development of the recommendations here provided (de Vaus 1985, 86).

Some validity threats are to be kept in mind at the end of this study and as a developing suggestion for future studies in the same field. In the work by Creswell & Clark (2018, 251-253), it is pointed out that one pitfall for an exploratory study design is selecting the same participants for both the qualitative and quantitative data. The information collected in this research, is at the end, divided in 4 groups, quantitative IS, qualitative IS, quantitative S&M and qualitative S&M. Having bigger and unique samples for each of these groups could be hugely beneficial. Yet, and as indicated by some of the data collected, this is a small area, it is not easy to get high participatory numbers for any study, or activities, done here and the effort is many times rewarded with underwhelming results. To make the situation better, and as a second development suggestion in what research method respects, the method of data collection as only digital must be put in the spot line. Reaching out digitally to people is maybe not the best way to get the major quantity of data possible, and maybe collaboration with the university, the commissioners, and other interested parties could be made to collect data in-situ. It would be

specially interesting to have a second round of data collection after implementation. Doing active action research with a mixed method gathering that tracks the impact that is being made in the area through the work of integration, could be a good way to both gather worthy quantitative data (in higher volumes) and analyze impact through numbers, while at the same time interviewing for views on the already explored topics. This could lead to even clearer insights on how the theme of integration and local companies can be brought together and improved through impactful actions.

Further and more rigorous research could be done as well for each one of the 4 sample groups above mentioned, specially focusing on the enterprises to raise the subject to their table and keep exploring ways to develop integration further. Clearly it is not an easy feat to reach the busy companies and managers in the region, but there are many out there that are ready to have a conversation if reached out. That conversation would be rich for the economic development of the region and could be shared across the whole spectrum, from students to managers, from HR employees to teachers and, from local universities to local companies.

## REFERENCES

- Aalto University. 2022. Facilitating international students' integration in the Finnish labor market through act early concept. Press release. Available at: <https://www.aalto.fi/en/news/facilitating-international-students-integration-in-the-finnish-labor-market-through-act-early> [Accessed 07 October 2024].
- Abdurasak, A. 2016. Employability Of Foreign Graduates In Finland. KYAMK. Master's thesis. Available at: <https://urn.fi/URN:NBN:fi:amk-2016121620823> [Accessed 23 August 2024].
- Akhmetova, S. 2022. Patteri Entrepreneurial Society. *Insider*, 25(6). Web article. Available at: <https://insider.xamk.fi/patteri-entrepreneurial-society/> [Accessed 3 August 2024].
- Alho, R. 2020. You Need to Know Someone Who Knows Someone. International Students Job-Search Experiences. University of Helsinki. Doctoral thesis.
- Alper, C. 2018. International Student Experiences in Non-Native English-Speaking Countries: Postgraduate Motivations and Realities from Finland. *Research in Comparative & International Education*, 13(3) 439 – 456. Article. DOI: 10.1177/1745499918791362 [Accessed 23 August 2024].
- Anttila, V. 2022. The barriers in the employment of international students in Vaasa. University of Vaasa. Master's thesis. Available at: [https://osuva.uvasa.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/13869/Uni-Vaasa\\_2022\\_Anttila\\_Veera.pdf?sequence=2&isAllowed=y](https://osuva.uvasa.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/13869/Uni-Vaasa_2022_Anttila_Veera.pdf?sequence=2&isAllowed=y) [Accessed 3 August 2024].
- Arzamastseva, E. 2021. The Networking Aspect Of International Students' Integration Into Finnish Working Life: A Case Study Of Team&Client Project Course. University of Jyväskylä. Masters's Thesis. Available at: <http://urn.fi/URN:NBN:fi:jyu-202112175996> [Accessed 23 August 2024].
- Babbie, E. 2008. *The Basics of Social Research*. 4<sup>th</sup> ed. Belmont: Thomson Wadsworth.
- Cacioppo, J. & Patrick W. 2008. *Loneliness: Human Nature and the Need for Social Connection*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company.
- Cai, Y., Pekkola, E., Shumilova, Y. 2014. Employability of International Graduates Educated in Finnish Higher Education Institutions. *VALOA-project Career Services University of Helsinki*. Available at: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/233426293\\_Employability\\_of\\_International\\_Graduates\\_Educated\\_in\\_Finnish\\_Higher\\_Education\\_Institutions](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/233426293_Employability_of_International_Graduates_Educated_in_Finnish_Higher_Education_Institutions) [Accessed 23 September 2024].
- Creswell, J. 2009. *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. 3rd ed. Sage Publications Ltd.

