

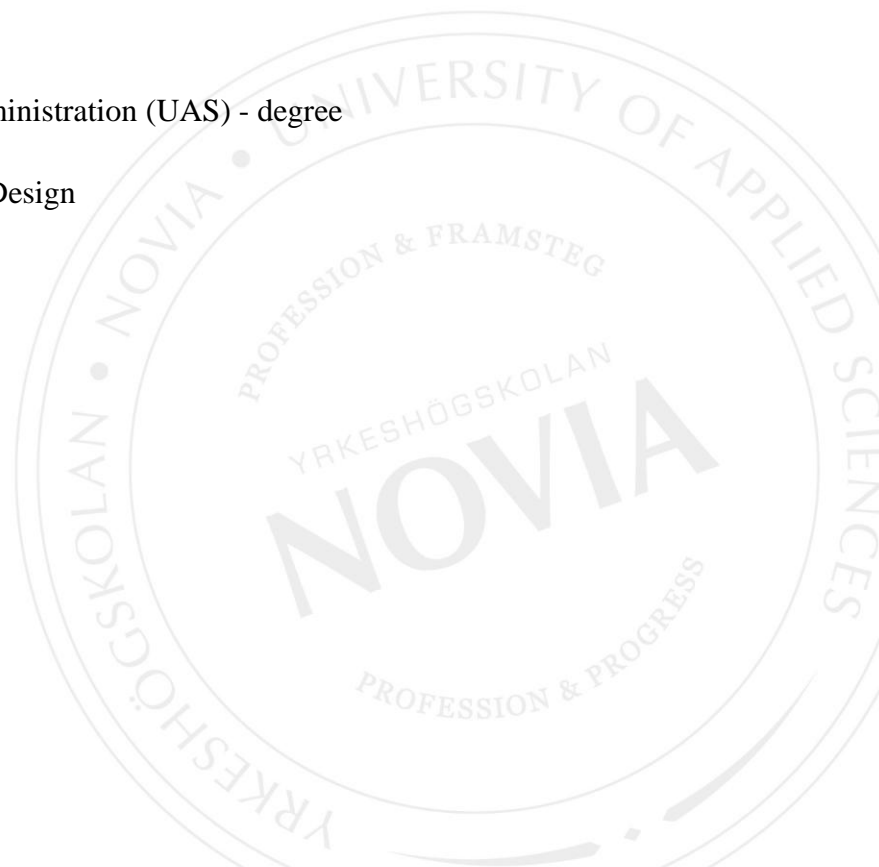
**Enhancing the Mental Health of International Master's Students in Novia UAS**  
**Using Service Design**

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## **Abstract**

This study explored the challenges faced by international master's students at Novia University of Applied Sciences (Novia UAS), with a particular focus on mental health, social integration, and academic adjustment. As international students represent a growing portion of university populations worldwide, their well-being and academic success are critical areas of concern for higher education institutions. This research specifically sought to understand the issues that international master's students at Novia UAS encounter, using a combination of the Double Diamond design framework and design thinking approaches to develop student-centred solutions that address these challenges. The study was conducted using a qualitative research approach, primarily through semi-structured interviews. A total of seven participants, including five international master's students, a student psychologist, and the Head of the Degree of Service Design, were interviewed to gather in-depth insights into their experiences. The interviews revealed significant challenges that were then categorized into eight major areas: cultural and social adjustment, academic challenges, mental health issues, job unavailability, loneliness, accommodation difficulties, and acclimatization to Finland's winter. These categories formed the foundation for the research's Discover and Define phases, where the problems were thoroughly explored and defined.

One of the most pressing issues identified was the difficulty students faced in adapting to Finnish culture, particularly in terms of communication and social integration. Language barriers and cultural differences created a sense of isolation, which compounded the students' feelings of loneliness and hindered their academic performance. Additionally, many students struggled with the transition to the Finnish educational system, which often differs significantly from the academic environments in their home countries. Technical challenges with the learning platforms further added to this stress, leading to increased anxiety and frustration. Mental health emerged as a major concern, with students reporting high levels of stress and anxiety. The study also highlighted the financial pressures faced by international students, particularly in terms of job unavailability. The inability to find part-time work not only caused financial strain but also worsened students' anxiety and affected their overall well-being. This was compounded by accommodation challenges and difficulties in adjusting to Finland's harsh winter conditions, which some students found emotionally taxing.

Benchmarking the services at Novia UAS against those provided by other universities, such as the University of Helsinki, Aalto University, and Sheffield Hallam University, revealed that Novia lags in critical areas. While other institutions offer structured career services, culturally sensitive mental health programmes, and proactive wellness initiatives, Novia UAS lacks these essential services. This gap underscored the need for significant improvements in the support offered to international students, particularly around mental health, employability, and social integration. Based on the findings, the study proposed several recommendations for Novia UAS to improve the experience of its international master's students. These include expanding mental health services to include culturally sensitive counsellors and integrating mental health and career services to provide holistic support. Additionally, the study recommended peer mentorship programmes, and inclusive social activities that promote interaction between local and international students. Career services should also be enhanced by offering personalized counselling, job preparation workshops, and networking opportunities with Finnish companies.

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## **1 Introduction**

Mental health and its related issues have been a matter of concern for quite a long time earning little regard and interest from the respective healthcare facilities and systems (Limone & Toto, 2022). Mental health is anticipated to overtake physical illness as the primary cause of death by 2029 (Alzheimer's Association, 2013) also mental health disorders are recognized as the world's second-largest cause of global disease burden (Global Burden of Disease Study 2013 Collaborators, 2015). It has been reported that over one million individuals commit suicide each year, with another 10 to 20 million attempting it (Bomyea et al., 2013). According to Gustavsson et al. (2011), the global cost of mental illness was approximately \$2.5 trillion in 2010, with a projected increase to more than \$6 trillion by 2030. Nearly half of the world's population suffers from mental illness, which affects their self-esteem, relationships, and ability to function in daily life (Storrie et al., 2010).

Mental health issues among university students, including stress, anxiety, and depression, have been on the rise in recent years. These issues can have a significant impact on students' academic performance, social relationships, and overall well-being. Poor mental health of students in further and higher education has been an increasing concern for public health and policymakers globally (Campbell et al., 2022). University students are more at risk of depression and anxiety than their peers who go straight into work. These findings are based on a study by McCloud and her co-researchers, suggesting mental health may deteriorate due to the financial strain of higher education and worries associated with achieving high results in the wider and social context (McCloud et al., 2023). They also reported that by the age of 25, the difference in mental health had disappeared between graduates and non-graduates. Studies on mental health problems have indicated that women are more likely than men to admit to having a depressive condition (Panchal et al., 2020).

Kukoyi et al. (2022), stated that one of the reasons for the high prevalence of mental health difficulties is that a population's source of mental health-related information is inadequate. Inadequate use of mental health services is a significant problem in the control and management of mental illnesses. According to Oksanen et al. (2017), there was an increasing trend of frequent psychological distress among Finnish university students from 2000 to 2012, with the peak prevalence occurring in 2008. This increase may reflect the growing multifaceted environmental demands and dietary choices of students. Mental health of Finnish university students has been reported to be lower in vegetarian students than non-vegetarian, in addition, academic performance was said to be associated with the consumption of specific food items rather than diet types (Ansung, 2021).

It has been reported that individuals with high levels of depression (Martínez-Hernández et al., 2014), suicidal ideation, and a history of self-harm (Cotter et al., 2015) are more likely to seek help than those with less significant symptoms. Although health professionals are vital sources of this information, due to their scarcity and generally low accessibility, other sources are crucial in teaching the public about mental health issues such as the internet, self-help books, pamphlets, telephone hotlines, newspapers, television, and radio. Most young persons with mental disorders choose not to get help from health professionals (Burgess et al., 2009). Friends and families are the most common sources of assistance for students. Furthermore, it has been documented that despite the ill effects of mental diseases such as depression, anxiety, bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, psychosis, eating disorders, mood disorders, and psychosis, most students do not seek treatment or prefer informal sources of aid to professional sources of help (Ogorchukwu et al., 2016). This could lead to misleading information and further worsen mental health problems. The likelihood that a person would use healthcare services is reflected in predisposing factors while enabling factors are resources that may make it easier for a person to access healthcare. Furthermore,

positive health-seeking behaviour in patients can lead to better utilization of health services, including patients with mental health problems (Bhattarai et al., 2015).

The contention of underutilization of mental health services among university students is a public health concern as poor mental health affects not just interpersonal relationships but also other physical life factors (Wang et al., 2019). Some universities set up counselling centres and other mental health units with the primary function of providing direct counselling interventions for students whose personal problems interfere with their ability to function successfully in the academic environment (Lockard et al., 2012). However, literature reports that despite the chronicled benefits of these services, a good number of university students still underutilize mental health services even when these services are available within the campus community (Eisenberg et al., 2011). This thesis begins with a general summary of this study's background, including this study's justification, problem statement, research questions, and significance. This study aimed to enhance the mental health status and well-being of international master's students at Novia University through a multifaceted approach.

## **1.1 Problem Statement**

According to Alzheimer's Association (2013), mental illness is anticipated to overtake physical illness as the primary cause of death by 2029. Mental health issues such as stress, anxiety, and depression, among university students (especially international master's students), have been a growing concern worldwide in recent years, even at Novia University. This has been linked to having a significant impact on the students' academic performance, social relationships, and overall well-being (Campbell et al., 2022). University students are more at risk of depression and anxiety than their peers who go straight into work (McCloud et al., 2023). High levels of depression (Martínez-Hernández et al., 2014), suicidal ideation, and a history of self-harm (Cotter et al., 2015) are the common factors that have been

reported to cause mental health among students. More so, the demands of graduate-level studies, coupled with personal and professional responsibilities, can contribute to high levels of stress, anxiety, and depression among students. Despite the university's efforts to provide support services, there is a need to comprehensively assess the mental health needs of international master's students and develop targeted interventions to enhance their well-being.

The purpose of this thesis is to investigate the current mental health status of international master's students at Novia UAS, identify factors contributing to mental health issues, and propose evidence-based strategies to promote mental well-being. By addressing these problems, this study will raise the general well-being and academic achievement rates of international master's students, which in turn will add value to the university.

## **1.2 Research Gap**

The focus of this research is to bridge the gap in the existing literature and highlight the relevance and significance of the mental health status of international master's degree students. Although there is a lot of literature on mental health issues among university students, especially undergraduates, there is minimal research that has been conducted on this topic focusing on international students pursuing a master's degree. This study intends to bridge this gap by offering recommendations that are specifically designed according to the distinctive conditions of international master's students at Novia University of Applied Sciences. The research approach seeks to increase the understanding of mental health among university students and their need for effective interventions. The rise of mental health issues among university students such as stress, anxiety, and depression have been witnessed in the last few years. These issues have serious impacts on the student's school performance, socialisation, and general well-being.

### **1.3 Objectives of the Study**

This research seeks to evaluate the mental health condition of international master's students at Novia UAS and attempts to determine the most crucial factors for their mental health, by evaluating the prevalence of stress, anxiety, and depression manifestations among the graduate students, their coping strategies and their help-seeking behaviours. Besides this, the study aims to evaluate the academic workload, social support, and lifestyle habits on the mental health of international master's students. The findings of this study are to be used to develop recommendations for interventions and ways of support that are tailored to the requirements of international master's students who aim to improve their mental well-being and achieve academic success. This research will also target the enhancement of the individual capacity of international master's students to recognize and identify mental health challenges as well as the creation of a friendly and inclusive environment on campus for help-seeking.

### **1.4 Significance of the Study**

This research is fundamental not only to Novia UAS but also to its international master's students; hence, its findings should not be underestimated. This study, first, highlights the importance of mental health in the international master's student population, which is unfortunately not prevalent in the study of mental health. In contrast with providing information about the mental welfare of higher education students in general, this study will help to acquire important information specific to international Master students who might be dealing with stressors and challenges that are different from the undergraduates. Therefore, this study's research information might help in developing specialized support services and interventions for international master's students.

Moreover, the research will exemplify the data about the quantity of stress, anxiety, and depression cases among international master's students at Novia UAS. Such information is a must in setting the boundaries of the problem and advocating the allocation of funds and policies to look after students' mental health. Furthermore, the study will be important for identifying factors affecting mental health like academic workload, coping mechanisms, and social support, which in turn will be important for formulating evidence-based strategies to promote mental well-being among international graduate students. These strategies not only help students deal with stress more effectively but also improve their holistic life quality.

Lastly, the study carries significance beyond the university framework. By sensitizing society on mental health problems and facilitating a supportive environment, the research may reduce the rate of stigmatization of mental issues and encourage a tendency to seek assistance among students. Ultimately, the study has the potential to improve the overall mental health and academic success of international master's students at Novia University.

### **1.5 Research Questions**

The research questions are addressed below.

1. What are the main factors contributing to mental health challenges among international master's students?
2. What are the existing support services and interventions for enhancing mental health at Novia University for international Master's students?
3. How can Novia University enhance its mental health support services and interventions to better meet the needs of international Master's students?

## **Elaboration of the Research Question**

The first research question guides in identifying the factors within the university environment, academic demands, personal life, and social interactions that contribute to mental health challenges among international master's students. More so, the second research question would help to see what sort of mental health support system is available right now at Novia UAS, consisting of counselling programs, mental health awareness campaigns, and other support activities. The final research question puts forward the recommendations on the possible improvement of mental health services offered to international master's students at Novia University of Applied Sciences based on the individual needs and choices of these students.

### **1.6 Scope of Limitations**

This is the explanation of various limitations encountered in this study, which may also affect the results presented. This research focuses only on international master's students at Novia UAS. This research study concentrates on evaluating the present situation concerning mental health, recognizing contributors, and providing recommendations for its improvement. A semi-structured approach, such as interviews, was employed to gather data. The findings of this study may not be generalizable to other universities or student populations. The research relies on self-reported data, which may be subject to bias. This study's scope is limited to assessing mental health challenges and developing recommendations, without implementing or evaluating interventions.

### **1.7 Commissioner's Details**

As the prestigious commissioner of this study, Novia UAS is one of the Universities of Applied Sciences in Finland. Novia UAS operates within Vaasa, Turku, Raasepori, and Pietarsaari campuses. With 5000 students, and a workforce consisting of about 350 people,

Novia UAS is renowned for its dedication to higher education that is practical and provides a wide range of degree programs in Swedish, Finnish, and English, encouraging linguistic variety among its student body. Novia is an entrepreneurial UAS with close contact with its students and working life. It is dedicated to meeting the competence needs of bilingual Finland and its sustainable societal development. To prepare professionals for expert and developmental roles that reflect the changing demands of the workplace, the institution is crucial. Novia UAS sees itself as a vital contribution to the growth of local working life and industry with a strategic focus on gaining national and international prominence.

As the commissioner, Novia UAS has taken on the duty of evaluating, developing, and providing the targeted interventions this study will provide to support international master's students undergoing mental health issues in its community. The administration of the institution understands the value of offering thorough support services that are tailored to the various language backgrounds and needs of its international students. The choice to undertake this study illustrates Novia UAS's proactive attitude to making sure that its international master's students are successful and satisfied. However, to inform strategic changes in support services and support Novia UAS's continued efforts to maintain excellence in both undergraduate and master's student academic performance, this study aimed to reveal the current mental health status of international master's students at Novia University, identify factors contributing to mental health issues and propose evidence-based strategies to promote mental well-being.

## **1.8 Thesis Structure**

A groundwork is laid for this study by defining mental health, its risk factors, and causes among university students. Also, this study's problem statement, the significance of the study, and research objective -cum- questions are given attention in Chapter 1. In Chapter 2, the overview of mental health issues among international students, and reviews of previous

studies on mental health interventions for students are discussed. In Chapter 3, data collection and analysis will be covered. However, this will employ service design, design thinking, and double-diamond methods. Based on the data gathered, Chapter 4 conducts a gap analysis and makes suggestions for improving the services provided to assist international master's students in overcoming mental health or its related issues. The thesis will be concluded in Chapter 5, which summarizes the main findings, goes through the research goals again, and suggests possible directions for future study. This organized framework guarantees a succinct and clear description of the research process.

## **2 University Students and Mental Health**

Mental health among students in higher education is increasing vibrantly in this period of unparalleled globalization globally, contributing to poor academic performance, social relationships, and overall well-being of the students, even at Novia UAS. This thesis is a thorough assess the current state of mental health of Novia UAS international master's students, identifying contributing factors, and developing recommendations for enhancing mental health.

The successful design and execution of findings or recommendations that will be birthed from this study on international master's students are crucial in enhancing their mental health support services, which may result in improved academic performance, increased retention rates, and better overall well-being of a student. An overview of mental health issues among international master's students, Mental health through history, Prevalence of mental health issues among University students, and Previous studies on mental health interventions for students are the four essential dimensions that are utilized in this section. This section also deals with theoretical aspects, which would be the building block for the interpretation of the mental health menaces in international master's students.

### **2.1 Overview of Mental Health Issues**

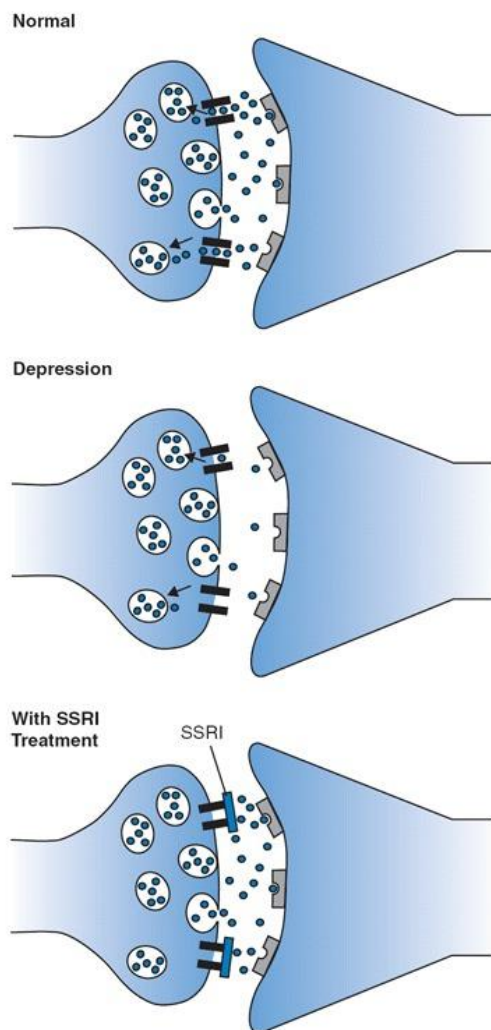
Mental health refers to a person's emotional, psychological, and social well-being. It involves how individuals think, feel, and act as they navigate the ups and downs of life. Mental health reigns paramount at every moment of life, whether as a kid, a teenager, or an adult. Good mental health implies an overall feeling of wellness, self-control, and confidence to deal with the difficulties of living. It encompasses the abilities as well to bond and cooperate, to work efficiently, to cope, and other human capabilities (Gautam et al., 2024). Mental illnesses, however, are states of mind that impair a person's emotional, cognitive, or

behavioural capacities. These illnesses may show up and cause a lot of negative consequences like having brought changes to a person's life, relationships, and physical health (Schlack et al., 2021). Illnesses such as depression, anxiety, schizophrenia, and bipolar all belong to the list of mental disorders. Mental health has multiple influential aspects such as genes, body, environment, and personal mind (Stoewen, 2022). On top of this, attitude and discrimination can contribute to how mental health is perceived and dealt with.

Scientifically, mental health illness results from problems with the communication between neurons in the brain (Ibanez & Zimmer, 2023). The brain has not always been esteemed as the locus of that highly complex and contradictory entity, the human mind. Hippocrates, in the fourth century (B.C.) Greece identified the brain as "the interpreter of consciousness" and deduced that various forms of madness can arise from an unhealthy brain. He also held, though, that the brain was a gland and was most important as the site at which air, with its vital properties, was drawn into the body and entered the blood. Aristotle, for his part, considered the brain merely a cooling organ at the top of the body (Ackerman, 1992).

Early Christian thought located mental functions in the ventricles of the brain, along a progression from the front of the head toward the back: sensation and imagination in the anterior ventricle, reason, and intellect in the third ventricle, and memory, as the most selective mental faculty, in the rearmost ventricle. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the popular science of phrenology sought to assign every conceivable trait of personality to its specific location on the cerebral cortex, as if the mind were a physical entity like the brain. Most recently, neuroscience has begun to uncover some of the intricate and less obvious relations between the mind and the brain, as investigative approaches from biochemistry, psychology, and genetics converge on an understanding of the physiology of mental illness (Ackerman, 1992).

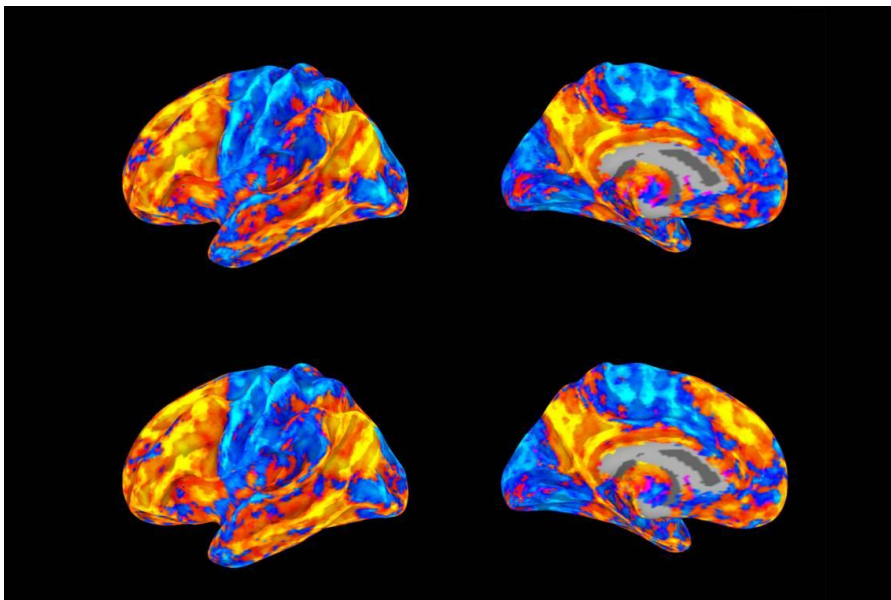
Several studies have hypothesized that when the level of serotonin (a known neurotransmitter) is lower in individuals, it results in depression (Jauhar et al., 2023; Moncrieff et al., 2023). Selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs) work by reducing the amount of serotonin that is taken back into the presynaptic neuron. This leads to an increase in the amount of serotonin available in the synaptic space for binding to the receptor on the postsynaptic neuron. Changes in other neurotransmitters (in addition to serotonin) may occur in depression, thus adding to the complexity of the cause underlying the disease (Figure 2.1; Edinoff et al., 2021). Scientists also believe that there may be disruptions in the neurotransmitters (such as dopamine, glutamate, and norepinephrine) in individuals who have schizophrenia (McCutcheon et al., 2020). One indication that dopamine might be an important neurotransmitter in schizophrenia comes from the observation that cocaine addicts sometimes show symptoms similar to schizophrenia. Cocaine acts on dopamine-containing neurons in the brain to increase the amount of dopamine in the synapse (Venton et al., 2006).