Creswell, J. & Clark P. 2018. *Designing and Conducting Mixed Methods Research*. 3rd ed. Los Angeles: SAGE.

De Vaus, D. 1985. *Surveys in Social Research*. 5th ed. Crows Nest, Allen&Unwin.

EF EPI English Proficiency Index. 2023. EF Education First. PDF document. Available at: <https://www.ef.com/assetscdn/WIBlwq6RdJvcD9bc8RMd/cefcom-epi-site/reports/2023/ef-epi-2023-english.pdf> [Accessed 3 August 2024].

Ellis, C., Adams, T., & Bochner, A. 2011. Autoethnography : an overview. *Historical Social Research*, 36(4), 273-290. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.12759/hsr.36.2011.4.273-290> [Accessed 19 August 2024].

EURES (European Employment Services). 2023. Labour market information : Finland. Available at : [https://eures.europa.eu/living-and-working/labour-market-information/labour-market-information-finland\\_en](https://eures.europa.eu/living-and-working/labour-market-information/labour-market-information-finland_en) [Accessed 15 September 2024].

European Commission. (2023). *European Year of Skills 2023*. Available at: [https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/priorities-2019-2024/europe-fit-digital-age/european-year-skills-2023\\_en](https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/priorities-2019-2024/europe-fit-digital-age/european-year-skills-2023_en) [Accessed 12 September 2024].

Finnish Government, Ministry of Employment and the Economy. 2023. PK-yritysbareometri. *Suomen Yrittäjät ry*. Report. Available at: <https://www.yrittajat.fi/ajankohtaista/tutkimukset/pk-yritysbareometri-2-2023/> [Accessed 07 October 2024].

Finnish Government, Ministry of Employment and the Economy. 2024. Finland: Comprehensive reform of the Integration Act. Available at: [https://migrant-integration.ec.europa.eu/news/finland-comprehensive-reform-integration-act\\_en](https://migrant-integration.ec.europa.eu/news/finland-comprehensive-reform-integration-act_en) [Accessed 15 September 2024].

Finnish Government, Ministry of the Interior. 2024. Requirements for permanent residence permits to be tightened. Press release. Available at: <https://valtioneuvosto.fi/en/-/1410869/requirements-for-permanent-residence-permits-to-be-tightened> [Accessed 15 September 2024].

Granovetter, M. 1973. The Strength of Weak Ties. *American Journal of Sociology*, 78(6), 1360-1380.

Groves, R., Fowler, F., Couper, m., Lepkowski, J., Singer, E. & Tourangeau, R. 2009. *Survey Methodology*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. New Jersey : John Wiley & Sons Inc.

Kallio H., Pietilä A., Johnson M. & Kangasniemi M. 2016. Systematic methodological review: developing a framework for a qualitative semi-structured interview guide. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 72(12), 2964-2965. E-journal. Available at: [https://mycourses.aalto.fi/pluginfile.php/1741038/mod\\_resource/content/1/KallioEtAl-DevelopingInterviewGuide-2016.pdf](https://mycourses.aalto.fi/pluginfile.php/1741038/mod_resource/content/1/KallioEtAl-DevelopingInterviewGuide-2016.pdf) [Accessed 19 August 2024].