**Figure 2.1:** Schematic illustration of how mental illnesses are associated with changes in neurochemicals (e.g., in people who have depression, less of the neurotransmitter serotonin (small circles) is released into the synaptic space than in people who do not have depression. Certain medications called selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs) relieve symptoms of depression by causing an increase in the amount of serotonin in the synaptic space (Adapted from National Institutes of Health, 2007).

In a study by Elliot et al. (2018), it was proved that transdiagnostic risk for common forms of mental illness is associated with patterns of connectome-wide intrinsic connectivity between visual association cortex and networks supporting executive control and self-referential processes, networks that are often impaired across categorical disorders. Also, they reveal that poor communication between the four regions of the visual cortex that help

process what a person sees is associated with a greater risk of mental illness (Figure 2.2), suggesting that a person's risk of mental illness generally elevates when the visual cortex has trouble communicating with the brain networks responsible for introspection and concentration.



**Figure 2.2:** Brain imaging showing poor communication between the four regions of the visual cortex highlighting how disruptions in communication between the visual cortex and networks supporting executive control are associated with higher risks of mental illness. It suggests that impaired connectivity in specific brain regions can be an indicator of mental health vulnerabilities (Adapted from Elliot et al., 2018).

## 2.2 Mental Health Through History

Mental health has a legendary story running back to millennia before the modern era. Throughout history, societies have developed their notions about mental illness and the treatment thereof. In ancient cultures like Egypt, Greece, and Rome, mental disorder was attributed to the demons or the divine. The treatment was often spiritual practice, exorcism, or herbal medicine (Farreras, 2024). In the Middle Ages in Europe, religious beliefs and

superstitious attitudes towards mental illness were the norm. People suffering from mental illness were isolated and thought to be possessed by demons. Treatment was rough and it even occurred that people were locked in cells or just neglected (Espí Forcén & Espí Forcén, 2014).

The Renaissance period witnessed the emergence of a more human approach to the treatment of mental disorders. The movement of humanism and enlightenment gave prominence to the concepts of reason and knowledge over divine structures and revelation. Some psychiatric hospitals did appear however the standard of living there was low for patients. The 19th century was a period of development in mental health care. The emergence of asylums and the dawn of psychiatry as a separate medical discipline marked the beginning of the evolution of a more formalized mental health care system (Nenadović, 2011; Tasca et al., 2012).

The beginning of the 20th century witnessed a lot of accomplishments as far as psychiatric care is concerned. For example, Sigmund Freud formulated psychoanalysis while psychotropic medications such as antidepressants and antipsychotic drugs were introduced (Baldessarini, 2014; Iannitelli et al., 2019). The trend of deinstitutionalization came up and the budget for community-based services expanded, which led to the closing of many asylums (Baldessarini, 2014). Nowadays, mental health is admitted to be a vital factor in everybody's health and life quality. A recognition of biopsychosocial complexity with mental disease development has emerged. A treatment modality, which is a combination of medication, psychotherapy, and further supportive services, has been varied to meet the specific needs of each client (Iannitelli et al., 2019). Despite the progress that has been made in dealing with mental illness, the mental health stigma continues to be a major obstacle to treatment and acceptance in society. Removing the stigma associated with mental health

issues and offering more ways to obtain care are among the major tasks in mental health today (Shahwan et al., 2022).

### **2.3 Prevalence of Mental Health Issues Among University Students**

Research suggests that the mental health of students studying for master's degree courses is more vulnerable than the general student population. Such common mental health complaints include anxiety, depression, and stress (Maser et al., 2019; Pascoe et al., 2020; Liyanage et al., 2021; Kılıç & Karahan, 2023). It is natural to feel inadequate and overwhelmed since graduate programs are very competitive and both the students and the system have certain expectations. Also, shifted academic and social surroundings may worsen pre-existing mental health difficulties or bring forth new ones (Cage et al., 2021; Limone & Toto, 2022).

Numerous research papers have revealed that the incidence level of conditions like anxiety and depression among graduate school students is often up to 33% (or six times larger), which is significantly higher than the prevalence in the general population (Eleftheriades et al., 2020; Gin et al., 2021; Satinsky et al., 2021). As reported by Woolston (2020) and Senthil Kumar et al. (2023), 50% of graduate students reported manifesting depression, anxiety, or burnout symptoms during their programme. More so, poor mental health was reported as one of the reasons for the students' leaving academia. Woolston's study established that 32% of students at the graduate level had depression, and 39% had anxiety.

Besides, other research demonstrates that a large percentage of graduate students have anxiety, depression, or exhaustion and that time in academia matters significantly. The graduate students had their own distinct mental health issues profile that portrayed high levels of hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal (HPA) axis impairment and psychological detachment. Also, there was no difference observed among students regardless of their

academic level with decreased work engagement, more anxiety, and depression in general as compared to non-students (Gallea et al., 2021).

The increase in the focus of research on graduate students' mental health and well-being from Okoro et al. (2021) in bibliometric analysis of articles indexed in Scopus and published between 2012 and 2021 was found to be growing over the years with a remarkable increase in the last two years probably owing to the COVID-19 pandemic and concerns around remote learning. The countries with the most frequent publications were situated in the United Kingdom and the United States of America. Their results indicate that mental health issues are quite prevalent among master's students. One of the reasons for mental health problems among graduate students is that they are expected to cope with a highly competitive academic environment and face high demands in the educational setting. Hence, universities have to acknowledge the high occurrence of mental health problems in the majority of master's students to provide support services and facilities to assist the students in psychological care.

#### **2.4 Previous Studies on Mental Health Interventions for Students**

Positive mental health is often defined as a state where an individual is feeling good and functioning well. Mental well-being has been shown to protect university students from suicidal thoughts and learning difficulties (Keyes et al., 2012). According to the Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (2023), there is no single cause for mental illness. Several factors can contribute to the risk for mental illness, such as adverse childhood experiences (like trauma or a history of abuse (for example, child abuse, sexual assault, witnessing violence, etc.)), experiences related to other ongoing (chronic) medical conditions, such as cancer or diabetes, biological factors or chemical imbalances in the brain, use of alcohol or drugs, and having feelings of loneliness or isolation, etc. Student mental health is a heterogeneous research area and is hampered by the use of imprecise terms, both for

describing risk factors and mental health outcomes (Sheldon et al., 2021). University students worldwide are at risk for mental health disorders because of the range of stressors they experience (Aldiabat et al., 2014). However, empirical reviews of previous studies on mental health issues and interventions for students in Finland have provided valuable insights into the prevalence, causes, and effective strategies for addressing mental health concerns in this population. Several key themes and findings have emerged and are discussed below.

Firstly, the prevalence of mental health issues among students in Finland is consistently reported to be high. Studies have found that a significant proportion of students experience symptoms of anxiety, depression, stress, and burnout during their academic journey (Sarasjärvi et al., 2022). This was earlier reported in research carried out in 2021 by the Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare (THL), in cooperation with the Social Insurance Institution of Finland (Kela), however, it was stated that one-third of higher education students in Finland suffer from symptoms of anxiety and depression. This is a proportionally higher rate of mental health symptoms and psychological distress than the adult population, according to the research. The latest research shows that 7 percent of students suffer from burnout while another 19% have milder symptoms of burnout and feelings of inefficiency. While the exact prevalence rates may vary depending on the study population and methodology used, the overall trend suggests that mental health issues are a widespread concern among Finnish students. A considerable body of research has revealed that university students are almost surely to suffer from either mental or physical stress. Despite this, University students display higher depression symptoms than the public (Sarmiento, 2015).

The research has brought out the relationship between the student's mental state and several health risk factors that are observed in Finland mainly among university students. Student

pressure and deadlines are uncanny features of academic programs and contribute to many stresses and anxieties that sometimes turn into the compulsion for many students to seek medical help if any condition worsens. Social isolation is an important risk factor as well because students may feel distant from their peers and friends they used to be with, especially those who study abroad or in a different city. However, students do not escape financial stress from this mechanism since a lot of them cannot afford tuition fees, accommodation, and living expenses. Besides that, some dimensions might be the social factors like gender, and social status which we are born with. Men and women from lower social status are at a higher risk (Reiss et al., 2019; Reile & Sisask, 2021).

Besides this, very few investigations have targeted the numerosity of interventions and their effectiveness of them in curbing mental health problems among Finnish students, and globally as a whole. These interventions may partly involve the deployment of different approaches, for instance, counselling and psychotherapy, stress management programs, peer support groups, and mental health education discussions. Ultimately, such programs have provided encouraging results achieving alleviating symptoms as well as enhancing the overall wellness of the students. For instance, it has been indicated that cognitive-behavioural therapy (CBT) can help with the treatment of anxiety and depression (Gautam et al., 2020; Zamiri-Miandoab et al., 2022), whereas mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) interventions appear to be a strategy to deal with psychological and physiological symptoms of stress (Kriakous et al., 2021).

In the study of Kohtala et al. (2015), it was shown that the brief Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT)-based intervention aimed at the reduction of sub-clinical depressive symptoms could also be applied as a means of controlling mental health in the master's student of Finland. Educative and stigma-reducing programs like peer support groups and mental health educational initiatives are also proven to help increase mental

health alertness and realization (Sunday et al., 2022). Additionally, diet choices can contribute to academic accomplishments, which is one of the main psychological issues for young people today. In a study that examined the connections between diet choice, mental health, and academic achievement by Ansung (2021), it was revealed that vegetarian university students are more likely to have lower mental health status than non-vegetarian students on average, and that, academic achievement is associated with the consumption of specific food items rather than diet types. Overall, the findings suggest that vegetarian students should carefully monitor their mental health status. Also, students should be supported to improve their food choices and dietary quality for their academic achievement.

Mobile phone technology has become an integral part of peoples' lives. It has changed how we interact with each other and how we access information. Nolan and co-author describe how mobile phone use, in particular text messaging, has been used to communicate with and support students with mental health problems attending a university in Ireland to manage their academic and social lives. They showed that text messaging with a student population using a mental health support service was valuable, and it offered a means of maintaining ongoing contact between the service users and the staff and acted not only as a means for receiving and giving information but as a means of maintaining the on-going therapeutic relationship (Nolan et al., 2011).

Nevertheless, regardless of the presence of remedies, diverging impediments arise due to the deprivation of students' right to psychological help in Finland. The mental health stigma stands out as a huge obstacle for a lot of learners, as most of them will be ashamed or embarrassed to avail of help for their problems regarding mental health (Osborn et al., 2022; Swed et al., 2022). There is sometimes a lack of information about resources that could be helpful, and people do not often go to use them for mental health support. More so, there are challenges in the logistics for instance delays in counselling appointments and shortage in

services that contribute to the barrier to health care service delivery (Syed et al., 2013). Additionally, many cultures have such perceptions and practices when it comes to mental health issues as some students may not openly discuss mental health problems or won't consider them very important (Zhou et al., 2022; Asimwe et al., 2023).

However, given such research outcomes, there is a tendency to realize the significance of the multi-faceted programs tackling mental health in the context of Finnish education. These measures include embedding such preventive measures as stress reduction programs and resilience-building initiatives that help people's mental health, among others (Meriläinen, 2014; Kirkbride et al., 2024). It additionally involves the creation of a supportive environment, which ensures that students have a feeling of confidence to seek assistance in case of need (Campbell et al., 2022). Early detection and support services, including intervention and treatment, play a significant role in this process, as they enable mental health issues to be recognized and addressed at an early stage which prevents their further development into more severe issues (Colizzi et al., 2020; Singh et al., 2022). Apart from this, mental health services should be administered in such a way that they are available and are specific to student needs to eliminate the problems with the availability of care and push results up.

## **2.5 Theoretical Models for Explaining Mental Challenges**

Theoretical frameworks such as stress-coping models (Lazarus and Folkman's transactional model of stress and coping), and social support theory provide valuable insights into understanding and addressing mental health issues among international students. These frameworks help to explain how individuals respond to stressors and the role of social support in mitigating the negative effects of stress on mental health. In the context of mental health issues among international master's students in Finland, these theoretical frameworks can help explain why some students may be more vulnerable to mental health issues than

others. For example, students who perceive academic pressure as overwhelming may be more likely to experience stress and anxiety (Deng et al., 2022). However, students who have strong social support networks may be better able to cope with these stressors and maintain their mental health. Interventions based on these theoretical frameworks can focus on enhancing individuals' coping skills and social support networks. For example, stress management programs can teach students effective coping strategies, such as problem-solving skills, relaxation techniques, and cognitive restructuring (Yazdani et al., 2010; Amanvermez et al., 2022). Peer support groups can provide a supportive environment where students can share their experiences and receive encouragement and advice from their peers (Simmons et al., 2023). Additionally, efforts to promote mental health literacy and reduce stigma can help create a more supportive and understanding environment for international master's students experiencing mental health issues, as reported by Shahwan *et al.* (2022), but in a caregiver's study.

### **2.5.1 Lazarus and Folkman's Transactional Model of Stress and Coping**

Stress-coping models, such as Lazarus and Folkman's transactional model of stress and coping, propose that stress is a dynamic process involving an individual's appraisal of a stressor and their coping strategies (Berjot & Gillet, 2011; Stanisławski, 2019). According to this model, individuals appraise a situation as stressful or not based on their perceptions and interpretations. They then use coping strategies to manage the stressor and its associated emotions. Effective coping strategies can help reduce the negative impact of stress on mental health.

Unlike earlier theories, this model frames stress as a dynamic interaction between an individual and their environment. It highlights that stress depends on how a person perceives and evaluates situations rather than the situations themselves (Biggs et al., 2017; Obbarius

et al., 2021). When a person encounters a potentially stressful event, they go through a two-stage cognitive appraisal process. The first stage, Primary Appraisal, involves assessing whether the situation is harmful, threatening, or challenging (Wolfers & Utz, 2022). Here, the individual determines if the event is relevant to their well-being and if it poses a danger to them. If the situation is seen as stressful, it is then classified as a threat (potential future harm), a harm/loss (damage that has already occurred), or a challenge (opportunities for growth). More so, in the second stage, Secondary Appraisal, the person evaluates the resources they have available to manage or cope with the stressor (Ghaffari et al., 2021). This involves considering their skills, social support, and emotional resilience. Based on these appraisals, they then choose coping strategies that can help them address or mitigate the stress.

Coping strategies within this model are divided into Problem-Focused and Emotion-Focused approaches as earlier stated. Problem-focused coping involves actions taken to address the root cause of stress, such as making changes or taking direct action (Vishkin & Tamir, 2020; Algorani & Gupta, 2023). Emotion-focused coping, however, centres on regulating the emotional stress response, using tactics like seeking support, reinterpreting the situation, or even temporary avoidance (Ding et al., 2021; Fischer et al., 2021; Nuetzel, 2023). The choice of coping strategy can be influenced by numerous factors, such as the nature of the stressor, individual personality traits, and available social resources. Furthermore, this model highlights that coping is a process, not a one-time reaction. It also provides insight into the adaptive responses individuals can use to manage stress effectively, emphasizing that the interplay between appraisal and coping determines the impact of stress on well-being. This model has since become foundational in psychological and health research for understanding stress and resilience.

### 2.5.2 Social Support Theory

Social support theory emphasizes the importance of social relationships in buffering the effects of stress (Feeney & Collins, 2015; Liu et al., 2023). According to this theory, social support can provide emotional, informational, and instrumental assistance that helps individuals cope with stressors. Social support can come from various sources, including family, friends, peers, and professionals, and can take different forms, such as emotional support (e.g., empathy, reassurance), instrumental support (e.g., practical assistance), and informational support (e.g., advice, guidance) (Drageset, 2021).

The core idea of social support theory is that a dependable social network can foster better mental and physical health, especially during difficult or demanding times (Bjørlykhaug et al., 2021; Acoba, 2024). Emotional support is one dimension of social support, encompassing empathy, care, love, and trust, which help individuals feel valued and understood (Camara et al., 2014; Chronister et al., 2021; Atta et al., 2024). This is often provided by close friends, family members, or significant others, this type of support offers comfort and assurance, reducing feelings of loneliness or isolation in times of distress. Informational support, another facet, involves sharing guidance, advice, or insights that help individuals navigate specific challenges (Fakhraei & Terrion, 2017; Zamiri & Esmaili, 2024). For example, a colleague's perspective on managing workplace pressures or a healthcare provider's recommendations for coping with illness are forms of informational support that empower individuals to manage stress more effectively. Instrumental or tangible support is the third aspect of social support and includes practical assistance such as financial aid, physical help, or provision of essential resources that alleviate immediate burdens (Hua et al., 2021; Cui et al., 2022). This could take the form of helping with childcare, lending money, or providing transportation when needed, all of which relieve some of the weight individuals carry in challenging situations. Multiple research has demonstrated that strong

social support networks are linked to lower levels of anxiety, depression, and stress, and these networks can also promote better recovery outcomes in cases of illness (Saeri et al., 2018; Wang et al., 2018; Hua et al., 2021; Cui et al., 2022; Gabarrell-Pascuet et al., 2023). Additionally, supportive relationships bolster self-esteem and a positive outlook, both of which are essential to overall well-being (Liu et al., 2021; Feeney & Collins, 2015; Andersen et al., 2021).

### **3 Concept Development Process**

Developing the process that can enhance the mental health of international master's students at Novia UAS involves empathising with students to identify their unique challenges, defining key issues, ideating potential solutions, prototyping services, and testing them through feedback. This iterative process ensures that services are tailored to their needs, fostering a supportive environment that enhances overall mental health and integration into the university community.

#### **3.1 Service Design Principle and Design Thinking**

Combining the service design and design thinking principles will be the foundation of the international master's student mental health support system at Novia UAS. In this respect, the employed strategy is based on the idea of a service creation exclusively orientated towards users and subsequently focused on improving the lives of international master's students via Lazarus and Folkman's Transactional Model of Stress and Coping. A holistic approach to value proposition canvas is preferred and the emphasis will be on lean prototyping way (Gibbons, 2018). The value proposition canvas is an indispensable service design tool created by Dr Alexander Osterwalder as a way to check a match between Product and Market (Osterwalder et al., 2014). It is an intricate tool for drawing the link between two parts of Osterwalder's bigger Business Model Canvas: the customer segments and the value proposition. It can be applied in a scenario where there is an existing offering and there is a need to evolve it, add to this the fact that the tool is helpful where the offering is being invented from scratch (Gibbons, 2018). This also implies integrating international master's students into the design process, considering their diverse risks or factors contributing to mental health, particularly depression and stress and continually developing new solutions based on their feedback to improve the provision of mental health services.

Design thinking is a non-linear and cyclical methodology that promotes close dialogue between users and designers (Bender-Salazar, 2023). The main idea is to provide the latest technology in media development that is user-oriented, i.e. how users think, feel, and act. It is just a way of thinking that embraces creativity to develop a unique method for problem-solving (Dam, 2023). But in any case, when it comes to international master's students with mental health concerns, this needs to be human-centered and engender creativity to address the various complexities of depression, stress, anxiety, and even failure to excel academically.

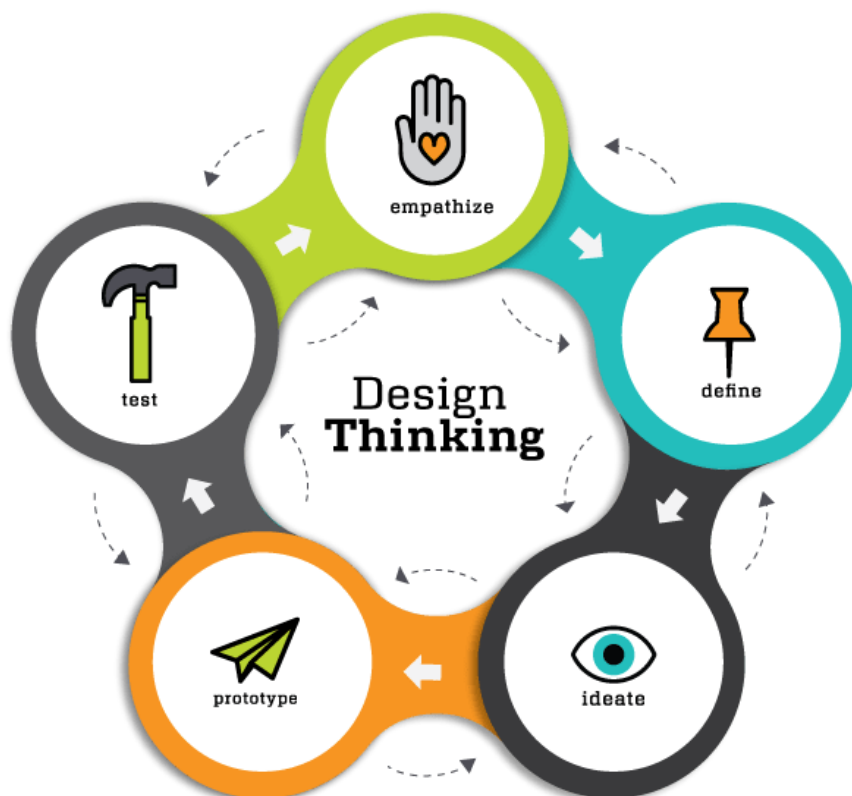
This cooperation between service design and design thinking has often been used to generate innovations that are highly effective in dealing with emergency needs in educational settings. Thus, it helps to develop a problem-solving approach and profound solutions for international students with mental health challenges. Design tools include persona creation, value proposition canvas, and service prototyping (Iriarte et al., 2023; Azura & Ghina, 2024), and they are essential in visualizing the feelings of international master's students who are struggling with mental health issues. To Novia UAS, the process of integrating design thinking and service design into the international master's level student support services becomes a strategic aspect. In addition, integration results in an atmosphere that is free and easy, open-minded and adaptive as the university tries to make a real difference through its approach to workplace development.

This conceptual framework provides the thesis not only the chance to boost mental well-being among international master students at Novia UAS but also to inspect the assistance services that are already in place, which means the study can also suggest practical solutions incorporating service design as well as design thinking. Student support services must be not merely effective in tackling mental health issues and related matters at Novia UAS but also helpful in improving a student's grades and attending lectures, increasing retention rates,

and offering better life quality to students. This will help to build a bridge between theories and practical implementation. It will be vital to ensure that the support services of the international master's students remain flexible enough to address their changing needs. For this purpose, systematic input from the students will be implemented. This will be implemented through user experience loops, which is a critical component. It is vital to underscore that communication is key to avoiding a lack of understanding, taking into consideration the language barriers and cultural contradictions. Lastly, the role of understanding the emotional segment in the international master's student journey together with empathetic service design that gives technical support and emotional connection seems to be the proper way.

### **3.1.1 Design Thinking Process**

Enhancing the mental health of international master's students at Novia UAS involves tapping into the design thinking approach. The design thinking process is an innovative problem-solving method that is integrated into every level and field of life and creates superior interests and research among international master's students. Design thinking is a resourceful approach that employs a set of problem-solving tools, using a nonlinear, iterative process with which the user is understood, assumptions are challenged, questions are redefined, ideas are generated, prototypes are created, and tested again (Dam, 2023).



**Figure 3.1:** The five steps involved in the design thinking process (Adapted from Dam 2023).

The pillars of design thinking through Dam's (2023) proposal are empathize, define, ideate, prototype, and test (Figure 3.1), which have time and again proved to be powerful ways out of unclarities. The first stage of the process, empathy, is reached when there has been developed a deep understanding of the matters moving international master's students with their experience environments, financial obstacles, social relationships, and other contributing factors that take place in their lives. During this stage, resolving the challenges experienced by students is aligned with the customer-centered approach found in any services and products intended for the student's end-users. Another element of the approach is the definition step, which effectively summarizes the lessons from the empathic exploration and leads to the analysis of problems experienced by foreign master's students. The next stage of design thinking, which is "define," can be based on the strategy that was

developed in this phase. Through the creative thinking process in the ideate phase, the concern shifts to chalking out feasible and unique propositions. The second stage focuses on defining while constructing solutions using teamwork purpose which means that it may help to cope with the challenges of international master's students or mental health issues.

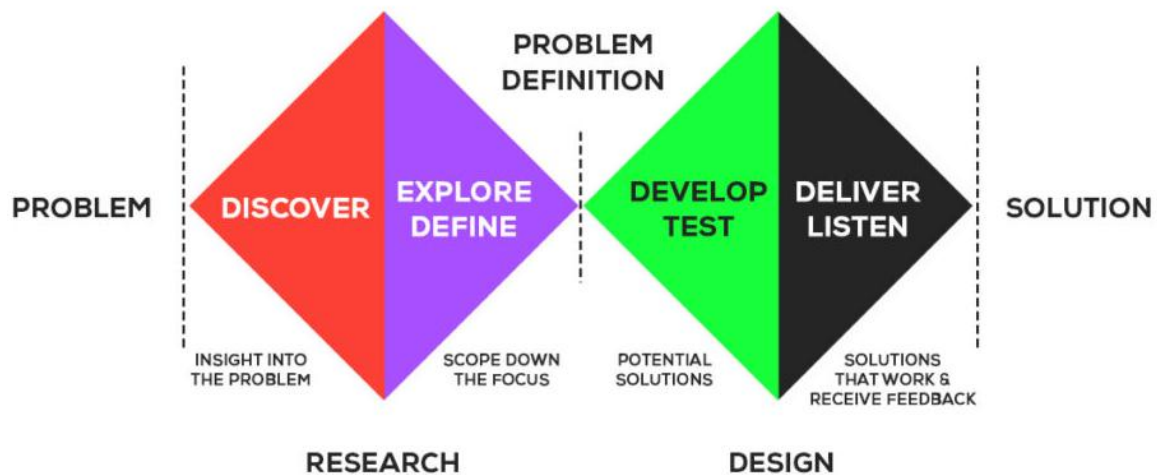
At the prototyping phase, physical representations of proposed solutions are built following the service prototype principles. A concept is put into practical reality through prototypes before its fully developed nature, so that to get user feedback, improvisation of the concept is possible incrementally, and at the test phase that phase follows for prototypes and suggested solutions as well. This iteration process can be repeated many times, which means, it guarantees that the master's student's dismay is alleviated by embracing the feedback from user loops.

This human-centered design thinking approach which will be part of this research framework will enable not only to conduct a comprehensive assessment of the existing support services but also to readily come up with tangible and implementable proposals based on the lived experiences of the international master's students, who are going through mental health challenges. The theory of research-creation takes a living process as the route to follow the Interaction Design Foundation Framework designed by Dam (2023). This human-centered, iterative approach guarantees that Novia UAS support services for master's students, on the contrary, keep advancing and growing alongside the mental health of international Master's students.

### **3.2 The Double Diamond Model**

The Double Diamond model is a design process framework that divides creative problem-solving into four phases: discover, define, develop, and deliver (Figure 3.2). It encourages divergent thinking in the "discover" phase, where broad research and exploration of ideas

occur, followed by convergent thinking in the "define" phase to pinpoint the core problem (Brown, 2024). The "develop" phase focuses on creating and prototyping potential solutions, while the "deliver" phase tests and implements the final solution. This iterative process fosters innovation and ensures that solutions are user-centred and well-defined before being executed. It is widely used in design thinking and innovation (Zorzetti et al., 2022).



**Figure 3.2:** The four phases of the double diamond process (Adapted from Brown, 2024).

The Double Diamond model and design thinking share complementary processes, making it natural to merge them. Both emphasize human-centred problem-solving and innovation through iterative exploration and refinement. In this combined approach, the Double Diamond's phases—discover, define, develop, and deliver—align with design thinking's five stages: empathize, define, ideate, prototype, and test. During the "discover" phase, design thinking's "empathize" stage comes into play, focusing on understanding users' needs through research and observation. This leads into the "define" phase of both models, where the core problem is identified. The "develop" phase of the double diamond aligns with design thinking's "ideate" and "prototype" stages, where solution development and rapid prototyping occur. Finally, the "deliver" phase mirrors design thinking's "test" stage, where solutions are tested and refined based on user feedback. This integration leverages both the

divergent and convergent thinking of the Double Diamond, along with the empathy and iterative nature of design thinking, to create a comprehensive service design solution for improving students' mental health.

### **3.2.1 Discover Phase**

The double diamond model is a visual framework that illustrates the four key stages of the design process: Discover-Define-Develop-Deliver as shown in Figure 3.2. The model has two diamond shapes that show divergent and convergent thinking (Brown, 2024). The double diamond model in creating mental health help services for international master-to-be students will include the following stages. The most important stage of the double diamond model is Discover, which gives a great opportunity for international master's students to present their demands, desires, and difficulties related to mental health support services. This phase entails carrying out the interviews and using tools such as the value proposition canvas to collect insights and data (Jain, 2023). The interviews are of paramount importance in this stage because they present an opportunity for this research to engage directly with the international master's students, who then get interviewed concerning their experiences, viewpoints, and expectations regarding psychological support services. These interviews were planned in detail with courses being selected to reflect a diverse range of student experiences including age, gender, cultural backgrounds, and programmes of study. Therefore conducting 4 to 5 interviews will make the study collect the highest quality qualitative data which can be applied to the design process. In addition, the data will be analyzed to identify common points, patterns, and places that need to be enhanced in the mental health services too. The value proposition canvas is a tool used by mental health support services providers to express and explain what value they offer international master's students. It gives researchers a way to comprehend what exactly pains the students, what they feel they've gained, or what they need to be doing (Pkorná et al., 2015).

### 3.2.2 Define Phase

In the second stage called Define, the emphasis is placed on integrating all the data that were collected during the Discover stage, thus forming a clear picture of the users and the problem that needs to be solved (Dam, 2023). This phase is delicate because it allows the design to be aimed at and achieve the needed mental health support services for international master students. User persona is one of the vital activities of this stage. User personas are fictional representations of diverse segments of international master students with varying backgrounds and mental health needs (Dam and Teo, 2024b). These personas are the result of data collection through interviews, and they allow a designer to empathize with and understand the various needs of students with different profiles. Creating user personas will be based on the findings of the research conducted during the Discover phase that will unpin common patterns, behaviours, and characteristics among international master's students. For example, it is possible to list some of the characteristics of the persona that may include age, gender, background cultural, course in school, mental issues, and the preference for support services. Another aspect that is crucial in the Define stage is to develop the problem statement. This entails specifying the problem or challenge that the design process intends to tackle (Dam and Teo, 2024b). Likewise, "What implications would the research findings have in connection with the access to mental health services for international student masters?" Such as: making the process clear and the designers working towards a concrete target.

Furthermore, benchmarking usage in the Define phase is especially significant because it establishes standards, reveals best practices, and helps shape a comprehensive understanding of the current landscape (Bligaard et al., 2016; Bartz-Beielstein et al., 2020), which is a crucial factor for designing effective mental health services for international master's students at Novia UAS. The use of benchmarking in this study serves as a tool to identify

successful mental health support models from other institutions, particularly those with a diverse international student body. This comparison enables you to highlight gaps in Novia UAS's current offerings, using insights from institutions that have already achieved success in similar situations. With this knowledge, the study can define the specific areas where Novia's mental health support might be enhanced, focusing on factors like accessibility, inclusivity, and responsiveness to international master's students' needs.

Benchmarking also helps identify best practices that can inform innovative solutions tailored to this group's unique challenges (Ettorchi-Tardy et al., 2012). Drawing on established approaches that have proven effective elsewhere, the Novia UAS can more accurately pinpoint which interventions would be most impactful and aligned with the international master's students' needs. It aids in refining the project's scope by channeling resources toward the most relevant areas, informed by practices that resonate with the target group's needs (Bartz-Beielstein et al., 2020). Furthermore, benchmarking establishes quantitative and qualitative metrics, providing a baseline for future comparisons and helping set realistic, contextually relevant goals (Broome & Quirk, 2015; Zhao et al., 2020). This foundation allows for clear measures of success and a framework for evaluating Novia's mental health services against industry standards.

### **3.2.3 Develop Phase**

The third phase of the double diamond model development phase includes the generation of solutions to form ideas and the making of conceptual models for testing these ideas (Freeman, 2023). This stage involves looking at a vast range of options and trying different approaches before one can decide what is better for the mental health support services of international master's students. An activity that falls among the vital is idea generation. Prototyping is a vital step in the development stage. Prototyping is accomplished at the next

stage by putting together low-fidelity prototypes of new service concepts or existing service improvement ideas that evolved during the phase where ideas were generated (Dam & Teo, 2020). Given that these prototypes are crude and cheap, their main purpose is to experiment with an idea quickly and at a lower cost. Prototyping aims to gather users' and stakeholders' feedback on the functionalities that work and those that are still in need of improvement (Interaction Design Foundation – IxDF, 2019). Early and frequent testing of prototypes will help designers find any problems and change them in the design before investing too much time and money in the development of the solution.

#### **3.2.4 Deliver Phase**

The fourth stage of the Double Diamond model, Deliver, is the final one with an emphasis on testing the prototypes developed in the previous steps and implementing them in a controlled environment. This phase is the most important step as it involves users' feedback and stakeholders, allows for solutions fine-tuning, and can be fully implemented (Dam, 2023). Testing, another element of this, is crucial and it means the introduction of the prototypes in a controlled environment, e.g., a pilot study or a limited rollout, to collect feedback from the users and stakeholders (Geissdoerfer et al., 2022). Testing makes designers assess the viability of the prototypes identify the problems or shortcomings and work on their solutions accordingly (Yousef, 2023). Another major point to be mentioned is the iterative process which belongs to the delivery phase. The feedback gathered through the testing process helps designers in iterating the prototypes and improving them to remedy whatever issues or concerns (Dam & Teo, 2023). This process of iterations helps designers fine-tune the solutions and ensure that they meet the mental health needs of international master's students. The subsequent step after the prototypes have been tested and further improved is implementation.

### 3.2.5 Iterate Phase

The last stage of the double diamond pattern is Iterate. It concentrates on polishing the outcomes of the trials and deployments with the generated feedback (Martins, 2024.) This phase plays an important role in refining the solutions and fine-tuning them to fit the context of the changing needs of international master's students who require support services. Iteration means that prototypes are refined by re-checking feedback from participants during testing and implementation (Johnson-Awonyi, 2023). Such adjustments could be about the design, user experience, or functionality of the solutions to make them better relevant to the needs of the climate crisis victims. Iteration aims to make sure that correct solutions keep on improving and revising to target the best possible results for international master's students.

One of the key aspects of iterations is to be iterative and incremental. Instead of trying to attain perfectness immediately, designers should endeavour to make small, incremental changes that will be based on the feedback provided and testing (Gadam, 2023). This facilitates the designer in making choices fast and quickly allowing the designer to process and adapt to changing needs and requirements. The second significant feature of iteration is to involve users and stakeholders in the process. Through the process of obtaining feedback from students of international master's programs, nurses, and specialists in mental health, designers will ensure that the mix of solutions is being revised for the needs and will match their preferences. This collaborative effort makes it easy to buy in and support the implementation of the identified solutions, improving the implementation's chances of success.

## 4 Project Implementation

The Double Diamond model is a framework that consists of four phases; Discover, Define, Develop, and Deliver as earlier described in Chapter 3. However, each phase corresponds to different stages in the design process, moving from understanding the problem to implementing solutions. On the other hand, design thinking underlines empathy, ideation, and prototyping to create solutions that meet users' needs. It involves five stages; Empathize, Define, Ideate, Prototype, and Test. In the present study, interviews were conducted with 7 participants (5 international master's students, study psychologist, and the Head of the Degree Programme of Services Design) to identify the problems that contribute to their mental health. The process starts with understanding their needs (Discover/empathize), defining the core problems (Define), developing creative solutions (Develop/ideate), and implementing and testing those solutions (Deliver/prototype and test). This comprehensive approach ensures that the solutions are user-centred, feasible, and responsive to the actual experiences of international master's students. Thus, by continuously iterating and gathering feedback, the Novia UAS can create a more supportive and enriching environment for its international master's students, enhancing both their academic success and overall well-being.

### 4.1 Phase 1: Discover



Here, understanding the needs, experiences, and challenges of the international masters' students at Novia UAS was assessed. This was achieved by gathering insights from the students' personal stories and identifying their pain points as described in Chapter 3.2.1

### **4.1.1 Interviews**

A semi-structured interview was conducted to gain perspectives from the students. The interviews are focused on gathering qualitative data from the participant's views based on the research objectives. The data collected helped move the design process from general issues to more detailed ones. It also reveals the need for possible further research. When doing semi-structured interviews, open-ended questions are created. This interview style is rather flexible as there is room for expanding the questions based on the interviewee's responses.

The role of the interviews as stated above was to gain insights but also simultaneously to spread information and gain new methods to improve international master's students facing mental health issues. There were 7 interviews and they were conducted as face-to-face sessions and via online meetings depending on the availability and location of the participants. The people interviewed were all international master's students at Novia UAS, the Head of the Degree Programme of Services Design and a student psychologist at the school clinic.

Most of the interviews were held in July 2024 and continued with a few final interviews in October 2024. The interview questions (Appendix 1, in English) were made up of six (6) questions. The insights from the interviews were compiled into categories: challenges, motivations, interests, mental health and well-being. However, to understand the challenges faced by international master's students better, comprehensive research was conducted. Structured interview was first used in this phase. The existing responses from the Head of the Degree Programme of Services Design, a student psychologist and five (5) international master's students provide a foundation. More so, the key insights which were based on international master's student responses were employed to discover the challenges they

encountered. The major challenges that the participants identified are highlighted in the table below.

**Table 4.1:** The major challenges highlighted by the study participants.

S/No.	Challenges	Descriptions
1.	Cultural and social adjustment	The international master's students expressed difficulty adapting to Finnish culture and communication styles, leading to isolation and social challenges. Language barriers further compounded these issues.
2.	Academic challenges	Students struggled with understanding academic expectations, particularly due to cultural differences in learning styles. Technical issues with the learning platform added to their educational stress.
3.	Mental health and well-being	Students reported high levels of stress and anxiety, exacerbated by limited access to mental health services.
4.	Job unavailability	Many students experience financial stress due to the difficulty of finding employment, which exacerbates their anxiety and general mental well-being.
5.	Loneliness	The absence of strong social networks and support systems leads to loneliness and a sense of disconnection from the local community.
6.	Accommodation issues	Difficulties in finding suitable housing bring about stress for international students, thereby negatively impacting their emotional health.
7.	Adapting to Finland's Weather	Students struggling with Finland's harsh winter conditions (e.g., darkness, and cold), which can exacerbate feelings of isolation, seasonal depression, and difficulty adjusting.

Hence, focusing on these core challenges highlighted by the study participants in this Discover phase, will help Novia UAS improve and promote the mental health of international master's students, follow their journeys, and in the future pinpoint where additional support is required.

#### **4.1.2 Value Proposition Canvas**

Value proposition canvas entails identifying the customer profile (pains, gains, and jobs) and the value map (pain relievers, gain creators, and products/services). In this thesis, the value proposition canvas was designed based on the interview responses from the study population. The customer segment (international master's students) faces challenges related to cultural adjustment, academic pressures, and mental health support while seeking social integration and clear academic guidance. More so, value proposition typically tailored service that offers culturally competent mental health support, social integration activities, clearer academic guidance, and better access to housing, which will help international students adapt smoothly, perform better academically, and maintain mental well-being. Below is the breakdown based on the interview insights.

##### **4.1.2.1 Customer Profile (International Master's Students)**

###### **1. Jobs (Customer's tasks and responsibilities)**

- a. ***Cultural adjustment:*** Immigrant students need to adapt to Finnish culture, language, and academic systems.
- b. ***Academic success:*** Navigating coursework, group projects, and exams in an unfamiliar education system.
- c. ***Mental well-being:*** Balancing studies, social life, and personal responsibilities while facing stress and isolation.

- d. ***Social integration:*** Building social networks in a new environment with cultural barriers.

## **2. Pains (Customer's challenges and frustrations)**

- a. ***Cultural barriers:*** Difficulty with the Finnish language and reserved communication style leads to social isolation.
- b. ***Overwhelming academic pressure:*** Students feel unprepared for assignments and exams, especially with unclear instructions.
- c. ***Inadequate mental health support:*** Limited mental health resources, long waiting times, and lack of cultural awareness in counselling.
- d. ***Housing and accommodation issues:*** Uncertainty around finding suitable student housing adds stress.
- e. ***Limited Social Interactions:*** Minimal opportunities to engage in face-to-face activities, especially for Master's students.
- f. ***Unemployment:*** The student experiences difficulty in getting job placement, because of the language barrier and this causes them to be financially constrained.

## **3. Gains (Customer's desired outcomes and benefits)**

- a. ***Cultural competence:*** Improve Finnish language skills and better understand local social norms.
- b. ***Clear academic guidance:*** Detailed instructions for assignments and a more supportive learning environment.
- c. ***Enhanced mental health services:*** Timely and culturally competent counselling, and easy access to mental health resources.
- d. ***Better social networks:*** Opportunities to form meaningful connections with peers, both international and local students.

- e. *Smoother integration*: Easier access to housing and a more guided orientation to student services and platforms.

#### 4.1.2.2 Value Map

##### 1. Products & services (What the service design offers in the discovery phase)

- a. *Culturally adapted mental health services*: Counselling that addresses the specific challenges faced by international students.
- b. *Comprehensive orientation programme*: A guide that helps students with settling into housing, navigating the education system, and accessing mental health services.
- c. *Social integration programmes*: Workshops, events, and peer support networks to facilitate cultural exchange and build social connections.
- d. *Academic support services*: Mentoring and workshops to clarify academic expectations and improve understanding of the Finnish education system.