- Karhunen H. & Mathies C. 2021. International Student Migration in Finland: The Role of Graduation on Staying. *Journal of international students*. 11(4), 874-894. doi: 10.32674/jis.v11i4.2427 ojed.org/jis
- Karsten, P. & Moser, K. 2009. Unemployment impairs mental health: Meta-analyses. *Journal of vocational behaviour*, 74, 264-282. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2009.01.001> [Accessed 16 September 2024].
- Kvale, S. & Brinkmann, S. 2009. *InterViews, Learning the Craft of Qualitative Research Interviewing*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. California: SAGE Publications Inc. Available at: [https://books.google.fi/books?id=bZGvwsP1BRwC&printsec=frontcover&redir\\_esc=y#v=onepage&q&f=false](https://books.google.fi/books?id=bZGvwsP1BRwC&printsec=frontcover&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q&f=false) [Accessed 12 October 2024].
- Li H. 2020. How to Retain Global Talent? Economic and Social Integration of Chinese Students in Finland. MDPI. Article. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.3390/su12104161> [Accessed 23 September 2024].
- Majakulma, A. 2011. Enhancing the Employability of International Graduates during Education – A Case Study based on Finnish Universities of Applied Sciences. *Ammattikasvatuksen aikakauskirja*, 13(2), 44–59.
- McIntosh, M. & Morse, J. 2015. Situating and Constructing Diversity in Semi-Structured Interviews. *Global Qualitative Nursing Research*, 2(0). Article. Doi: 10.1177/2333393615597674
- Miles, M., Huberman, M. & Saldaña, J. 1994. *Qualitative Data Analysis, A Methods Sourcebook*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. London: SAGE Publications Ltd.
- Nan, L. 1999. Building a Network Theory of Social Capital. *Connections* 22(1), 28-51. Available at: [https://cafethorium.who.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/33/2021/01/Lin\\_NetworkTheoryOfSocialCaptial-1.pdf](https://cafethorium.who.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/33/2021/01/Lin_NetworkTheoryOfSocialCaptial-1.pdf) [Accessed 16 September 2024].
- Newman, M. 2003. The structure and function of complex networks. Available at: <https://arxiv.org/abs/cond-mat/0303516> [Accessed 16 Sep. 2024].
- Ollanketo, A. 2018. Kansainvälisten Korkeakouluopiskelijoiden Työllistymisen Edistäminen, Toimintamalli ja ketteriä kokeiluja. Xamk Kehittää 36 Kaakkois-Suomen Ammattikorkeakoulu. PDF. Available at: <https://urn.fi/URN:ISBN:978-952-344-073-9> [Accessed 23 September 2024].
- OPH Opetushallitus (Finnish National Agency for Education). 2024. People with immigrant backgrounds in vocational education – Situation picture. Report. Available at: <https://www.oph.fi> [Accessed 11 September 2024].
- Peters, T. 1997. The brand called you. *Fast Company*, (10), 83. Available at: <https://personalimpact.ca/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/thebrandcalleyou.pdf> [Accessed 19 September 2024].

Sharmaz, K. 2006. *Constructing Grounded Theory, A Practical Guide through Qualitative Analysis*. Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications Inc.

Shephard, D. 2010. Self-marketing: Using branding to promote your career. *Career Planning and Adult Development Journal*, 26(4), 11-21. Available via email [Accessed 19 September 2024].

SITRA – The Finnish Innovation Fund. 2017. Työelämä tutkimus. Available at: [https://media.sitra.fi/2017/05/16144238/Sitra-Työelämän-tutkimus-2017-FINAL\\_sitrafi\\_PDF.pdf](https://media.sitra.fi/2017/05/16144238/Sitra-Työelämän-tutkimus-2017-FINAL_sitrafi_PDF.pdf) [Accessed 15 September 2024].

Somekh, B. 2006. *Action Research: a Methodology for Change and Development*. Maidenhead: Open University Press.

Spence, M. 1973. Job Market Signaling. *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 87(3), 355-374. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.2307/1882010> [Accessed 19 September 2024].

Statistics Finland. 2023. Available at: <https://stat.fi/en/statistics/opiskt>.

Tremblay, K. 2005. *Academic Mobility and Immigration*. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 9(3), 196-228. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1028315305277618>.

Valtonen, M. 2023. *Kansainvälinen ja vetovoimainen Suomi – Ratkaisu*. Työelämä- ja osaamispalvelut. Available at: <https://kauppakamari.fi/> [Accessed 12 September 2024].

Villa, T., Salminen T. & Saari J. 2016. Katsaus Kansainvälisten Tutkinto-Opiskelijoiden Työllistymiseen Suomessa. *Opiskelun ja koulutuksen tutkimussäätiö Otus*. Available at: <https://www.otus.fi/julkaisu/katsaus-kansainvalisten-tutkinto-opiskelijoiden-tyollistymiseen-suomessa/> [Accessed 07 October 2024].

Yle News. 2024. PM Orpo: Finland working on strategy to keep foreign students beyond graduation. Press article. Available at: <https://yle.fi/a/74-20079734> [Accessed 15 September 2024].

Yorke, M. 2006. Employability in Higher Education: What It Is, What It Is Not. *ResearchGate*. Article. Available at: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/225083582\\_Employability\\_in\\_Higher\\_Education\\_What\\_It\\_Is\\_What\\_It\\_Is\\_Not](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/225083582_Employability_in_Higher_Education_What_It_Is_What_It_Is_Not) [Accessed 12 October 2024]

Zewde, H. 2018. (De)skilled migrants in Finnish labor market: The impact of racialized discrimination and immigration policies in the labor choices of Ethiopian skilled migrants in Finland. University of Helsinki. Master's thesis. Available at: <http://hdl.handle.net/10138/236902> [Accessed 23 September 2024].