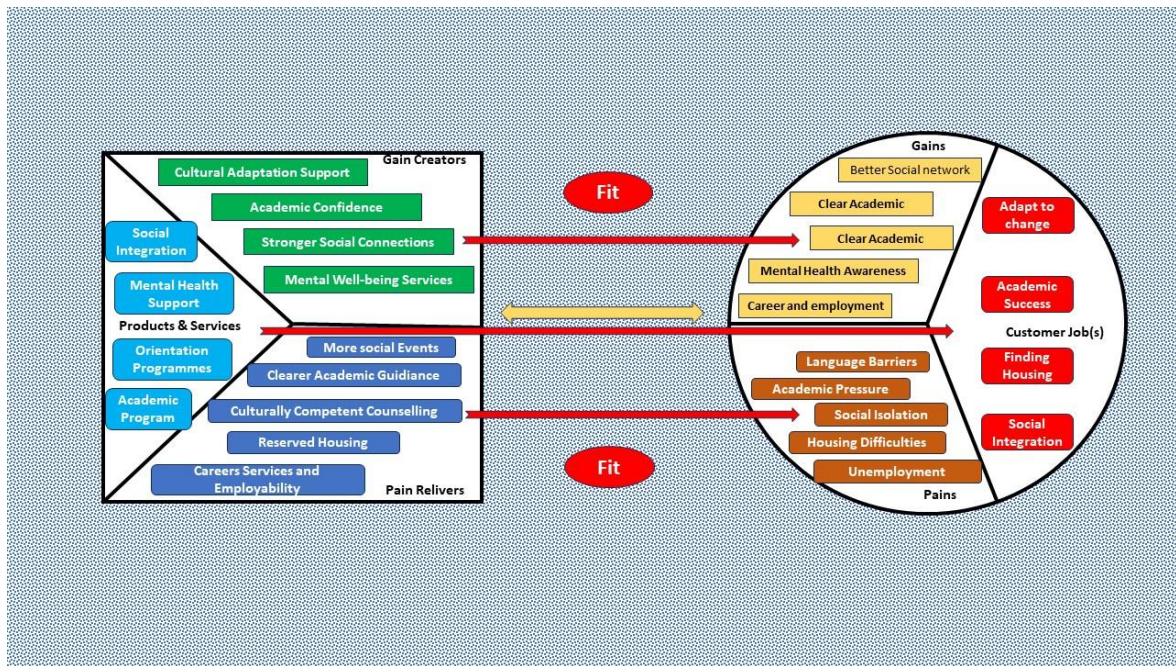
##### 2. Pain relievers (How the service addresses customer pains)

- a. *Enhanced mental health resources*: Provide more accessible counselling services with shorter wait times and culturally competent staff.
- b. *Tailored support for social integration*: Increase social events, intercultural workshops, and peer mentorship programs to reduce feelings of isolation.
- c. *Guidance for academic challenges*: Offering clearer assignment instructions, practical workshops, and academic mentorship to help international students adapt to the education system.
- d. *Improved housing assistance*: Reserved spots for international students in student accommodation to reduce stress upon arrival.

- e. ***Career and employment:*** Providing tailored career guidance, networking opportunities, and local employment resources to ease job search challenges and improve career prospects post-graduation.

### **3. Gain creators (How the service creates value and benefits)**

- a. ***Better cultural adjustment:*** Programmes that help students learn Finnish and understand local culture, making everyday interactions easier.
- b. ***Stronger academic performance:*** Clearer guidance and better academic support to help students feel confident in completing assignments and exams.
- c. ***Improved social connections:*** Social gatherings, group activities, and mentorship programmes that help students form bonds with peers.
- d. ***Mental well-being support:*** Easily accessible mental health services that students can rely on during stressful periods.
- e. ***Career and employment:*** Offering skill development workshops, industry connections, and internship placements to enhance employability, boost confidence, and foster successful career pathways for students.



**Figure 4.1:** Value proposition canvas. This shows how the study identifies the pains/gains when designing services for the target audience-majoring in international Master's students. This figure dissects the services to fit the design, thus meeting the challenges and dreams of the international students.

## 4.2 Phase 2: Define



In this phase, the key problems are clearly defined based on the insights gathered during the discovery/empathize phase. This involves identifying the core challenges that need to be addressed as broadly described in Chapter 3.2.2.

After researching the service, the design process moves on to defining what should be the area to focus on. The information gathered in the discovery phase will be enriched by further research and then narrowed down to find the key issues to be solved (Design Council, 2015).

### 4.2.1 Synthesizing of the Interviews

As stated earlier in 4.1.1, different problems or challenges were highlighted by the study participants, and these challenges are further synthesized in this area of the thesis. A thematic analysis approach was adopted to identify and examine patterns of content and meaning within the data provided by the study participants. However, it may not delve as deeply into the interpretative aspect of participants' experiences. It usually followed six (6) steps which were outlined by Braun & Clarke (2006), and are familiarizing with the data, coding, identifying themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and lastly, writing the findings logically and systematically (Clarke & Braun, 2014). The study participant's response during the semi-structured session provided insights regarding mental health challenges faced by international master's students at Novia UAS, and they are represented in thematic analysis format below, organized around key themes emerging from the data regarding international master's students' mental health at Novia UAS.

#### **Theme 1: Mental Health Challenges**

Several recurring issues related to mental health challenges faced by international Master's students emerged:

- **Job unavailability:** Many students experience financial stress due to the difficulty of finding employment, which exacerbates their anxiety and general mental well-being.

*"It's really challenging to manage financially when job opportunities are so limited here.*

*The stress of finding work only adds to my anxiety."* - **Abina Appiah.**

*"The constant search for a job has been overwhelming, and not having an income to rely on just worsens my mental health."* - **Arhaan Patel.**

*"Without stable work, it's hard to make ends meet, and the financial pressure really affects my overall well-being and focus on studies."* - **Olawale Oluwasegun.**

- **Language barriers:** Communication difficulties often hinder students' ability to integrate socially and perform academically, contributing to feelings of frustration and isolation.

*"...I will have some difficulty with the Finnish language."* - **Han Nguyen.**

*"One of the most difficult aspects was dealing with the language barrier, which often made communication and social interaction stressful."* – **Arhaan Patel.**

*"...of course, language is a big barrier, you know, it's difficult to understand and communicate in the local language and this can create a feeling of isolation."* - **Olawale Oluwasegun.**

- **Loneliness:** The absence of strong social networks and support systems leads to loneliness and a sense of disconnection from the local community.

*"Oh, Novia is lack of social activities to fall for international student."* - **Han Nguyen.**

*"Additionally, I experienced a sense of isolation due to the different cultural practices and lack of familiar social networks."* - **Abina Appiah.**

*"...This, combined with the academic pressure, led to feelings of loneliness and stress."* - **Arhaan Patel.**

- **Academic challenges:** Students struggled with understanding academic expectations, particularly due to cultural differences in learning styles. Technical issues with the learning platform added to their academic stress.

*“In a few courses, I noticed that the lecturers gave out instructions and most of the international students didn’t really understand...” - Olawale Oluwasegun.*

*“...The pressure was immense because these exams were crucial for my academic progression and future career prospects. I had several back-to-back exams, and despite my best efforts to prepare, I felt unprepared due to the vast amount of material that needed to be covered.” - PEDIYA Wickramasinghe.*

*“One other thing again is something that affects the mental health is, speaking from experience, trying to adjust to a different academic system and expectation can be stressful, you know, the expectations are like really high, you might, you might have five assignments and then you might end up doing four and if you miss one you can get a fail, you know, you can get a zero just by missing one assignment.” - Abina Appiah.*

- **Accommodation issues:** Challenges in finding suitable housing add another layer of stress for international students, impacting their emotional health.

*“Because if you come into a country that you know no one and then you don't even know where you're going to rest your head, you apply for the student accommodation system and then you don't get you don't get...” - PEDIYA Wickramasinghe.*

*“...And then you want to navigate different things like settling, housing, the best places to go and get the things that you need...” - Olawale Oluwasegun.*

- **Mental health and well-being:** Students reported high levels of stress and anxiety, exacerbated by limited access to mental health services.

*“The pressure to perform well academically while managing multiple responsibilities triggered a lot of stress...” - PEDIYA Wickramasinghe.*

*“Yeah, because I, as I said before, I don't have any strength or any. Mental issue with their study...” - Han Nguyen.*

## **Theme 2: Current approaches to mental health support**

- ***Community building efforts:*** The university is attempting to establish an international community to foster connections among students, creating a support network that can alleviate feelings of loneliness and provide social integration opportunities.

*“...But we are trying to create an international community here at Novia that can help international students connect with one another and also help with soft landing here in Finland.” - Head of the Degree Programme of Services Design.*

- ***Lack of targeted interventions:*** Despite these efforts, there are no formal, tailored intervention programmes aimed at addressing the specific mental health needs of international students.

*“There have not been any specific intervention programs to try to help international masters' students....” - Head of the Degree Programme of Services Design.*

## **Theme 3: Cultural sensitivity in mental health support**

- ***Cultural background considerations:*** It is emphasized that students' cultural backgrounds and related limitations must be factored into mental health support efforts.

*“A person's cultural background and cultural limitations must be considered while rendering mental health support.” - Head of the Degree Programme of Services Design.*

- More so, the stigma around mental health and the types of support sought vary significantly between different cultures, and a one-size-fits-all approach may not be effective.

*“Cultural aspects that maybe... A lot of international students react to, so maybe trying to give some kind of, I don't know, information package...” - Student Psychologist.*

#### **Theme 4: Collaboration and partnership gaps**

- ***Lack of external partnerships:*** The institution has yet to form partnerships with other departments within the university or with external organizations to enhance mental health support. This highlights a gap in leveraging broader networks for support.

*“I would imagine not.... Not that many, so I would think. Like maybe partnering with them and collaborating and again as I'm not sort of that..., and so, I would recommend...” - Student Psychologist.*

- ***Potential for external assistance:*** There is openness to receiving assistance in forming these partnerships, indicating room for growth in terms of external collaboration and resource sharing.

*“We have not partnered with any department or external organizations. Maybe you can assist with that.” - Head of the Degree Programme of Services Design.*

#### **Theme 5: Recommendations for improvement**

- ***Benchmarking other institutions:*** The institution can benefit from learning how other universities approach mental health challenges, potentially adopting successful strategies and tailoring them to the needs of Novia UAS.

*“I would suggest benchmarking. Which is to look out at how other schools approach mental health situations. That can give us some insights.”* - **Head of the Degree Programme of Services Design.**

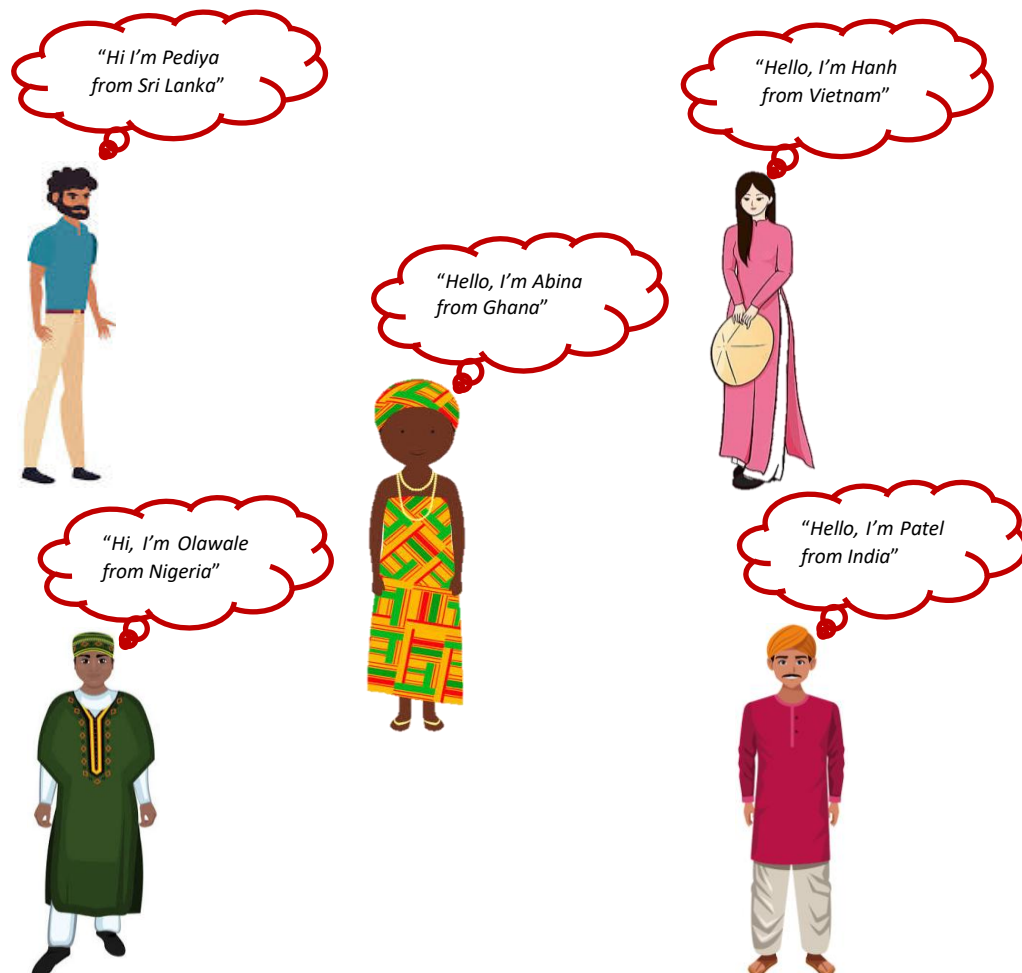
- *Creation of a mental health handbook:* A practical recommendation is the development of a handbook outlining mental health resources, coping strategies, and guidance on seeking help. This would serve as a roadmap for students struggling with their mental health.

*“I would also recommend a handbook as well which provides a road map on how to deal with mental health issues and where to seek help.”* - **Head of the Degree Programme of Services Design.**

#### **4.2.2 User Personas**

Five different user personas were identified based on the participants of the structured interviews earlier conducted in this phase (discovery phase). These user personas are described in Figure 4.2. The personas are fictional characters of the service users that are created based on research. A persona can be created by finding common interests amongst the target group that has been studied. Creating personas can assist the designers in understanding the user of the service better and in designing better services for them. The personas are used for looking at the world through the customer’s eyes when designing a service. It is important to focus on the credibility of the personas because it will determine how engaging the profile is. The personas can be made in a very detailed manner and share also demographic information. However, the most essential issue is to demonstrate the users’ authentic feelings and thoughts related to the service in question. The personas are fictional characters but the values and wants they represent are real (Stickdorn & Schneider, 2013). The main purpose of the user personas in this thesis is to describe the international master’s

student at Novia UAS rather than the local master's student at Novia UAS. Personas can be used, for example, in building use cases for the future international master's student and to exemplify how a user would enter and use the service. The personas are described in more detail in Figures 4.3 to 4.7.



**Figure 4.2:** Novia UAS international master's student user persona. Introducing the students by their names and nationality, also showing differences in culture through their dressings.

## Pediya Wickramasinghe

*“Hi, I’m Pediya. My goal is to complete a thesis that addresses pressing environmental challenges, particularly those relevant to Sri Lanka.”*



**Age:** 25  
**Gender:** Male  
**Course:**  
**Location:** Turku, Finland.  
**Nationality:** Sri Lankan  
**Living Situation:** Off-campus

### Challenges:

- Adjusting to the Finnish way of life, particularly the reserved social interactions and different educational system.
- Coping with Finland’s cold climate, which is a significant change from the tropical weather in Sri Lanka.

### Motivations:

- Deep passion for environmental sustainability and the desire to make a positive impact.
- Commitment to learning and applying sustainable practices that can be implemented in Sri Lanka.

### Interests:

- Active participation in environmental clubs and organizations at the university.
- Enjoys exploring nature and is particularly interested in Finland’s national parks and conservation areas.

### Mental Health Support:

- Utilizes Novia UAS’s mental health services, particularly counselling and peer support groups.
- Finds comfort in connecting with other international students who share similar experiences.

**Figure 4.3:** Pediya Wickramasinghe’s user persona. Pediya is a 25-year-old male Sri Lankan student living in student accommodation in Turku, Finland. When arriving in Finland, Pediya had to struggle to get used to the reserved way of Finnish people and the rather cold winter climate. He is passionate about environmental conservation and loves to connect with other international students to foster togetherness

## Hanh Nguyen

*“Hi, I’m Hanh. My goal is to build a strong network of friends and professional contacts in Finland.”*



**Age:** 26  
**Gender:** Female  
**Course:**  
**Location:** Helsinki, Finland.  
**Nationality:** Vietnamese  
**Living Situation:** Off-campus

### Challenges:

- Due to the predominantly online nature of her programme, Hanh experiences a sense of isolation.
- She misses the in-person interactions that were common in Vietnam.
- Struggles with understanding the Finnish language and culture, limited in-person interactions with classmates, difficulty forming friendships with local students.

### Motivations:

- Hanh is motivated to excel in her studies and hopes to use her degree to secure a better job and improve her family's quality of life.
- She wants to better understand Finnish culture and language to feel more integrated into society and to help her family adjust.

**Figure 4.4:** Hanh Nguyen’s user persona. Hanh is a 26-year-old Vietnamese student, who is studying in Helsinki and is experiencing isolation resulting from the online nature of her program, and her inability to speak the Finnish language. Nevertheless, she takes a personal interest in her studies and strives to better understand the Finnish culture and language to become integrated into Finnish society and improve the quality of her life and family.

## Olawale Oluwasegun



**Age:** 32  
**Gender:** Male  
**Course:**  
**Location:** Vasa, Finland.  
**Nationality:** Nigerian  
**Living Situation:** Off-campus

*“Hi, I’m Olawale. My goal is to successfully complete a Master's degree.”*

### Challenges:

- Adjusting to the Finnish education system, which emphasizes student-centred learning.
- Balancing academics with a part-time job and personal life.

### Motivations:

- Passion for gaining a global education to bring back and contribute to Nigeria.
- Desire to overcome personal challenges and build resilience.

### Interests:

- Active participation in student organizations and campus activities to build a social network.
- Learning the Finnish language to enhance communication and social integration.

### Mental Health and Well-being:

- Accesses mental health support primarily through the university's counselling centre.

**Figure 4.5:** Olawale Oluwasegun’s user persona. A 32-year-old Nigerian student in Vaasa Finland. Olawale grapples with integrating in the student-centered education system, juggling academics, work; and personal life. His drive to finish his master’s degree is to be able to positively impact his home country Nigeria. Olawale gets closely involved in some student organizations to network and practice his Finnish language in his spare time.

## Abina Appiah



*“Hi, I’m Abina. My goal is to leverage the Finnish education system’s focus on innovation and independence to develop a unique thesis.”*

**Age:** 25  
**Gender:** Female  
**Course:**  
**Location:** Vaasa, Finland.  
**Nationality:** Ghanaian  
**Living Situation:** Off-campus

### Challenges:

- The stark difference in climate from Ghana to Finland, particularly the long, cold winters, was a significant initial challenge.
- She experienced immense stress during her second semester due to lots of assignments and deadlines to meet up with.

### Mental Health:

- Abina accesses mental health services through the student counsellors at Novia UAS, which provides student counselling.

### Motivations:


- Abina is motivated by the opportunity to gain a world-class education that she can apply back in Ghana, particularly in areas that foster innovation and critical thinking.

### Interests:

- Interested in **Educational Technology** and how it can be integrated into teaching methods in Ghana.

**Figure 4.6:** Abina Appiah’s user persona. Abina is a 25-year-old Ghanaian student studying in Vaasa currently her issues are to withstand the winter in Finland as well as to handle the immense pressure of assignments and deadlines. For Abina, the motivation is to attain a world-class education with passion in the area of education technology.

## Arhaan Patel



**Age:** 35  
**Gender:** Male  
**Course:**  
**Location:** Vaasa, Finland.  
**Nationality:** Indian  
**Living Situation:** Off-campus

*“Hi, I am Patel. My goal is to excel in his Master’s programme with a focus on research.”*

**Challenges:**

- Adapting to Finnish social customs and academic practices, which differ significantly from those in India.
- Navigating the initial language difficulties, although support resources have eased this transition.

**Motivations:**

- Passion for his field of study and desire to contribute to technological innovation.
- Determination to overcome challenges and succeed as an international student.
- Commitment to personal growth through intercultural experiences and academic achievements.

**Interests:**

- Actively participates in international student meetups.

**Mental Health Support:**

- Does not access mental health support.

**Figure 4.7:** Arhaan Patel’s user persona. Arhaan, a 35-year-old man, doing his master’s degree in Vaasa, Arhaan complains about the disparity between the Indian and the Finnish way of doing academic work and language barriers. He is dedicated to research and technology and participates in cross-cultural international students programs and to improve both academic achievement and cultural understanding.

### **4.2.3 Benchmarking**

Benchmarking is a service design process that assesses and contrasts the service performance of any organization with the competitors or industry norms (Krishnamoorthy & D'Lima, 2014). It was employed in this study because it is essential in today's corporate environment, offers insights into best practices, and points out areas for development (Alosani et al., 2016). In designing a benchmarking service for Novia UAS International Master's students that integrates key elements from other institutions (Figure 4.8), this study focuses on enhancing employability, mental health support, and social integration. The following models are based on best practices observed from institutions like the University of Helsinki, Aalto University, Sheffield Hallam University, and others.

#### **1. Career and Employability Services**

Enhancing employability for international students usually involves personalized career counselling, skill-building workshops, job market orientation, and legal guidance. Key support includes language training, mentorship, and access to job resources. Structured programmes focus on industry insights, workplace culture, and continuous feedback to ensure students are job-market-ready and adaptable post-graduation. To achieve these, the following services should be engaged.

### **Career Counselling and CV Building (Inspired by the University of Helsinki and Sheffield Hallam University).**

Novia UAS will offer dedicated workshops and one-on-one counselling for:

- CV writing (tailored to Finnish job market standards)
- Cover letter crafting.
- Job application reviews.
- Interview preparation sessions.

### **Networking and employer connections (inspired by Aalto University)**

*Novia International Talent Programme:* This programme is a specialized mentorship and networking programme connecting international students with Finnish companies. This initiative would include industry networking events, company visits, and mentorship from local professionals. Also, alumni could mentor international students, helping them gain industry-specific insights and build networks.

### **Lifelong Career Support (Adapted from Sheffield Hallam University's Career Hub)**

International students will have access to ongoing career support post-graduation through online resources like job search platforms and career webinars.

## **2. Mental Health and Well-being Support**

Providing robust mental health services that are tailored to the unique needs of international master students, focusing on reducing stress, cultural adjustment, and social integration is necessary. This service has been utilized by some universities like Cambridge University, the University of Sheffield, and the University of Glasgow,

### **Culturally Competent Mental Health Counselling (Inspired by Cambridge University)**

Expanding Novia's counselling services with multilingual and culturally aware professionals can go a long way because it will help address the specific mental health challenges faced by international students (e.g., isolation, and homesickness).

### **Early Intervention Programme (Inspired by Georgia Tech)**

This programme would entail introducing an "upstream" wellness approach where students are encouraged to seek mental health support early before crises arise. This could include regular wellness check-ins, stress management workshops, and peer counselling networks.

### **Mental Health and Career Integration (Inspired by the University of Sheffield and the University of Glasgow)**

Integrating mental health counselling with career services will help offer a holistic approach to well-being and career development, for example, providing combined support for managing stress related to job searching or academic pressures.

## **3. Social Integration and community Building**

Promoting social cohesion and reducing feelings of isolation through fostering a supportive and inclusive international student community cannot be overemphasized. This assists in integrating the international master students into the Finnish culture or society, thereby fostering community building.

### **International Student Networking Events (Inspired by Aalto University and ASU)**

Hosting regular cultural exchange events, networking meetups, and workshops encourages social interaction and helps international students feel more integrated into the university environment. Furthermore, there is a need to create peer-to-peer support networks where students can share experiences, offer advice, and provide emotional support is needed.

### **Inclusive Social Events and Peer Support (Inspired by Western Wyoming Community College)**

Organizing culturally diverse events can encourage interaction between local and international students. These could include language exchange programmes, cooking classes, or outdoor activities.

### **Orientation Programmes and “Adulthood” Classes (Adapted from ASU’s Life Skills Coaching)**

Developing a comprehensive orientation programme that includes practical life skills sessions, such as managing finances in Finland, navigating local transportation, and understanding Finnish culture, will help international students better integrate into their new environment. Additionally, Novia UAS could introduce 'adulthood' workshops to help students adjust to life in Finland, covering topics such as apartment hunting, dealing with administrative processes, and navigating healthcare.

## **4. Academic and Career Counselling Integration**

Counselling that provides both academic and career support ensures international students are well-equipped to handle academic pressures and prepare for future career opportunities.

### **Personalised Academic Support (Adapted from Aalto University and University of Oxford)**

Offering tailored academic counselling services as practised by Aalto University and the University of Oxford, will help students manage coursework, assignments, and exams. This could include study workshops, academic writing courses, and language support for non-native Finnish speakers.

### **Group and Individual Career Counselling (Inspired by Aalto University's Group Workshops)**

Organizing group counselling sessions that focus on both academic challenges and career-related issues, ensures that students receive the holistic support they need for both areas of their lives. More so, launching a mentorship programme where international students are paired with academic advisors or alumni to help them navigate their studies, builds resilience, and develop career goals early on.

### **5. Collaboration with external employers and universities**

Fostering strong relationships between Novia UAS, local employers, and other universities is a must. This will increase employability and social integration opportunities for international students.

#### **Partnership with Finnish Companies (Inspired by the University of Helsinki and Aalto)**

Establishing formal partnerships with companies across Finland to provide internship and job placement opportunities specifically for international master students.

#### **Cross-University Collaboration (Inspired by Aalto University and the University of Sheffield)**

Collaborating with other Finnish universities and international programmes would offer students broader networking opportunities, such as joint career fairs, social events, and research collaborations. In addition, hosting regular career fairs and industry panels would allow international master's students to meet potential employers and gain valuable insights into the Finnish job market. By integrating best practices from various universities worldwide, Novia UAS can develop a comprehensive service design that supports the academic, social, and career success of international master's students. This model will

ensure that students are equipped with the tools needed to thrive both academically and professionally while fostering a sense of belonging and community within Finland. Benchmarking of mental health support services for international students in a few universities of the world to Novia UAS is depicted below.

	Novia UAS	University of Helsinki	Aalto University	Sheffield Hallam University	University of Glasgow	University of Oxford	Arizona State University (ASU)	Georgia Tech
Career Services & Employability	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Culturally Sensitive Mental Health Services	✗	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Mental Health Awareness Campaigns	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Integrated Mental Health & Career Support	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓
Proactive Mental Health & Wellness Programmes	✗	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Social Integration Programmes	✗	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Financial Wellness & Job Support	✗	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

**Figure 4.8:** Benchmarking service for Novia UAS International Master’s students. This figure compares Novia with other schools, highlighting services that need to be implemented.

**Table 4.2: Summarizing the institutions and their associated practices, with a focus on where benchmarking information can be obtained.**

Category	Institution	Webpages
Career and Employability Services	University of Helsinki	<a href="#">Career Services Overview</a> <a href="#">Helsinki University</a> , <a href="#">Benefits and Services</a> <a href="#">Helsinki University</a>

<b>Category</b>	<b>Institution</b>	<b>Webpages</b>
Career and Employability Services	Aalto University	<a href="https://www.aalto.fi/en/school-of-business/career-services-for-international-students">https://www.aalto.fi/en/school-of-business/career-services-for-international-students</a> <a href="https://www.aalto.fi/en/study-at-aalto/career-opportunities-and-employability-for-aalto-students">https://www.aalto.fi/en/study-at-aalto/career-opportunities-and-employability-for-aalto-students</a>
Career and Employability Services	Sheffield Hallam University	<a href="https://www.shu.ac.uk/careers">https://www.shu.ac.uk/careers</a>
Mental Health and Well-being	Cambridge University	<a href="#">Mental Health Services</a>
Mental Health and Well-being	University of Sheffield	<a href="#">University Mental Health Support</a>
Mental Health and Well-being	Georgia Tech	<a href="https://www.gatech.edu/">https://www.gatech.edu/</a>
Social Integration and Community Building	Aalto University	<a href="https://www.aalto.fi/en/career-design-lab/mentoring-and-networking">https://www.aalto.fi/en/career-design-lab/mentoring-and-networking</a>
Social Integration and Community Building	ASU	<a href="https://www.asu.edu/">https://www.asu.edu/</a>
Academic and Career Counselling	University of Oxford	<a href="https://www.careers.ox.ac.uk/how-we-help">https://www.careers.ox.ac.uk/how-we-help</a> <a href="https://www.careers.ox.ac.uk/about-us">https://www.careers.ox.ac.uk/about-us</a>

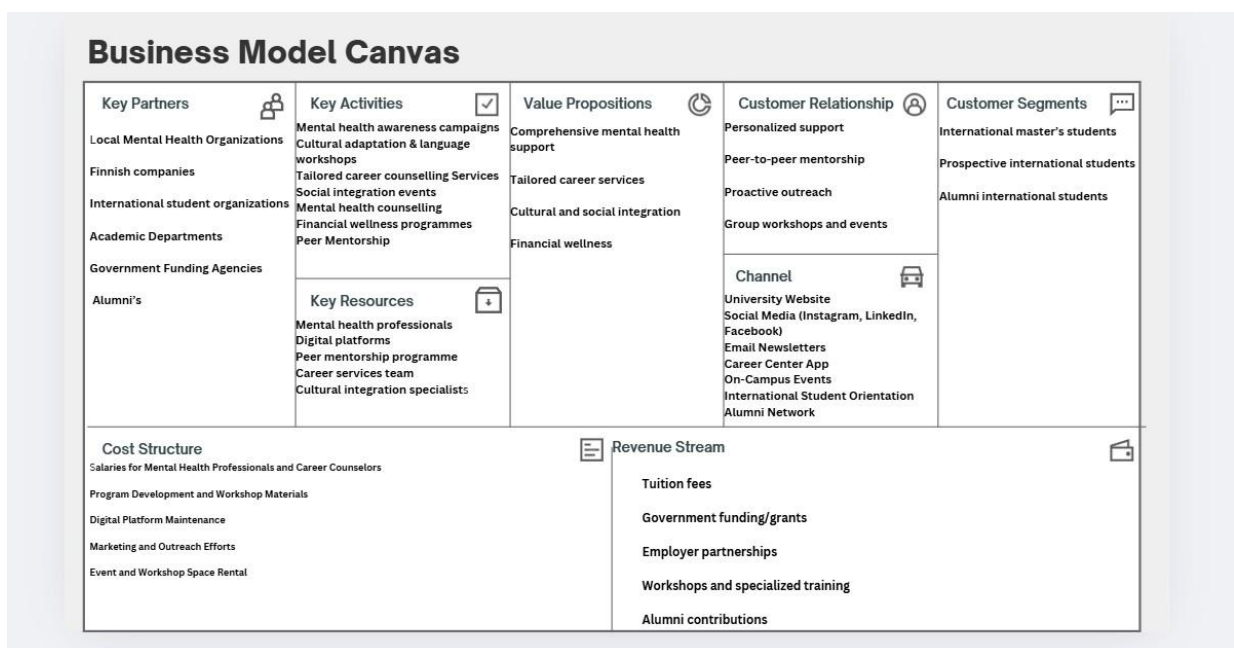
### 4.3 Phase 3: Develop/ideate



This phase involves brainstorming potential solutions to the defined problems as described in chapter 3.2.4. In design thinking, this is where ideation occurs, generating ideas that could address the students' challenges. This phase basically focused on insight from the interviews session that can address the students' needs.

The proposed solution to be utilized is a career centre to be known as **Novia Career Centre Solution**. A business model canvas shown in Figure 4.9 below describes this proposed solution in brief highlighting its key partners, key activities, key resources, value proposition, customer relationship, revenue stream and customer segment. A business model canvas enables an individual to visualise and communicate a simple story of an existing business model. It uses the canvas to design new business models, whether it is a start-up or an existing business. It is a strategic management template used for developing new business models and documenting existing ones (Barquet *et al.*, 2011; De Reuver *et al.*, 2013). It offers a visual chart with elements describing a firm's or product's value proposition, infrastructure, customers, and finances (Osterwalder *et al.*, 2010), assisting businesses to align their activities by illustrating potential trade-offs. The Business Model Canvas can be printed out on a large surface so that groups of people can jointly start sketching and discussing business model elements with post-it notes or board markers. It is a hands-on tool that aims to foster understanding, discussion, creativity, and analysis. It is distributed under a Creative Commons license from Strategyzer AG and can be used without any restrictions for modelling businesses. It is also available in web-based software format.

In the present study, the business model canvas centres on providing comprehensive services for international master's students, particularly around mental health, career support, and social integration. Key partners include local mental health organizations, Finnish companies, and student bodies, while the main activities are focused on awareness campaigns, career counselling, and social events. Resources include professionals from mental health and cultural integration fields, as well as digital platforms. The value proposition emphasizes tailored support for career services, mental health, and cultural adaptation. Relationships with customers are built through personalized, proactive outreach and mentorship programs. Revenue is primarily derived from tuition fees, government funding, partnerships, and workshops. The target customer segment consists of current and prospective international students as well as alumni, ensuring support across their academic journey and beyond.



**Figure 4.9:** A Business Model Canvas for Novia Career Centre Solution. The business model canvas outlines how the Novia Career Centre will function by highlighting the services it will offer, its cost structure, revenue stream, and all other key areas.

#### 4.4 Phase 4: Deliver/prototype and test



The final phase involves implementing the proposed solutions (prototyping) and testing them with real users (international master's students) to see if they effectively address the defined problems. This phase involves iteration, feedback, and continuous improvement as described in Chapter 3.2.4 and Chapter 3.2.5


#### Implementation and Testing

The implementation and testing of the proposed solution discussed in 4.3 above involves designing a promotional flier which will serve as a means of prototyping for the **Career and Well-being Centre** (Figure 4.10). A flier is a key communication tool designed to inform international master's students at Novia UAS about the comprehensive support services offered by the Career and Well-being Centre. With a concise and visually appealing format, it outlines essential services such as peer mentorship, language support, career coaching, and mental health services. Distributed both digitally and physically across campus, the flyer effectively raises awareness and encourages student engagement in programs that combat isolation and enhance career prospects.

Its user-friendly design features soft colours and clear language, ensuring accessibility for all students, regardless of cultural or linguistic backgrounds. The inclusion of diverse student imagery fosters a sense of community and inclusion, helping to build trust and motivate students to seek assistance. The flier plays a crucial role in promoting the Career and Well-being Centre, addressing key challenges like isolation, career development, and mental health to enhance the overall well-being and academic success of international master's students.


# Novia Career Center

The Novia Career Center helps international Master's students succeed in their careers and personal well-being.




- ## 1 Career Coaching


Individualized sessions to help with CVs, job applications, and interview preparation.


- ## 2 Workshops


Regular workshops on networking, soft skills, and industry-specific skills.


- ## 3 Mentorship


Connecting students with alumni and professionals for guidance and networking.


- ## 4 Mental Health

Access to counselors and mental health resources integrated into career services.



- ## 5 Job Listings

A centralized hub for job and internship opportunities, specifically tailored for international students.



## Career Success

Novia Career Center helps international Master's students succeed in their careers and personal well-being by providing essential resources and support.



**Figure 4.10:** Proposed Novia Career and Well-being Centre flier. The Novia Career Centre flier is a solution-based prototype identifying the core services and functions the career centre will offer.

#### **4.5 Student Feedback on the Novia Career Centre Prototype**

The Novia Career Centre prototype has been sent out to students for review and feedback. Below are the comments of students.

##### **1) Layout and Design:**

- “I love the simplicity of the design. It is clean and clear. It makes it very easy to understand the services that the Novia Career Centre will offer.”
- “I love the visual aesthetics of the flier and the arrangement of the icons and images.”

##### **2) Full- Service Support:**

- “I like the holistic approach of the career centre because it feels like its tailored to our needs.”
- “The peer mentorship program and alumni support are a great idea; it would really help in networking and navigating career choices.”
- “I think these services will help integrate international students into the community and creates a strong support system for them.”
- “Career coaching and workshops on networking and skills are the exact services we need to bridge the gap between school and the workplace.”

##### **3) Job Listings:**

- “The idea of job listings is very good, but I wonder if it will be regularly updated and the possibility of it being relevant to every field of study.”
- “I hope that the job listings will not have the requirements of speaking Finnish, otherwise, there would be no point to it.”

##### **4) Mentorship and Alumni Support:**

- “Connecting with alumni is great but I wonder about the availability of the alumni and if there will be enough mentors for those who want to have one.”

- “I’d like to see more details on how students will be paired with mentors and if there are any criteria for that.”

**5) Mental Health Services:**

- “By implementing these services, Novia would be addressing a lot of the issues and challenges that affect our mental health.”
- I’d like to see more mental health workshops because they are just as important as career workshops or alumni support.”

## **5 Conclusion and Recommendations**

### **5.1 Conclusion**

This study highlights the significant challenges faced by international master's students at Novia UAS, particularly concerning cultural and social adjustment, academic pressures, and mental health issues. This research underscores the difficulties these students encounter in adapting to Finnish culture, the academic environment, and social integration, all of which impact their well-being and academic success. Mental health challenges, compounded by language barriers, job unavailability, and isolation, further strain these students.

Furthermore, the benchmarking of services offered by institutions such as the University of Helsinki, Aalto University, and Sheffield Hallam University illustrated that Novia UAS lags in critical areas such as culturally competent mental health services, proactive wellness programs, and structured career support. Other institutions have successfully integrated mental health and career services, offering holistic support systems that could serve as a model for Novia UAS.

The Double Diamond and design thinking approaches utilized in this research emphasize the importance of user-centred solutions that address students' specific needs. The insights gathered in the Discover and Define phases provide a strong foundation for developing solutions that improve employability, mental health services, and social integration for international students. By adopting best practices from other universities, Novia UAS can implement comprehensive support systems to help international students thrive academically and personally.

## **5.2 Recommendations**

Based on the findings of this study, it is recommended that the following recommendations should be taken to ensure improvement in the mental health and well-being of international master's students in Finland.

### **1. Enhance Mental Health Support**

- Expand counselling services with culturally sensitive, multilingual staff.
- Implement early intervention programmes, such as stress management workshops and wellness check-ins, to proactively address mental health issues.
- Integrate mental health and career services, offering holistic support to students managing academic and job-related pressures.

### **2. Improve Social Integration**

- Organize regular cultural exchange events, networking meetups, and peer-to-peer support systems to help international students build social connections.
- Create mentorship programmes where international students are paired with local students or alumni for guidance and support.
- Offer orientation programs and life skills workshops to help students adapt to Finnish culture, administrative systems, and practical matters such as housing and healthcare.

### **3. Increase Career and Employability Support:**

- Provide personalized career counselling services, including CV and cover letter writing workshops tailored to the Finnish job market.
- Foster partnerships with local companies to offer internships and job placements for international students.

- Introduce career mentorship programmes that connect students with industry professionals to enhance job market readiness.

#### **4. Strengthen Academic Support**

- Offer tailored academic counselling and study workshops that address the specific challenges faced by international students, such as language barriers and unfamiliar teaching methods.
- Provide clear, detailed instructions for assignments and exams to reduce academic stress and confusion.

#### **5. Foster External Collaborations**

- Collaborate with other Finnish universities and international institutions to expand networking opportunities, research partnerships, and joint events for international students.
- Partner with external organizations to increase access to housing, employment, and social support services.

##### **5.3 Future Directions**

Future studies could focus on evaluating the effectiveness of the proposed solutions by collecting feedback from international Master students after implementation. It should also explore the long-term impact of career services, mental health support, and social integration initiatives on student outcomes, including academic performance, mental well-being, and employability. Expanding research to include a larger, more diverse population of international master's students across multiple Finnish universities could provide broader insights into the needs and challenges of this demographic. Additionally, investigating

innovative digital tools and platforms for delivering mental health and career services could enhance accessibility and engagement for students.

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## Appendices

### **Appendix 1: Interview questions for international Master's students at Novia UAS regarding their mental health and experiences**

1. Can you tell me about your experience as an immigrant coming to Finland to study?
2. Would you mind telling me about the moments when you have felt very anxious or stressed out while studying here at Novia University of Applied Sciences? What led to this experience?
3. Have you faced any cultural or social issues while studying at Novia UAS that have affected your mental health? If that is the case, how have you overcome these difficulties?
4. From your perspective, what changes can be made to the current support system of the university to give better attention to the mental well-being concerns of international Master's students?
5. Where do you currently get your mental health support services from, or where do you access them within Novia UAS? Are there any problems or barriers you find in using these services?
6. From your point of view, what specific areas of the academic environment of Novia UAS should be fixed to support the mental health and well-being of international students?

## **Appendix II: Head of the Degree Programme of Services Design**

1. Could you please tell me some of the main mental health issues that Master's students who come from different countries to study at Novia UAS encounter? What is the difference between these students and the native students?

**Answer:** Job unavailability, language barrier, loneliness, accommodation issues

2. What approaches or techniques do you currently apply to help international Master's students cope with their mental health and general well-being? Have there been any specific interventions or programs which have been effective?

**Answer:** There have not been any specific intervention programs to try to help international master's student. But we are trying to create an international community here at Novia that can help international students connect with one another and also help with soft landing here in Finland.

3. In the course of your experience, what are the major cultural considerations that should be given due consideration when you are rendering mental support to international students, especially Master's students?

**Answer:** A person's cultural background and cultural limitations must be considered while rendering mental health support.

4. How do you partner with other university departments and external organizations to improve the mental health support services for international Master's students? What are the ways of relating?

**Answer:** We have not partnered with any department or external organizations. Maybe you can assist with that.

5. What solutions would you recommend to improve the overall mental health support system for international Master's students at Novia UAS?

**Answer:** I would suggest bench marking. Which is to look out how other schools approach mental health situations. That can give us some insights. I would also recommend a handbook as well which provides a road map on how to deal with mental health issues and where to seek for help.

**Appendix III: Student I (Arhaan Patel)****1. Can you tell me about your experience as an immigrant coming to Finland to study?**

**Answer:** Well, to answer your first question, I think it was there are a lot of processes when you come to Finland, and that's very challenging to figure out things on your own. You don't have any guidance as such. Uh, to, you know, probably the college must have sent to you. But you there are so many things that you might just miss a few things. So like, a checklist would have been very helpful. Um, uh, about the things to do once you land in Finland. And it was just like, you know, a lot of information on the orientation and the first day. And, um, so it was a lot to take in, uh, to understand where to start from, whether I start the processes first. Kayla. First, that was challenging. And also the classes didn't happen often. We met like once in two weeks. Most students had not even come to international. Students did not come to Finland. And of course the problem with Finnish students, they have a different culture and they take some time getting to know students. So there was there was no scope of making friends at the university. Uh, so, so you kind of otherwise you're like, you know, on your own, trying to find a community, trying to make friends and, um, trying to do life alone. So that was quite challenging.

**2. Would you mind telling me about the moments when you have felt very anxious or stressed out while studying here at Novia University of Applied Sciences? What led to this experience?**

**Answer:** Uh, the instances where I felt, um, challenging was, uh, not having access to, uh, the learning platform. That's, it's learning. And, um, then we had to find assignments through friends. We didn't have access to the presentations as well. And also in the background, we are trying to, uh, do other things where completing the processes, trying to find friends, um, you know, uh, trying to do beat loneliness, you know, so the learning platform didn't make it very easy, uh, uh, for us. And then also, uh, the fact that, you know, once we got the learning platform, it took a while, uh, to understand the platform. So it felt like we were there was a backlog of one and a half month for international students, especially, especially for me, uh, compared to the Finnish students who had the access right from day one. And some of them had already used that platform. So, uh, so, yeah. So that kind of and also kind of it impacted a grade because we didn't have access to certain materials. Uh, also. So that was like a very anxious, difficult situation. And that was a situation where, um, we had to look for projects. Also searching for a job has also been quite challenging. I don't know what the

expectations are in regards to finding a job and it has been almost impossible to find one. Most times when I try to apply for a job they require me to speak Finnish and I don't know how to yet. So for me the constant search for a job has been overwhelming, and not having an income to rely on just worsens my mental health.

**3. Have you faced any cultural or social issues while studying at Novia UAS that have affected your mental health? If that is the case, how have you overcome these difficulties?**

**Answer:** Answering a question about cultural and social issues. Yes, of course you can. You second guess yourself. Talking to locals here, probably you asked the wrong questions or say the wrong things. So you constantly have that fear. Um, and you are not very confident in, uh, you know, uh, discussions where you kind of might seem very opinionated. So you keep second guessing each other and while understanding the culture, and then once you understand the culture and, uh, then things get easy. But of course, it takes a toll on your mental health for sure, because if you cannot say what you want to say and you keep second guessing yourself, um, that's pretty hard. And I mean, the way you overcome this is, of course, you have to, uh, read a little about the Finnish culture, how people are and, uh, um, the way you kind of make friends with people. Um, what questions do you ask them? And, you know, a little bit of, you know, uh, it's just like understanding you trial and error. You make mistakes, then you learn, and then you kind of don't do that. I know it's unfortunate to do this in a social setting, but then you're in a new culture. You got to adapt. And the if I must say the language barrier doesn't help much either. Because one of the most difficult aspects was dealing with the language barrier, which often made communication and social interaction stressful.