## SURVEY FOR STUDENTS

### Let's Go International Project / Thesis Work life integration for international students ☺

**Win a 50€ gift card** for a shop of your choice by answering the questions below! (10 minutes) Please be mindful when answering. ONLY FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS (non-Finnish) in Kouvola/Kotka regions.

Let's Go International (LGI) is a project supported by Patteri Entrepreneurial Society and regional fund Otsakorven Säätiö. The aim of the project is to help enabling practical training and work life integration for international students in Kouvola and Kotka.

To achieve this goal, we have developed a three-stage plan:

- Understanding the issues through a small questionnaire (which you can participate in right now!) and interviews.
- Facilitating training that meets the needs of international students in their search for work.
- Organizing networking events that connect international students with local companies and provide real opportunities for practical training and job connections.

**Your answers here will have an impact in the future activities we organize.** Through this, international students will have an impact in making a change in the accessibility to training places and work life in Finland.

This project is also part of the Bachelor Thesis of Damián Santibáñez, if you want to know more, want to participate or any comments can be addressed to [projectmanager@patteries.com](mailto:projectmanager@patteries.com)

***If you want to have a deeper talk with us, and deepen your network at the same time, we would love to get in touch for an interview! Please, send us a message and let us know if you want to talk!***

All personal information collected is handled according to the law. All information will be handled anonymously.

Thanks for participating!

\* Obligatoria

#### Information about who you are:

None of this will be use to single out participants, and will be used just for statistical purposes.

1. How old are you? \*

- Under 18
- 18-24
- 25-34
- 35-44
- 45-54

2. Where are you from? \*

- Europe
- Asia
- Middle East
- Africa
- North America
- South America
- Otras

3. Email (This will be used to contact you for future activities, workshops, and networking opportunities)

4. Group of studies (What are you studying and when did you started?) \*

5. Campus \*

6. Do you want to receive future information on activities related to work life integration, training and networking in Kouvola/Kotka? \*

- Yes
- No

7. Do you want to participate in the draft of a €50 gift card for a shop of your choice? \*

- Yes
- No

## Work place experiences

8. Have you done a practical training / worked during your studies? \*

Yes

No

9. Please, explain briefly how did you find that placement (or placements if more than one).

10. What area(s) was your working place / training? (More than one option can be selected) \*

Cleaning and Maintenance Services

Health Care Services

Education and Training Services

Information Technology Services

Customer Service and Sales

Manufacturing and Production

Hospitality and Tourism Services

Otras

11. Did you find anything challenging about this work experience as a foreigner? Difficulties or things you would have liked differently?

12. If "yes". Please, rate your level of satisfaction with this work experience

1 - Very dissatisfied

5 - Very satisfied

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

## Finding a training / working place

13. If you need to find a work place, do you know where to look for it? \*

Yes

No

14. What is the main difficulty or difficulties that you encounter when looking for a training / working place? \*

15. What do you think is the most important skill or knowledge to find a work place in Finland? \*

16. Which one of your personal skills do you think could help you finding a training place/work place here in Finland? \*

17. Would you consider to stay working in Finland after your studies? \*

Yes

No

18. How willingly would you be to learn Finnish language?

1 - not interested at all in learning it

10 - you will definitely learn the Finn language \*

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	----

19. Do you know what is the "Hidden Job Market?" \*

Yes

No

Otrás

Let's keep in touch!

20. Would you be willing to participate in an interview about the subject? \*

- Yes
- No
- Maybe, tell me more

21. Thank you!

- Thank you!

---

Este contenido no está creado ni respaldado por Microsoft. Los datos que envíe se enviarán al propietario del formulario.

 Microsoft Forms

# SURVEY FOR LOCAL COMPANIES

Appendix 2/1

## Let's Go International Project / Thesis Work life integration for international students

### Helping International Students in Finland Find Training & Work: Let's Go International Project

Let's Go International (LGI) is a project that aims to help international students in Kouvola and Kotka, Finland, find practical training and work opportunities. Supported by Patteri Entrepreneurial Society and regional fund William ja Ester Otsakonven Säätiö, the project consists of three stages:

- Understanding the issues through questionnaires and interviews.
- Facilitating training that meets the needs of international students in their search for work.
- Organizing networking events that connect international students with local companies and provide real opportunities for practical training and job connections.