**4. From your perspective, what changes can be made to the current support system of the university to give better attention to the mental well-being concerns of international Master's students?**

**Answer:** Well, I think one big change, what the university can make is to have a mentor, like a, um, a second year student, uh, who can empathise with you, um, with you, you know, you can have, like, a small questionnaire to see, um, to find a compatible mentor, maybe, uh, or a buddy who can help you with the processes here. So that'll be, like, pretty nice to do that and probably have, like some communities, like WhatsApp groups of, uh, Novia students in

Turku, uh, where you can, like, uh, all of them get together and have socialising. I have like a socialisation event to kick off, uh, somewhere at least a couple of socialisation events, one in the beginning of the semester and somewhere maybe like, say, for example, in September and one somewhere in November, so that you can meet more people, um, um, from the city and you can connect with more people. So having like a.

Um, I'm having, like, a student. Uh, events, a couple of events would be very nice where you can socialise with new students. Um, the more like the speed dating thing where you, you know, you're on a table of four, no, 4 or 5 people and you have to spend half an hour chatting and interacting. And then after 30 minutes, you can you have to move to a different table and with a new, completely new group of people and you kind of like socialise and talk in a group like that. So, you know, having these kind of events where you gives you a chance to network will be really great. And you know, the also, you can get alumni who want to mentor students as well. So having a mentor from a corporate would be also like really nice.

So I think that kind of support system, in terms of just meeting more people and mixing with more local people and team building activities, I think that can really go a long way.

**5. Where do you currently get your mental health support services from, or where do you access them within Novia UAS? Are there any problems or barriers you find in using these services?**

**Answer:** Well, question five. Uh, mental health support services. Um, I don't know if there's anything in Novia which you can. I think there are counsellors who can help. I mean, um, I've never used it. I've just kind of. I was in a dilemma to select, uh, my electives. So I had a meeting with the teacher to get answers to your questions. So that kind of eased things out. And then also the career guidance, uh, and, uh, also, what do you call that, a counsellor? I spoke to them to help me out with a few things. Uh, so that kind of that was a useful session where I met the counsellor a couple of times to solve some queries. Um, so in terms of mental health, I don't know. I mean, yes, I did feel loneliness and low, but I'm not sure if there was anyone to talk to about all that apart from friends. But I think for me it was cool just talking to friends about these issues.

**6. From your point of view, what specific areas of the academic environment of Novia UAS should be fixed to support the mental health and well-being of international students?**

**Answer:** I think team building activities were majorly missing. Um, especially if they are running international programs. Uh, they come people come from very, um, a collectivist societies, usually from, uh, the, the Asian and the African subcontinent. So having team building activities can really help their cause, especially with international students. Uh, like the activity I mentioned earlier as well. Um, having a place to team building activities. Uh, it can be easily organized. They can actually ask students to organize, um, from different programs of Novia and, uh, that and of course, um, everyone from other universities are also welcome. You know, maybe all the universities can get together and organize some events like this. And uh, so that way we can it can be a very fruitful exercise, you know, like having an event where people can come to Novia and it's an open event. And then you, uh, you have X number of slots, say 100 people first, 100 people who sign in, get into it, and then you divide people into teams randomly and you keep chatting. And then every 30 minutes you find a new team. So if you know, this kind of activity can happen on a weekly basis as different campuses where people can go and socialise, uh, it can be more than 100, maybe 500 people as well. You know, it's an inexpensive activity. All you need is a space where people can socialise and, and organisers of course, who can organise this, organise this kind of event.

### **Appendix III: Student II (Abina Appiah)**

#### **1. Can you tell me about your experience as an immigrant coming to Finland to study?**

**Answer:** Coming to Finland as an immigrant to pursue my studies has been uhh roller coaster for me. It was really hard adjusting to the weather. It was so cold for me and I didn't know how to dress properly for the Finnish weather. Also, everywhere getting dark by 3pm made me feel so lonely. I cried a lot of times because of how lonely I was feeling. I missed my family a lot back home. It was really not easy. I experienced a sense of isolation due to the different cultural practices and lack of familiar social network. Also it doesn't really help that my course is mostly online. I feel like if I had more in-person classes, it would increase my chances of meeting new people and making friends. Also I have been trying to find a job for a while now and it has been hectic. It's really challenging to manage financially when job opportunities are so limited here. The stress of finding work only adds to my anxiety you know.

#### **2. Would you mind telling me about the moments when you have felt very anxious or stressed out while studying here at Novia University of Applied Sciences? What led to this experience?**

**Answer:** Oh okay, I experienced anxiety in my second semester because I had a lot of deadlines to meet up with. I had several courses that had several assignments and exams so it was hard managing it all and trying to meet up the various deadlines. One other thing again is something that affects the mental health is, speaking from experience, trying to adjust to a different academic system and expectation can be stressful, you know, the expectations are like really high, you might, you might have five assignments and then you might end up doing four and if you miss one you can get a fail, you know, you can get a zero just by missing one assignment.

#### **3. Have you faced any cultural or social issues while studying at Novia UAS that have affected your mental health? If that is the case, how have you overcome these difficulties?**

**Answer:** Umm, yes I have faced some cultural and social issues, yes. I would try to greet people and they wouldn't respond. I guess its just a cultural thing because I am used to doing that back home. But here in Finland everyone minds their business and don't try to interact

much. I am now currently trying to learn the Finnish language so I can connect with more people.

**4. From your perspective, what changes can be made to the current support system of the university to give better attention to the mental well-being concerns of international Master's students?**

**Answer:** Umm, changes, yeah changes that can be made is probably to try to make international students feel more welcomed and included. We sometimes feel invisible and very lonely so if they can try to create opportunities where we can connect with people and learn the culture then that will be great.

**5. Where do you currently get your mental health support services from, or where do you access them within Novia UAS? Are there any problems or barriers you find in using these services?**

**Answer:** There was one time I was feeling really stressed about a course I did poorly on. I spoke with the student's counsellor about it and it was really helpful. The course was an elective and she helped me to understand that it wasn't a big deal and I could make up for it with other courses. I felt good after that. That's really the only time I have accessed anything close to a mental health service in Novia

**6. From your point of view, what specific areas of the academic environment of Novia UAS should be fixed to support the mental health and well-being of international students?**

**Answer:** For me, I think its just all about making us feel welcomed and included. And I think by creating opportunities where we can connect with people it will help with loneliness and helps us to feel seen. Yeah, one last thing, I also think that explaining academic expectations from the get-go will help greatly.

## **Appendix IV: Student III (Olawale Oluwasegun)**

### **1. Can you tell me about your experience as an immigrant coming to Finland to study?**

**Answer:** Well, my experience as an immigrant coming to Finland to study has been greeted with mixed feelings. There are times where I've been overly, uh, elated. And there are other times that I have been gloomy. You know, I think that, uh, for immigrants, when you come into a new country, you feel kind of lost. You know, that's the first thing. You come in and then you feel alone. Um, the supports that you have from home. Uh, isn't the same with here. It's an entirely different country. And then you want to navigate, uh, different things, like, um, settling housing in the best places to go and get the things that you need, um, shopping and all that. So even also navigating the system, um, moving from one, commuting from one place to another from one bus station, trying to use Google Maps to find different locations, and then trying to get used to the system in terms of the, uh, um, how the system works and also the study, you know, because for me, it was it's kind of different studying in my country and studying in Finland and not exactly the same. The pedagogy is quite different. And, um, yeah, sometimes it can just be overly overwhelming. You're trying to settle down for accommodation, trying to get accustomed to, uh, you know, the directions to classes, trying to navigate. Also, um, getting used to, you know, the structure of the platform. So. Yeah.

### **2. Would you mind telling me about the moments when you have felt very anxious or stressed out while studying here at Novia University of Applied Sciences? What led to this experience?**

**Answer:** Okay, well, there were moments where I felt very anxious and stressed, you know, while studying in Novia. When I arrived in Turku, I had challenges logging into the Its learning platform and this was supposed to be the platform that has everything in my studies. So I had to go to Turku University to try and rectify the problem physically. And after a week, I still couldn't log into my account. You know, I became paranoid because I felt like if this is the platform that gives me access to my learning and a week into class, I still don't have access. Then, you know, it wasn't something nice, you know, it was very unsettling for me. I felt like I had missed a lot. Although I must confess that I got emails about some assignments and then I got a reminder about some deadlines that I missed while I didn't have access to the platform, but this really unsettled me. And even when I finally got my password and login details, I had to now begin to learn, you know, how to use the platform. And these affected my very first grade because I missed an assignment. Yeah, I got into the platform. I saw, you know, it was just a lot at the same time because you are juggling, you know, with

settling in Finland and then settling in your studies. So my first grade, you know, my first grade wasn't so good. And I can attribute it to this experience. So yes, Its learning was very stressful for me. Yeah, it was very, very stressful for me, yeah, also, in a few courses, I noticed that the lecturers, you know, gave out instructions and most of the international students didn't really understand, you know, the instructions. they really didn't know what the lecturers were expecting in the context of the assignment. But it was easier for, you know, Finns to navigate this because they are used to the process, you know, and it was it was really mentally draining, you know, when you put in a lot of work into answering a question that has been set or an assignment in the way that you understand and then after all the effort put, you then realise that perhaps you have completely done it in a different way.

And then this brings you, you know, this brings also this question, you know, are we failing to learn or are we learning to fail, you know? You know, sometimes you're just expected to do things without even knowing the full scope of these things, you are expected to learn by doing. But the downsides of this learning by doing is that sometimes you want to learn how to do these things and then be given an example but instead you then will be given a task and then you'll be scored for that task, then you then learn from that task and after that, you know, you might have already accumulated a poor grade and then have to learn from that. And it can be frustrating when mentally when you put in a lot and then in the end your, you know, your efforts doesn't correspond or isn't a perfect match for the lecturer's expectations.

**3. Have you faced any cultural or social issues while studying at Novia UAS that have affected your mental health? If that is the case, how have you overcome these difficulties?**

**Answer:** Okay, for the cultural adjustment, of course, language is a big barrier, you know, it's difficult to understand and communicate in the local language and this can create a feeling of isolation. Yeah, though most, most, more like some Finns speak English as well, but the preferred language is Finnish and when you are there and you're trying to interact with people, you are trying to make friends, you are trying to feel included and the communication is something that you cannot hear, it becomes, it becomes, you know, very challenging to, you know, to just connect into this new environment. That feeling of exclusion from the local student groups can also be something, you know.

One other thing, again, is something that affects the mental health is, speaking from experience, trying to adjust to a different academic system and expectation can be stressful, you know, the expectations are, like, really high. You might have five assignments and then

you might end up doing four and if you miss one, you can get a fail, you know, you can get a zero just by missing one assignment. This is a different, you know, this is a different system for me and, you know, this can be stressful. So, yeah.

**4. From your perspective, what changes can be made to the current support system of the university to give better attention to the mental well-being concerns of international Master's students?**

**Answer:** Well, for me, I think that the university should pay utmost attention to students' accommodation. You know? I think that's one of the most challenging parts. You come into a country, and then you have no place to rest your head. Yes. you apply to TYS, but TYS tells you that you're going to get an accommodation as, you know, in you know, they don't tell you when. If universities can reserve some spots for their students, international students, it doesn't have to be the best, you know, like, may you know, somewhere where they can lay their head. Because if you come into a country that you know no one, and then you don't even know where you're going to, you know, rest your head, you apply for the student accommodation system, and then you don't get you don't get, you know, you don't get, you know, the feedback that you need, then it becomes worrisome. Also, there should be a better way to integrate students into the platform, the east learning platform, even before, you know, the lecture starts. You know, they can just be during the orientation session. I know there was an orientation, a day orientation, but I don't think it was enough. You know? Maybe some hands on practice, and then might be easier, and also a guide, more like a guide on the steps that students needs to, you know, take to ensure that they settle properly. Something that they can just easily go through and then know that, okay. I'm supposed to do this. I'm supposed to do this. I'm supposed to do that, and all that. Something easier and more explicit. Yeah.

**5. Where do you currently get your mental health support services from, or where do you access them within Novia UAS? Are there any problems or barriers you find in using these services?**

**Answer:** To be candid, I have never visited any mental health support service and I do not know how to access them in Novia. However, I have visited the hospital before, the student's YTHS hospital and I noticed that they have a section for mental, you know, health support services. Maybe there should be some kind of sensitization so that students know who or where to go to when they need this kind of help. Maybe some kind of awareness, you know. It doesn't have to be just, you know, Novia because, of course, a lot of, you know, you have

a lot of students, you know, and then, but they can also be like recommendations on, you know, where to go for these services. Yeah, I think an awareness on where to get this, where to get any kind of help would be great. So if you need this, this is where you go for help. If you need that, that's where you go for help. This should be part of the orientation so that, you know, students are more aware on what they need to do, you know, in order to get help.

**6. From your point of view, what specific areas of the academic environment of Novia UAS should be fixed to support the mental health and well-being of international students?**

**Answer:** I think that if Novia can help us with integration into the Finnish professional system that will be great. If they can help with job internships and placements with companies that would be very helpful. Because I was not able to get a job at all for a very long time and without stable work, it's hard to make ends meet, and the financial pressure really affects my overall well-being and focus on studies. Because my finances were down, and it was really challenging as I had a lot of financial expenditure to make. So if Novia can look into that as well as TYS accommodation and clear instructions and expectations in our academics, it will go a long way in helping our mental health and making us feel supported.

**Appendix V: Student IV (Pediya Wickramasinghe)****1. Can you tell me about your experience as an immigrant coming to Finland to study?**

**Answer:** My experience coming into Finland to study was overwhelming for me. I had a lot going on at the same time. It was very stressful. I had school to attend with lots of information to get from school, I still had lots of information to get from immigration, accommodation and generally trying to settle in. For me this triggered a lot of stress. Accommodation was uhh also something that really unsettled me. I couldn't get a place for myself and my family to stay. The student accommodation had not been given to me so I was really just jumping from one place to the other. Because if you come into a country that you know no one and then you don't even know where you're going to rest your head, you apply for the student accommodation system and then you don't get it can take a toll on you. So umm yes, I can't say I had the best experience coming into Finland.

**2. Would you mind telling me about the moments when you have felt very anxious or stressed out while studying here at Novia University of Applied Sciences? What led to this experience?**

**Answer:** Yes, one of the most anxious moments I experienced was when preparing for my exams. The fear of failure made me very stressed and anxious. The pressure was immense because these exams were crucial for my academic progression and future career prospects. I had several back-to-back exams, and despite my best efforts to prepare, I felt unprepared due to the vast number of materials that needed to be covered. So yeah the pressure to perform well academically while managing multiple responsibilities triggered a lot of stress

**3. Have you faced any cultural or social issues while studying at Novia UAS that have affected your mental health? If that is the case, how have you overcome these difficulties?**

**Answer:** Yes, it was hard adjusting to the reserved way of life here. I didn't understand a lot of things. Like for example getting into the bus I noticed that everyone sits alone. Nobody wanted to sit with each other. I thought that was very strange. But I am grateful that I was able to connect with other Sri-Lankan's and we are able to rely on each other. This has been a coping tool for me.

**4. From your perspective, what changes can be made to the current support system of the university to give better attention to the mental well-being concerns of international Master's students?**

**Answer:** I think that it will be very good if Novia can connect us with our peers or alumni's so we can connect and network with one another because its so lonely navigating coming here alone. Umm, yes, and I think that if they can help with job opportunities then that will be great as well. Yeah, if they can also help with opportunities for learning the language and culture as well. Okay, yeah, that's all.

**5. Where do you currently get your mental health support services from, or where do you access them within Novia UAS? Are there any problems or barriers you find in using these services?**

**Answer:** Most times I talk with the student counsellor. Its pretty easy to do that. Once I book a session that's it. They are able to answer any questions about my academics and sometimes they ask me about my welfare which is nice. Its nice to have a stranger care about you, you know. That's all I do.

**6. From your point of view, what specific areas of the academic environment of Novia UAS should be fixed to support the mental health and well-being of international students?**

**Answer:** I think that creating programs for us to meet other people will go a long way. I also think that helping with jobs would be good. And if they can help with excursions that can make us go out and connect with other people that will be great.

**Appendix VI: Student V (Han Nguyen)**

**CE** **CHIAMAKA EZUKA** 2:13  
Uh-huh. So.  
Hello.  
Hello.  
Umm can you please unmute?  
Cause your mute and I can't hear you.

**HN** **Han Nguyen** 3:08  
Ohh wait.  
OK.

**CE** **CHIAMAKA EZUKA** 3:09  
OK.

**HN** **Han Nguyen** 3:10  
How are you?

**CE** **CHIAMAKA EZUKA** 3:10  
Yes.

**HN** **Han Nguyen** 3:11  
How about them?

**CE** **CHIAMAKA EZUKA** 3:12  
Hi I'm fine.  
How are you?

**HN** **Han Nguyen** 3:13  
Yeah.  
Yeah, very well.

**CE** **CHIAMAKA EZUKA** 3:16  
How's your holiday been?

**HN** **Han Nguyen** 3:19  
Yes, just uh at home and go around, yeah.

**CE** **CHIAMAKA EZUKA** 3:25  
Yeah.  
That's nice.

**HN** **Han Nguyen** 4:04  
Ohh umm.

**CE** **CHIAMAKA EZUKA** 4:10  
Yeah.  
So thank you so much for making yourself available for this interview?

**HN** **Han Nguyen** 4:20  
Yeah.  
Yeah.

**CE** **CHIAMAKA EZUKA** 4:20  
I've actually been trying to get in touch.

**HN** **Han Nguyen** 4:20  
No, no, no. Yeah.

**CE** **CHIAMAKA EZUKA** 4:23  
Yes, thank you.  
OK.  
So we can just start and I have.

Hey, Cortana 5 questions.

No 6 questions and I'll start from the very first one.

So can you please tell me about your experience?

Into Finland to study what has your experience been like?

**HN****Han Nguyen** 4:49

Ohh excuse that the connection is not really good, so you can repeat yeah.

**CE****CHIAMAKA EZUKA** 4:55

OK, I was saying that.

What has your experience been like coming to Finland to study?

**HN****Han Nguyen** 5:05

Do you study?

**CE****CHIAMAKA EZUKA** 5:07

Yeah.

**HN****Han Nguyen** 5:07

Ohh, but do you ask which experience?

**CE****CHIAMAKA EZUKA** 5:13

Yes.

What is your experience living your country and coming here to Finland to study?

**HN****Han Nguyen** 5:23

Are leaving.

**CE****CHIAMAKA EZUKA** 5:23

Has he been good? Yeah.

**HN** Han Nguyen 5:27

Yeah.

So in general the everything is is very good and treat me, treat me and treat my family well.

I we we just had some trouble, but I think it just a command trouble with the weather in Finland.

And also I will have some difficult with the the Finnish language.

**CE** CHIAMAKA EZUKA 6:03

Yeah.

**HN** Han Nguyen 6:04

Yeah, because I'm filled up.

I am.

I it's hard to do.

Due to.

Understand.

Uh.

Uh, the culture and also the the, the, the life, the life of Finnish people, when I can understand what they talk to each other.

**CE** CHIAMAKA EZUKA 6:40

Yeah.

**HN** Han Nguyen 6:41

Yeah.

And also I also.

**CE** CHIAMAKA EZUKA 6:42

Umm.

**HN****Han Nguyen** 6:44

Ohh, a few.

Uh, some have to to catch up Ohe ohe the event in.

And many things and news in in the society around me.

**CE****CHIAMAKA EZUKA** 7:07

Yeah.

**HN****Han Nguyen** 7:08

Yeah.

**CE****CHIAMAKA EZUKA** 7:09

Yeah.

I I I understand what you're saying because I have similar experience with that as well.

**HN****Han Nguyen** 7:17

Yeah.

**CE****CHIAMAKA EZUKA** 7:17

The weather was really so bad that it also affected my husband and he has to be in the hospital for a while, you know?

**HN****Han Nguyen** 7:26

Yeah.

**CE****CHIAMAKA EZUKA** 7:27

Yeah.

So I can totally relate with what you're saying and OK, so my next, my next question is umm, can you tell me about the times that you have failed anxious, can you tell me about?

**HN****Han Nguyen** 7:43

Sorry.

**CE****CHIAMAKA EZUKA** 7:46

Can you hear me?

**HN****Han Nguyen** 7:49

Yeah, this is like there is a lot in and don't know the connection is not stable.

**CE****CHIAMAKA EZUKA** 7:49

Umm I will.

**HN****Han Nguyen** 7:57

Then can you repeat?

**CE****CHIAMAKA EZUKA** 7:58

OK, I said.

Can you tell me about the times that you have felt anxious or stressed while studying at Novia and how have you been able to overcome the challenges that have caused you to be anxious or stressed?

**HN****Han Nguyen** 8:20

OK, actually I am actually I don't have.

I think I don't have any strap with their study at at school.

Yeah.

If I have a state it from.

Ohm my my family because ohm, I want to share you my, my, my, my, my, my thoughts.

That because, umm, when we come in Finland?

Uh, I have a I and me and me and my wife.

We have changed grown each other when uh, in in our model country.

I'm the I'm the person to earn money for living and my wife she at home and teach

my my son.

And handle the household.

But when we come to the the Finland uh, which which in Rome, each order and I need I'm.

I'm still making acquaintance acquaintance with the the neuron, so I I study and I handle my house phone and also take care of my my son.

And so I some so I have often some straight about how how to teach and how to interact with my son.

Yeah, about the 38 now at Novia University items until now, I it's OK for me, yeah.

**CE** **CHIAMAKA EZUKA** 10:28

OK, alright, great.

Umm my next question is have you faced any cultural or social issues while studying at Novia?

**HN** **Han Nguyen** 10:40

Umm.

**CE** **CHIAMAKA EZUKA** 10:42

And how has it if you have faced any, how has it affected your mental health?

**HN** **Han Nguyen** 10:47

Hmm.

Ohh agrees I I feel I is a hard to to make friend with the finished are student I think because before first of all I I I don't understand.

**CE** **CHIAMAKA EZUKA** 11:02

OK.

**HN** **Han Nguyen** 11:11

Then the story, the story where they talk to each other in finish and I'm and in the order that they there, the other culture.

Uh.

In between, between us.

So maybe it also effect on the effect on the.

Maybe I I think there is a barrier between between us.

Yeah.

And maybe the the the Finnish culture.

Maybe it's because because of finished culture they don't not show really friendly.

**CE****CHIAMAKA EZUKA** 12:03

Yeah.

**HN****Han Nguyen** 12:04

Yeah.

And the the first time.

So I think if we need to do more prove closure we we need to to talk each other more.

**CE****CHIAMAKA EZUKA** 12:17

Yeah.

Because when you don't have friends, you're not able to.

Communicate with other people.

It can make you feel isolated.

So yeah, OK.

**HN****Han Nguyen** 12:29

Yeah.

**CE****CHIAMAKA EZUKA** 12:31

My next question is from your perspective, what changes can be made to the current support system of the of Novia so that it can give better attention to mental well being for?

**HN****Han Nguyen** 12:50

Yeah.

**CE** **CHIAMAKA EZUKA** 12:50  
My stance?  
International master students.  
Yeah.  
So our comments changes, do you think can be?  
Yeah, novia.

**HN** **Han Nguyen** 12:59  
Sure.

**CE** **CHIAMAKA EZUKA** 12:59  
So that it's can what current changes do you think can be made at Novia to give?  
Better support system or better attention to mental health for international master students.

**HN** **Han Nguyen** 13:14  
OK.  
Yeah.  
Yeah.  
I think it's because the the Masto decrease.  
In the master decrease we don't have.  
Many shuxian to to see.

**CE** **CHIAMAKA EZUKA** 13:49  
Hello. OK.

**HN** **Han Nguyen** 13:52  
Hello.

**CE** **CHIAMAKA EZUKA** 13:53  
Yeah.  
Sorry, you are frozen for a bit.



**Han Nguyen** 13:55

Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.



**CHIAMAKA EZUKA** 13:56

Yeah, but I can.

Yeah.

Please go on.



**Han Nguyen** 13:59

Yeah.

So I think the the issue is the.

In the decrease or the master decrease our program, we don't have many section to to see each other in person.

Right.

We we most objection is based on online.



**CHIAMAKA EZUKA** 14:20

Yeah.



**Han Nguyen** 14:27

So we yeah, we don't see each other but but in my our, our our culture when we we interrupt in person is very important.

No.

Yeah.

No.

In person interaction interaction is very important and which in the master decrease I I don't see it, so it's also make take effect on on my mental.

Also I I feel our our friendship relation is is is very loose.

Many loose, yeah.



**CHIAMAKA EZUKA** 15:14

OK. Yeah.

**HN** **Han Nguyen** 15:15  
And I I don't also don't have many things to to talk or to share with my friend.  
Uh.  
When with my my classmate.

**CE** **CHIAMAKA EZUKA** 15:30  
Yeah.

**HN** **Han Nguyen** 15:31  
Yeah, I think this is the the the most important if possible.

**CE** **CHIAMAKA EZUKA** 15:36  
OK.

**HN** **Han Nguyen** 15:38  
I I I hope that there are no viac being can decide your class section, they can also.  
Uh, how are you getting on so?  
Ohh make some.  
Maria section to to make a opportunity then uh I'll I'll classmate can see in person  
and and have many.  
Maybe we can ohh met a man.  
More of the the workshop do, uh.  
Then we can to go to see and we can hear and share our experience.

**CE** **CHIAMAKA EZUKA** 16:32  
Yeah.  
Yeah, I think so too.  
My next question is.  
Where do you currently get your mental health supports?  
Within Novia, do you currently get a mental health supports in Novia and are there  
any problems in using these services?

**HN****Han Nguyen** 17:01

Ohh sorry.  
Uh, let let me.

**CE****CHIAMAKA EZUKA** 17:04

OK, I said.

**HN****Han Nguyen** 17:05

Sleep.

**CE****CHIAMAKA EZUKA** 17:06

Where do you currently get your mental health support services from?  
Or do you assess them in Novia?  
And if you do, are there any problems or barrier you finding using these services?

**HN****Han Nguyen** 17:22

Ohh actually I haven't access the the mental service of Novia University.

**CE****CHIAMAKA EZUKA** 17:32

Yeah.

**HN****Han Nguyen** 17:32

I I know that there there the, the the OHH personnel to handle this service but no I  
I haven't ohh access it.

**CE****CHIAMAKA EZUKA** 17:51

OK.

**HN****Han Nguyen** 17:52

Yeah, because I, as I said before, I don't have any strength or any.  
Mental issue with their study, so I I still haven't asked the Dementor service.

**CE** **CHIAMAKA EZUKA** 18:12  
OK.

**HN** **Han Nguyen** 18:12  
Yeah, yeah, yeah.  
But I I but I hope that the the issues is I mentioned that I need to see my my classmate if if possible more yeah.

**CE** **CHIAMAKA EZUKA** 18:29  
Yeah.  
Yeah.  
Yeah, yeah, yeah.  
OK, so my last my last question is from your point of view, from your perspective, what specific areas of Novia should be fixed to support the mental health and well being of international masters students?

**HN** **Han Nguyen** 18:52  
Umm yeah.

**CE** **CHIAMAKA EZUKA** 18:54  
Yeah.

**HN** **Han Nguyen** 18:57  
Ohm, let me let me a short time to to think about it because I I haven't.

**CE** **CHIAMAKA EZUKA** 19:02  
OK.

**HN** **Han Nguyen** 19:04  
I think it before, yeah.

**CE****CHIAMAKA EZUKA** 19:06

OK.

Umm, I also think I also think you already mentioned some of the things that can help in regards to, you know seeing more of your classmates.

Umm.

**HN****Han Nguyen** 20:03

Yeah.

Yeah.

**CE****CHIAMAKA EZUKA** 20:06

That's doing that.

Drains.

That's can foster a community amongst international masters students and.

**HN****Han Nguyen** 20:07

Yeah.

**CE****CHIAMAKA EZUKA** 20:15

Although you know for us to get to network, make friends, talk to each other.

Hmm.

Share our experiences.

**HN****Han Nguyen** 20:20

Yeah.

**CE****CHIAMAKA EZUKA** 20:22

I think that's if they can focus on doing things like that, that can bring international master students together, you know, to be able to find one another easily, it can help with the feeling with it can help with.

**HN** Han Nguyen 20:22  
Yeah.

**CE** CHIAMAKA EZUKA 20:41  
The feeling of isolation because a lot of masters students feel isolated, you know, international students because they don't know anybody you know, they're not used to the culture.  
It's a whole lot to take in at once, so I think Novia really needs to work on, you know, bringing the international master students together, not just from service design, but also other courses, you know, to kind of form a community.

**HN** Han Nguyen 20:52  
And.

**CE** CHIAMAKA EZUKA 21:08  
And I think they can do this by, you know, organizing workshops and other social gatherings that can bring us together.

**HN** Han Nguyen 21:17  
Yeah.  
So it's it.  
Used it.  
You say that I think.  
Ohh Novia is lack of social social activities to fall for international student.

**CE** CHIAMAKA EZUKA 21:32  
Yeah.  
Yeah.

**HN** Han Nguyen 21:36  
You know, I actually in in Columbia campus, I see some time I see some activities, but it's for the the bachelor, bachelor student and we are the master student.

**CE** **CHIAMAKA EZUKA** 21:45

Achilles, yeah.

Yeah.

**HN** **Han Nguyen** 21:51

We I I I don't see any activities that can we can join.

So I I sometime I I feel that ohm I'm I'm where is my is my belong to the the Novia University because yeah because there's no activity for for for us or for Internet for master decrease student and there's also the the no uh uh activity to connect with the other university yeah.

**CE** **CHIAMAKA EZUKA** 21:58

Is.

Yeah.

Yeah.

**HN** **Han Nguyen** 22:31

I also.

Check Novia websites and also check on their bulletin, but the the in the during the past one one year I don't see any activity due to collect all with with the put that you know all the university I think it's very important for us to improve our feeling and our mind about how to we can integrate into the Finish show show easier.

**CE** **CHIAMAKA EZUKA** 23:12

Yeah, because master students are just left on their own.

**HN** **Han Nguyen** 23:18

Yeah.

**CE** **CHIAMAKA EZUKA** 23:19

Yeah.

And it's hard to navigate, you know, through.  
Yeah.

**HN** **Han Nguyen** 23:22  
Yeah.

**CE** **CHIAMAKA EZUKA** 23:24  
Thank you so much.  
You like you've given me a lot of insights on the yeah.

**HN** **Han Nguyen** 23:29  
Yeah.

**CE** **CHIAMAKA EZUKA** 23:30  
Thank you.  
So, so, so much.  
I'm so grateful. Yeah.

**HN** **Han Nguyen** 23:33  
Yeah.  
I also thank you.  
Thank you.  
Also, because I I have opportunity to share my my thoughts and share sometime  
my my sensitive sensitive my I I want you to say you say allow.

**CE** **CHIAMAKA EZUKA** 23:49  
Uh.

**HN** **Han Nguyen** 23:53  
Yeah, maybe if the Novia may management can, they can access your information,  
your interview information.

I think it's very useful.

Uh.

**CE** **CHIAMAKA EZUKA** 24:06

Yeah.

**HN** **Han Nguyen** 24:07

Do do your do improve the studio service, yeah.

**CE** **CHIAMAKA EZUKA** 24:12

Yeah.

Yes, thank you so much.

**HN** **Han Nguyen** 24:15

Yeah.

**CE** **CHIAMAKA EZUKA** 24:15

Umm, yes, so so we've come to the end of the interview.

You've answered all my questions, but it's funny.

So we actually, yeah, we're done with the interview.

**HN** **Han Nguyen** 24:25

Yeah.

And and and and.

If you need to more information on you have some other question.

Are you just, umm?

Ask me and we can order even that we can arrange their the other meeting to share our our idea and experience as well.

**CE** **CHIAMAKA EZUKA** 24:53

OK.

**HN** Han Nguyen 24:54  
Yeah.  
So no, but she didn't.

**CE** CHIAMAKA EZUKA 24:55  
Thank you.

**HN** Han Nguyen 24:56  
Uh to to contact with me?  
Yeah, sometimes it.

**CE** CHIAMAKA EZUKA 24:59  
Alright.

**HN** Han Nguyen 24:59  
But maybe I I respond you you let.  
And so long as you said to push me.

**CE** CHIAMAKA EZUKA 25:08  
OK, alright.

**HN** Han Nguyen 25:08  
Yeah, there.

**CE** CHIAMAKA EZUKA 25:10  
I will thank you so much.

**HN** Han Nguyen 25:11  
OK.

**CE** **CHIAMAKA EZUKA** 25:13  
What about your thesis?  
How is it going have you started?

**HN** **Han Nguyen** 25:16  
No.  
Yeah, I'm not here.  
My my status is not started yet and I I I think I can study in when I'm ohh.

**CE** **CHIAMAKA EZUKA** 25:21  
OK.

**HN** **Han Nguyen** 25:29  
When the new semester he started.

**CE** **CHIAMAKA EZUKA** 25:32  
OK.

**HN** **Han Nguyen** 25:33  
Yeah.

**CE** **CHIAMAKA EZUKA** 25:34  
Yeah.  
Yeah, OK. Alright.

**HN** **Han Nguyen** 25:35  
Oh yeah, I have so yeah.

**CE** **CHIAMAKA EZUKA** 25:37  
Yeah, that's fine. OK.  
Alright, thank you.

**HN****Han Nguyen** 25:42

So we can, uh see.

Yeah, each other into the at the end up there, the August, yeah.

**CE****CHIAMAKA EZUKA** 25:51

Yes, we definitely will.

OK, alright.

**HN****Han Nguyen** 25:54

Yeah.

**CE****CHIAMAKA EZUKA** 25:56

OK, bye.

**HN****Han Nguyen** 25:56

Thank you.

Bye bye.

**CE****CHIAMAKA EZUKA** 25:57

Thank you.

Bye bye.

**HN****Han Nguyen** 25:59

You have a nice day.

□

**CHIAMAKA EZUKA** stopped transcription

**Appendix VII: Student Psychologist (Otto Waris)****OW****Otto Waris** 16:14

Hi sorry I'm I'm a few minutes late.

**CE****CHIAMAKA EZUKA** 16:22

Yeah, that's no problem at all.

I was actually be worried that you weren't going to show up.

**OW****Otto Waris** 16:24

OK.

No, I just had a a previous meeting that.

Took slightly longer.

That's that's why I'm late. I'm I apologize.

Yeah. So hi.

**CE****CHIAMAKA EZUKA** 16:40

No problem at all.

Hi. OK, so my name is Sharon. I am currently studying for my MBA service design at

Novia, but my campus isn't.

**OW****Otto Waris** 16:56

Right. Actually I'm also in in torko. Yeah, yeah.

**CE** **CHIAMAKA EZUKA** 16:57

Yeah.

OK, nice.

OK.

I'm still my thesis topic is enhancing the mental health of international master students in Novia using service design methods and tools.

I don't know if you know much about service design.

Maybe I can just give a brief explanation.

**OW** **Otto Waris** 17:24

Yeah, please do.

**CE** **CHIAMAKA EZUKA** 17:27

OK, so service design is more like I would request it to be.

Yes, it's analyzing.

You know a business or an organization, you know, and then trying to, you know, improve on it, you know, or make it better.

And then if you're building something from scratch, or if you're trying to improve on something, I like business as a company, organization, whatever it is.

And then you use service design methods and tools to improve.

To make it better by you know, getting you know feedback from customers, you know and you know, engaging with the stakeholders by using the services and methods and tools.

So what I'm trying to do is use service design methods to enhance the mental health of

international master students.

In novia.

**OW** **Otto Waris** 18:30

Alright.

**CE** **CHIAMAKA EZUKA** 18:32

Yeah. Did I?

Did I try at least explains?

**OW** **Otto Waris** 18:35

Yeah, yeah, yeah. Although I I'm.

So what are you mentioned that?

Interviewing, talking with the customers and the stakeholders and and different parties involved.

You mentioned also are there sort of other methods you said using methods in service design?

**CE** **CHIAMAKA EZUKA** 18:59

Yeah, Dan.

**OW** **Otto Waris** 19:00

So what?

What? What are these methods?

**CE** **CHIAMAKA EZUKA** 19:04

OK.

So the custom my journey map which is basically.

Telling us how the customer goes through.

In the service, up until you know engaging with the service from the research stage to interacting with the service and then getting that service and even coming back, you know, so the customer general helps us to identify that. And then we have the user persona.

**OW** **Otto Waris** 19:27

K right.

**CE** **CHIAMAKA EZUKA** 19:34

Is another method.

Use a persona is, you know, creating imaginary personas of these customers and identifying them with.

You know.

They will.

And you know what's they like, their dislikes, you know, what's you know? Is there a problem with the products, you know, and all of that?

So from the insights that you get from interviewing, you know customers and stakeholders.

You now create a user personas for different customers you know.

**OW** **Otto Waris** 20:12

Mm hmm.

**CE****CHIAMAKA EZUKA** 20:13

To try and capture the different demographics you know and differences between these customers, you create the user personas you know and identify you know their likes, their dislikes, you know and everything, exactly. And then we have, you know, the value proposition Canvas.

**OW****Otto Waris** 20:25

OK.

**CE****CHIAMAKA EZUKA** 20:31

A value proposition. Canvas is.

Basically to after getting the insights from the interview as well, you try to identify the pinpoints, the pains and the gains of the customers you know.

So what are their problems?

Identifying what the issues are.

In kind of like a diagram.

And then identifying what's the service providers can actually provide can do to alleviate these pains of the customers.

And then also trying to identify what's the gains will be when these service providers have, you know, elevated the pain.

Customers.

Is a difference.

**OW** **Otto Waris** 21:27

The connections a bit.

**CE** **CHIAMAKA EZUKA** 21:28

Yeah.

**OW** **Otto Waris** 21:31

Unstable I think.

**CE** **CHIAMAKA EZUKA** 21:31

Can you hear me?

**OW** **Otto Waris** 21:32

Yeah. Now I can hear you. Yeah.

**CE** **CHIAMAKA EZUKA** 21:36

OK, I sent the value proposition. Canvas identifies the pains of the customers and then also identifies the services.

That's the service providers.

Can you know bring up that can elevate the pains on the customers and then the gains as well?

When these services are provided, it's kind of like a diagram that symbolizes different

aspects.

You know, just trying to capture, you know, the mind, you know.

**OW** **Otto Waris** 22:03

OK.

**CE** **CHIAMAKA EZUKA** 22:08

Of the customers and then we have other methods like prototyping.

Prototyping is creating a solution like after the research you know and then you come up with a solution and then you create a prototype that's like to meet, yeah.

**OW** **Otto Waris** 22:26

OK.

So is there like?

A new new.

A suggestion of a new way of doing things, or or organizing something.

**CE** **CHIAMAKA EZUKA** 22:42

Sorry I didn't get that.

**OW** **Otto Waris** 22:44

So is this prototype like a suggestion or a a new way of doing things? New way of organizing the service or alright, yeah.

**CE** **CHIAMAKA EZUKA** 22:48

Yes, it's. Yeah, yeah, yeah. Prototype is like, you know, a suggestion that the service providers can follow, you know, can take.

**OW** **Otto Waris** 23:00

OK.

**CE** **CHIAMAKA EZUKA** 23:01

To that is what I'm trying to do.

**OW** **Otto Waris** 23:04

Right.

**CE** **CHIAMAKA EZUKA** 23:04

Currently.

So we have other methods, but it's like a whole. It's a whole lot, yeah.

**OW** **Otto Waris** 23:12

Yeah, yeah, yeah. OK.

Thanks. Now I think I. Yeah. Yeah, I think so.

**CE** **CHIAMAKA EZUKA** 23:16

You get the, you get the scope rights, OK.

OK.

Alright, thank you.

So.

Excuse me, being an international master student myself.

This topic is something.

This research is something that is very important to me because I find that I've a lot of the things that I have written about. I have faced them myself.

So yeah.



**Otto Waris** 23:44

OK.



**CHIAMAKA EZUKA** 23:45

So it's it's it's, it's a research that's very.

Little Boo. You know, I put myself just exactly like the customers because I am.

Actually I can bring up that can help international master students in when they come into novia and that is why I've done some research, you know, and I've interviewed students, international students.

Specifically, international master students 'cause they the reason why I'm carrying out this research? This research is for them.

But that's not to say that the solutions cannot be used like in general, for even bachelors students. Exactly.



**Otto Waris** 24:34

In.

**CE****CHIAMAKA EZUKA** 24:38

So I've interviewed students.

I've interviewed head of my degree program and so I thought you know, I could really get insights from you as well.

Just you know, because I understand that you had a psychologist and.

**OW****Otto Waris** 24:51

Don't know.

OK. Yeah.

**CE****CHIAMAKA EZUKA** 25:01

Now, and I'm sure you know a couple of students, national master students, you interact with these people.

So I just have a couple of questions that I would like to ask you.

**OW****Otto Waris** 25:13

Yeah, of course.

**CE****CHIAMAKA EZUKA** 25:14

So yeah, OK.

I'll start with the first question.

Could you please tell me some of the main mental health issues that master students who come from different countries you know face as?

**OW** **Otto Waris** 25:33

Well.

**CE** **CHIAMAKA EZUKA** 25:35

Yeah, if you have any idea.

**OW** **Otto Waris** 25:35

Actually actually.

The thing is.

Can't recall that that many master students, be they international or Swedish or like like Finnish.

Students.

Like in contact with me that much?

So.

I don't know really if I have an answer answer to that question and.

The thing is, when it comes to mental health.

Yes, I'm a psychologist, but I'm sort of employed here at at Novia as a study psychologist.

So Yep, I do talk about anxiety, for example, or or.

Depression or other kinds of mental mental issues.

But but if if a person is struggling with sort of significant mental health issues, then I do recommend.

And that would be the correct place to go. Is the the the health, healthcare, healthcare, the Finnish Student Health Service.

As I said or wrote, I'm not affiliated with the finish Health Health care system in any way

and I am not actually.

A.

This is sort of complex, but study psychologists in most cases in the Finnish universities are not seen as healthcare personnel but as university personnel.

**CE**

**CHIAMAKA EZUKA** 27:36

Yeah.

**OW**

**Otto Waris** 27:37

So that's that's one sort of.

Thing regarding that when it comes to international students.

I I would say that because we're all human.

We're all humans.

Most most things that have to do with mental health are probably similar to to the the the struggles that that sort of in this case finished students.

Are faced.

So depression, anxiety being probably the most common ones. But then when it comes to, I don't.

Wouldn't maybe put that in under mental health?

Per SE, because it's not according to my knowledge, a mental health diagnosis. But when it comes to students, I mean procrastination.

Is very common stress.

Stress.

Burnout.

Probably.

As well.

But then, of course, international students and this is.

Mainly mainly I base this on on on, on.

On what what I read more so than on on on.

What I I hear?

But face.

Sort of.

Unique unique challenges regarding.

Discrimination. Racism.

Sort of minority, minority, stress, cultural, cultural.

Clashes or or problems with with sort of cult culture related.

Issues related to being away from from family, friends, relatives, close ones.

So I would imagine that also might might cause problems for for some.

Language language is probably probably 1111 issue.

Yeah. So.

In that sense.

But I always.

I will always stress the fact that I see a very small fraction of of our students.

So.

My my experience from those interactions is probably not.

Not representative of the whole student body.