By participating in this questionnaire, you can help us make informed decisions to improve the accessibility of work opportunities for international students in Finland.

This project is also part of the Bachelor Thesis of Damián Santibáñez. If you want to learn more or get involved, please contact the project manager at [projectmanager@patteries.com](mailto:projectmanager@patteries.com) or +358413180196.

If you want to be part of the discussion, we would love to interview you. Please let us know at the end of this questionnaire.

Together, we can help international students in Finland build their careers and contribute to the local economy. Take part in the Let's Go International project today!

\* Obligatoria

1. Would you be interested in working with IS (International Students)? \*

- Yes
- No

2. What is the most challenging issue you would think could appear when working with IS?  
(Vastauksen voi antaa suomeksi) \*

3. How considerable is for you, as an employer, the Finnish language skills of a prospect IS?  
1 - not considerable, we can adapt  
5 - very considerable, cannot work without knowing Finnish \*

4. What is the most valuable benefit you think could come from working with IS? (Vastauksen voi antaa suomeksi) \*

5. Would you be willing to talk with us about the internationalization of worklife in the region?  
We would love to have a small interview with you on the subject \*

Yes

No

6. Please, where can we reach you?

---

Este contenido no está creado ni respaldado por Microsoft. Los datos que envíe se enviarán al propietario del formulario.

 Microsoft Forms

## SEMI STRUCTURED INTERVIEW GUIDELINES: STUDENTS

Students	
Topics to be covered:	Questions
Difficulties when searching, understanding of the Finnish labor market	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Where do you think most jobs are found in Finland?</li> <li>- Do you feel you are making enough connections? That you <u>have the opportunity to work towards "being connected"</u>?</li> <li>- Have you participated in business events, or other? Do you find them useful?</li> <li>- Do you know where you could get such contacts? / How do you feel about business events?</li> </ul>
Culture barrier	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Do you have contacts you think you could leverage to find a job or a training place?</li> <li>- How do you feel about approaching Finns?</li> <li>- Do you think your social skills can be helpful in the context of finding a job here?</li> </ul>
Language barrier	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Do you want to learn Finnish?</li> <li>- Do you have courses of Finnish?</li> <li>- How would you approach learning Finnish? What would be a format that would be comfortable for you? For example, exchanging native language, courses on specific subjects (<u>worklife</u>), or language clubs? What could be good to help you get better in the language barrier, considering you want to learn Finnish.</li> </ul>
The skill set to find work and training opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- What are the skills or characteristics in someone you think are important to find training positions here?</li> <li>- What is the value that foreigners can add to a local working place?</li> <li>- <b>Do you know how to generate opportunities on a networking event?</b></li> </ul>
<u>Experiences</u> at work and suggestions for the future	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- What are some of you experiences when working or training here in Finland? (searching, finding, in there...)</li> <li>- What would you tell companies as a student looking for opportunities and ready to work here?</li> </ul>

## SEMI STRUCTURED INTERVIEW GUIDELINES:COMPANIES

Companies	
Topics to be covered:	Questions
- Who are you?	- Who are you, what are <u>you</u> pro at that you do in your work? -What do you do with your company? What is your area of business, where are you going?
Finding a trainee: Difficulties when deciding to take a trainee	- Would you consider taking a trainee? - Pros and cons from <u>you</u> perspective? - How can those difficulties be diminished, for <u>example</u> ,/ how could the university help, <u>or a preparation</u> beforehand for the trainee? - (Work permits and taxes issues)?
The language and culture barrier	- Language at work? How does it work at yours? - Ideas to take away friction? Culture barriers when someone is just starting  - What could be a realistic approach to integration and work life training from your experience? (Always talking about IS)
The real important qualities, skill set	- What are the fundamental and minimum skills that an IS must bring if they would like to work with you?  - What are the skills that you could benefit from international students?
Activities	- Have you <u>participated in the past</u> in such activities? Do you have some suggestions?  We will be organizing <u>activities</u> , where we hope to have IS and local companies meet and possibly have fruitful networking. Suggestions to reach out? What would you <u>hope</u> as a company, compared to other events you have participated.  - Do you see <u>benefit</u> of these kind of activities?
Previous experiences and suggestions for the future	- From your international experience, - Any suggestions to create relationships between local companies and IS?