CE

**CHIAMAKA EZUKA** 30:49

Yeah.

**OW****Otto Waris** 30:49

So. So that's something that I always point out and stress that that if I would only sort of if

I would generalize from my interactions with students.

And during my appointments with individual students, that would give a very, very.

Sort of.

Incorrect picture of the.

The the the whole student body.

So. So that's also I think something that's that's important to point out that in general I would imagine and I think I have can't say that I've.

Specifically read about this, but I would imagine.

But it also concerns international students and international master's degree students that.

On the whole, the majority are doing quite fine.

And that's a good thing. Of course, a very good thing.

But then of course some some are facing different sort of struggles.

Yeah. Oh, I forgot to mention one very, very obvious one.

One is is sort of that I would imagine is economic, economic stress and especially I would imagine.

For international students.

But it's a growing, growing problem problem for for for domestic domestic students as well, and has been, of course, so.

So that's that's one and.

Yeah.

**CE****CHIAMAKA EZUKA** 32:41

OK.

**OW****Otto Waris** 32:42

I don't know. As you might have made out, I don't have.

Maybe really answer your questions sort of directly.

**CE****CHIAMAKA EZUKA** 32:53

Yeah, but I think you.

You did answer my questions because in carrying out this research, a lot of the things you mentioned, I found out where are the problems.

The International Master's degree students are facing loneliness.

Hash weather conditions sometimes because of international master's degree students are from, you know, tropical countries, you know.

Cornish is where it's really hot and he caught me on during the winter and it is so cold and it gets dark by three, you know, and you know it's.

This is that's, you know, you know, loneliness and isolation also.

International Master's degree students. They don't really interface with, you know, lecturers and you come to school all the time because they are master's degrees, not like bachelors, at least for my degree program. We don't come to school all the time and we do online sometimes and.

Then physical. So we don't have, you know that opportunity to, you know, meet with people all the time in regards to, you know, the school environment so.

**OW****Otto Waris** 34:05

Yes.



**CHIAMAKA EZUKA** 34:08

That kind of causes, you know, feeling of isolation and loneliness.

And also.

In the economic strategy to financial stress as well, you know the coming here, not being able to get a job. Obviously as a international master's degrees student, you do have, you know, a sponsor.

But.

Of the quality.

Might want to get a job, you know, and it's kind of it's bit of a problem because most companies require you to speak the language, you know, and you're just coming into the country you're trying to, you know, settling, you know, get sorted, you know, go to school.

You're juggling a lot.

And then trying to learn the language on top of that, you know, it can be stressful.

So the language barrier you mentioned.

I also.

Found out that it's a problem.

Also accommodation you know because trying to access the students accommodation, sometimes it can be a long wait and then you come here and you don't have, you know a place to stay. You know you're going from one place to another that can make anyone feel you know dis.

You know and not settled.

And when you're not settled, you know, internally it's going to be very difficult to, you know, focus, you know, on school.

You know.

Watch your mouth shock.

You know, just the culture are different, you know.

You know, in different countries we'll have a way of doing things, you know, culturally and then you come to Finland.

**OW**

**Otto Waris** 35:51

Mm hmm.

**CE**

**CHIAMAKA EZUKA** 35:52

It's an. It's an Italian, you know, different thing altogether, you know. So there's that cultural, you know, difference that can also, you know, 'cause, you know, stress.

So these things that I found out, you know, you know the things that are really coming, you know, anxiety.

In depression among international master degree students, these are the things causing, you know, the anxiety and depression.

So I'm now trying to, you know, find a solution. You know, for these, you know.

Problems.

**OW**

**Otto Waris** 36:29

No.

**CE**

**CHIAMAKA EZUKA** 36:30

So I understand that you know, maybe you don't interface a lot with international master's degree students.

I would just like to ask you if.

What do you think about or how do you propose that you know Novia?

Can you know make it easier for international master students in a solution that can address these issues that they are facing?



**Otto Waris** 36:52

Hmm.

Right. OK. Well, of course there are probably no sore sort of.

Easy.

Really easy, easy solutions, because that's as you and we we both talked about, there are many, many challenges that that.

Students, and especially international students, face face, so there's probably not going to be one like, OK.

Let's do this and.

It's all gonna be be be solved.

So they are probably gonna.

Be several several different things that that would need to to change and some of them.

We can't.

I.

I I think that's the the realistic.

Response we we can't, for example overnight change.

Certain aspects of of of Finnish culture, for example.

So. So that's that's what it is.

But what?

What I think and what we have, for example in my my team where I'm.

In the team with our study guidance counselors.

Is you mentioned and actually good that you mentioned because I specifically forgot to mention that one about climate, which can be quite a shock for quite a quite a few as you

said.

And and there are some recommendations and maybe sort of trying to inform students that come to Finland beforehand that OK.

Climate is possibly very different from from what you're you're used to, and it can have bigger, bigger sort of a bigger impact.

Than you might sort of imagine and think of.

It's not just that it's cold in winter. It can be snowy, it can be dark, it can be bleak.

And that can have consequences other than oh, it's just cold.

I need more clothes for example.

Which is one thing, of course.

Started trying to prepare students that come here that you will need. You will need warmer clothing.

So that's that's one aspect. But the fact that.

A lot of people, not everyone, but a lot of people sort of.

I don't know how consciously, but tend to.

Withdraw during winter so.

It's cold.

You don't wanna go outside.

You stay inside, you stay in your apartment.

Maybe you spend more time alone.

You mentioned loneliness. So sort of indirectly, people get sort of.

Conquered in at home. And and that probably is something that would be good and I do.

At some points when I have the opportunity, I do try to. Recommend and especially to to international students who might not be be familiar with the climate of Finland that stay active. Do go outside.

Do, do, meet, socialize, do, do, do do, do things.

And try to to sort of.

Prevent yourself from.

Being suddenly in that position when you've noticed that the weather is horrible.

I'm just at home all the time. It it's terrible.

I only go the only opportunities or times I go outside is when I go to to buy food and then I go quickly back inside.

I don't meet people so sort of trying to maybe inform inform students of.

Certain aspects regarding climate, but also maybe other things regarding maybe culture as well.

So Finnish people are often described as quite quiet and reserved and and sort of keeping personal space, for example, so that people maybe are aware of this, that.

Finished person is not being rude. For example they they they are are not disliking you just because of these things. That's part of Finnish culture.



**CHIAMAKA EZUKA** 41:47

Thank.



**Otto Waris** 41:54

That people tend to be quite quiet and keep to themselves and and not communicate that openly and actively.

Maybe this is of course very broad generalizations, because some Finnish people are very, very verbose and and talk a lot of course, but these are.

Cultural aspects that maybe.

A lot of international students react to, so maybe trying to giving some kind of, I don't know, information package.

CE

**CHIAMAKA EZUKA** 42:22

Yeah.

OW

**Otto Waris** 42:28

Beforehand so that that international students hopefully would be at least prepared to some extent. Of course, then the actual situation will always be sort of you can only prepare yourself. So so far with only information.

But then then, hopefully that can help help people adapt adapt more easily and and and.

Effectively too.

To to these new new new environments, new situations.

So that's I think.

One one thing.

The other.

Concerns this, and this is maybe especially for master's degree students. As you said, have less.

Less sort of interaction with with.

Teachers and staff and staff and and.

Possibly.

You probably know this better than me because I'm not.

Sort of in the day-to-day, sort of.

Going on about in, in, in, in, in, in the studies, but with maybe other students as well, I would possibly imagine if you have fewer lectures then you have your maybe opportunities to interact with with your your, YOUR students, study mates as well.

So maybe there could be something, something that that.

That.

Novia Novia as a whole.

Could could try to in some ways improve.

Improve upon.

We have highlighted and started.

A A.

What should it be called?

A peer support.

Like broad project or or activity of some kind.

What I don't?

I can't find the right word word for it.

In Swedish, it's al Amed.

In English, we have named it.

Come along.

But we haven't gotten so far yet as to.

Have an an English English version of this this.

Problem check.

Get we're working on it.

But it's for, that's for bachelor's.

But I would think that to some extent something similar might be able to to be used or or are had in in for masters students as well. But it's for bachelor's and 1st year students where in this group?

The students elect, of course.

There they are.

The the people who are elected are are are.

Volunteers, so to say, but they elect these come along students, and these students are then they have a role in that group of sort of being there to try to support the other students in

the group, especially concerning concerning.

These topics of of loneliness and and.

Group cohesion.

So for example, if someone feels left out in the group or feels lonely in the group group, then they can for example contact this, come along student and they can try to figure out OK and or if they come along student notices that someone is almost always by.

Themselves. Then they can invite them along.

Hey, would you like to grab lunch with with us, for example?

And also inform the staff.

Teachers, especially if if.

If the group is facing some kind of of challenges.

Just briefly, briefly trying to describe this, come along.

Come along project, but I would imagine that as I said, something similar maybe could be could be, could could be a good thing.

Good thing for for Masters master students.

As well, but I'm interested to hear what do you think just spontaneously of this come along.

**CE**

**CHIAMAKA EZUKA** 47:24

Yeah, I think it's a very good idea suggestion because.

I.

Now at my solution phase, you know trying to come up with a solution that can address these issues and peer mentorship.

Is part of the suggestions that I have made.

I think it's a very good suggestion.

Also, I was thinking you know for master's degree students.

They connected with the alumni. You know, people who have, you know, graduated from the different degree programs, you know, and kind of have, like, you know, a communication with them, you know, for peer mentorship, you know, follow up even even in career path, you know, even in their.



**Otto Waris** 48:05

Hmm.



**CHIAMAKA EZUKA** 48:19

Career path. You know, I think it's something that can be very useful.

It can also be tool for networking even outside of Novia.

Because I was trying to design.

A Career Center solution, but it does.

The Career Center would include all these different operational services.

It would include peer mentorship.

It would include, you know, interacting with the alumnies it would include.

OK.

How do I put it now?

I have different.

I have different solutions, you know, and I wanted to put them in one body.

So for me, the Career Center is supposed to address the difference problems like for example, with the issue of unemployment, you know, not being able to get a job.

You know, we could have.

Services that include, you know, career coaching that includes.

You know, helping out with the specific vs you know, because international master

students, you know, they don't want to expect when they come, they want to finish work.

Life is about. So you.

Just, you know, shooting your guns, but you're not, you know, shooting anywhere.

So, you know, having that mentorship so you know guide you direct you OK.

These are the things you need to do.

You know to be able to get into the finished work, you know?

Professional.

Life, you know, maybe you need to take this extra courses and this is how you'll see your

CV should look. This is what your cover letter should entail.

You know, just that direction, you know, I think would would can help with the

unemployment. And I was also thinking, you know, partnership partnering with.

Talents. Startups, you know?

**OW****Otto Waris** 50:24

Mm hmm.

**CE****CHIAMAKA EZUKA** 50:25

For internship programs.

It is just three months or six months, you know, master's degree students.

So you know.

Have that experience of professional life is about.

You know when they have that experience, it propels them to be able to get something else or something better, you know, in the future.

Experience already, even if it just be six months. So I think for that's the carrier sense sensor.

Processes that issue and then also addresses the issue of, you know, loneliness and isolation by by the Pmn tour she programs you know and networking with alumnis, you know and you know just creating.

Recreational activities as well. You know, that's international master's degree students can attend, you know, and meet other international students and be able to interact and network with them.

You can make friends that way.

You know when you have friends, you know it reduces the feeling of being left out of being isolated.

I'm also. I was thinking you know.

Being able to have.

As well-being for students that are feeling depressed, you know, lonely.

I don't know that.

But it's just, it's a rough idea. I'm still trying to fine tune it, but I think that's the peer mentorship.

You know, they come along. Program is a very it's something that should not just be for bachelors students. It should also be for master's degree students as well because especially for the international community because it is tough coming in here and trying to settle, you know set.



**Otto Waris** 52:27

OK.



**CHIAMAKA EZUKA** 52:27

Down.

Yeah.

**OW** **Otto Waris** 52:28

Yeah, yeah, that's that's good.

Good to hear.

And we've been thinking that.

Or we've been thinking that probably the the come along that we wouldn't sort of transfer it as it is.

To to international students, but in some some form and it's very informative for me to hear that you think that that it would be well, so appropriate for international, especially international, possibly all all masters.

Master's degree students.

But that's some some kind of activity.

Concerning or or that that's informative for me and I'll I'll.

Pass this on on as well.

**CE** **CHIAMAKA EZUKA** 53:21

Yeah, yeah.

**OW** **Otto Waris** 53:25

Yeah. And yeah, one thing I came to think of regarding.

Wait, now I lost my chain of thought.

I had one thing I was thinking of.

Or somehow related to when you brought up this peer peer mentorship.

Oh yeah.

And regarding as you said getting getting a job and this is probably also something that.

Is related to finding a job in Finland.

Is is language, language, language skills?

So trying to really get that through and maybe it's already very, very much done, I don't know.

Because as I said, I'm not there.

When, when, when students arrive and and have their first interactions with teachers and so on. But.

Really try to try to promote and stress that.

It's quite important if you wanna find a job, or at least you increase your odds of getting a job if you learn Finnish, especially and possibly Swedish.

**CE**

**CHIAMAKA EZUKA** 55:09

Language.

Yeah.

**OW**

**Otto Waris** 55:13

So if someone is planning on staying and hopefully settling down in Finland.

After, after or during their masters.

And it would be really important that they start studying.

The local language or languages.

Immediately.

Because that's something that I've at least heard repeatedly that that, yeah, Finnish

employers, a lot of them, they they do prioritize language like Finnish, Finnish school in Finnish or then maybe Swedish depending on on on the employer.

**CE****CHIAMAKA EZUKA** 55:40

Yeah.

**OW****Otto Waris** 56:01

So. So that's one thing.

And that also I think.

Those.

Two to sort of.

These more deeper, psychological maybe aspects of if someone hopes to feel integrated and included.

In the in society.

Then then I think I mean you can only get so far.

With English, for example in Finland.

So so I think language is really crucial there as well.

And and yeah, that's, I don't know what the future.

Will have in have in store regarding that, but I mean.

Yeah, probably.

Languages won't disappear.

We won't all speak English all over all over the all over the world.

So. So that's also a thing that if we could provide students, be they bachelor's or masters who have any kind of hopes and and dreams of of settling down in Finland, finding out employment job and and.

And living here.

And really trying to promote that idea of it would be a really, really beneficial and good for you then to right away start studying, studying the local language or languages.

And then of course.

This is something that probably can and should be improved upon is well providing good.

Courses and and and and opportunities to practice practice.

Speaking Finnish or Swedish or or both.

So that would be absolutely crucial in my opinion, and I think that.

Yeah, I think that there's could be a lot of positive work to be done in our organization.

And then as well sort of more like the Finnish Government.

Should I think?

Really, really sort of try to step up on that, that, that issue that because.

Constantly you read in the newspaper that Finland really wants skilled, skilled international.

People coming here and settling down here and and and living here and working here.

Then we should also see to it that these people have the the, the.

The the language skills and and skills to to, to, to thrive, thrive in Finland and to to find employment and and so yeah.



**CHIAMAKA EZUKA** 59:05

SOS.



**Otto Waris** 59:16

So that's one thing.

I also think that would be important, but of course all of well, most of these.

Some more, some less are. Are are.

Require resources.

Then we always come. Come, come to this. These difficult, difficult discussions about how and and in what way should this limited resources then be used? And it's always easy to say that we need this, this and this and this, but then.

How? How, how to to resource finance and resource those things is is a hard, hard topic.



**CHIAMAKA EZUKA** 1:00:03

I think I understand.

You know the importance of.

Speaking Finnish because it keeps the language you know alive.

Like for example, I'm from Nigeria.

And.

Speak in. We have different languages in my country.

So we don't speak one universal language, the only universal language we have is English, because we have different tribes.

And so when we're from different ethnic groups, different tribes, we have different languages.

So someone else from Nigeria might not understand my language and I might not understand their language.

So the universal.

You speak is English.

But this has, you know, our language is kind of, you know.

And appetites, almost some tribes almost going into extinction in in the sense that you have young people now not being able to speak their language because we are speaking English.

And I think that's something that's wrong.

You know, we should speak our native language, you know first.

So I can understand, you know.

French language being you know.

In the language, so part of immersing yourself in.

At the same time, coming here as an international master degree students, you have a lot to juggle at the moment, you know. So learning the language, you know, might not be the top priority. You know, at that time, you know, but eventually. And and I think it's also.

Important if you want to stay here.

That you learn the language. Maybe go to Finnish school after graduation, you know, because.

It's not really.

It's not easy language. You will need, you know, to be dedicated to learning the language it takes.

Time and.

Lots of studying, so sometimes it's difficult to juggle it with schoolwork as well. You know, I think that's another problems.



**Otto Waris** 1:02:28

Yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, I I would absolutely agree with that, that that it takes time and effort. And I would say that.

Should not be something that's just sort of.

Added on to an international student that this is something that you that you need to do on top of all the other things your studies and and so on.

But I would think that or.

These are just my opinions, by the way, so so.

I would think that it's something that would really require.

Like.

Top level planning so that so that those people who who come to Finland to study and would like to stay.

That they would have some kind of a, maybe a different sort of.

Slightly different curriculum.

Where these language studies might be incorporated so that they would not add on top of the studies, but would be a part of the studies and then the hopefully the stress and the workload would be affected, the studies might be slightly wrong longer of course.

Possibly. Probably I would guess.

But the workload would not be sort of affected. This is just an idea that that I've had, but I don't know if it's a smart one.

Yeah.

**CE**

**CHIAMAKA EZUKA** 1:04:10

I I think it's.

I think it's a great idea.

You know, it's kind of like, you know, if if nobody I can find a way to inculcate, you know, learning the language in the studies.

Yeah, it makes a lot of sense.

**OW**

**Otto Waris** 1:04:22

Because I think it's really, really.

I really sympathize for international students who are expected to study full time.

Then probably need some kind of employment to pay their bills.

Well, of course, these these things are common for many Finnish students as well.

And they are some struggling also, but on top of that you have these aspects of moving to a new country and everything.

Quite new and and so on.

So that's that's a challenge.

And then you say that OK, and by the way, you also would need to on the, I don't know in the middle of the night.

You shouldn't should study a completely foreign foreign language that a lot of people, especially when it comes to Finnish.

Feel that it's a really difficult language to learn.

So I think that's well, to be frank, quite unreasonable.

So that's why I would.

Or consider or try to figure out how those stents could be incorporated into the the to the like the actual studies.

**CE****CHIAMAKA EZUKA** 1:05:33

Yeah.

**OW****Otto Waris** 1:05:42

Yeah.

**CE****CHIAMAKA EZUKA** 1:05:47

Thank you.

I'll just ask you one last question.

What are your thoughts on Olivia partnering with?

Externals like other organizations.

In terms of addressing these issues, that's international master students face.

Just like I mentioned earlier that if Novia could partner with, you know, talent boost organizations or startups, you know?

To kind of create, you know, employments maybe in the form of internship, you know that could give some international master students you know.

Some professional experience in Finnish work life.

So what do you think about that?

**OW****Otto Waris** 1:06:44

I mean sounds good.

I don't know.

I I'm not.

I don't know if I'm sort of qualified to to to say, but I just how you describe it. It sounds really good and I I believe in Vasa, I don't know.

Are you familiar with? But in Vasa I think there is this.

This talent boost, what is it called?

International Bar site, is it Vasa international talents?

I think I can check if I find or. Are you familiar with this?

**CE****CHIAMAKA EZUKA** 1:07:18

No.

**OW****Otto Waris** 1:07:22

Novia is very much a part of that collaboration.

So I can.

I'll put the link here in the chat and you can check it out.

**CE** **CHIAMAKA EZUKA** 1:07:44

OK.

**OW** **Otto Waris** 1:07:49

So.

So they're they're.

I don't know if this is exactly what you mean, but.

Something like that exists in Vasa.

**CE** **CHIAMAKA EZUKA** 1:08:03

OK.

Oh, OK.

I don't think we don't have this here in.

But it looks looks good.

I'll take a closer look at it after this meeting.

**OW** **Otto Waris** 1:08:26

Yeah, absolutely.

**CE** **CHIAMAKA EZUKA** 1:08:27

Yeah. Thank you.



**Otto Waris** 1:08:27

Yeah, please, please, please do and and I mean.

Our.

Campus and I don't know exactly how many, how many Masters degree students do you know? How many Masters degree students do we have in in Torquay?

I would imagine not.

Not that many, so I would think.

Like maybe partnering with the and collaborating and again as I'm not sort of that.

Slightly involved in the International affairs, and so I would recommend, and maybe you have communicated, talked with an obvious international.

Personnel. But but maybe I would think maybe start trying to partner with the other.

Universities in Turku and see if.

And utilize there and try to collaborate together with them and jointly.

Jointly.

Try to.

Create or join if already something like this exists in these other universities that are well to be on a significantly larger larger than than Novia Storco campus. Does this make what?

What do you think?

Does this make any any sense?



**CHIAMAKA EZUKA** 1:09:55

Yeah. Yeah, it does.

It does. I think partnering with you know.

Other than cities, you know you can't go in long way because they may have, you know, some strategies or you know how they go about, you know, their own affairs.

That's.

Novia and Turuko can actually benefit from and there might be like.

It's collaborating with the schools.

**OW**

**Otto Waris** 1:10:35

Yeah. And then.

I know if if this is because I recalled now that we started talking about this.

There's this international house Turku.

Are you familiar with that?

But I'm not that.

**CE**

**CHIAMAKA EZUKA** 1:11:05

No.

**OW**

**Otto Waris** 1:11:06

I'm not that familiar myself.

I just know that it exists.

But I can.

With that link here as well if you wanna check that out.

**CE**

**CHIAMAKA EZUKA** 1:11:43

Hmm.

Yeah, I think this is really great.

You know, partnering with this organization.

Can be beneficial.

**OW** **Otto Waris** 1:11:57

Hmm.

Yeah, to to check. Check it out. If if that would be.

**CE** **CHIAMAKA EZUKA** 1:12:08

Yes, I will.

**OW** **Otto Waris** 1:12:09

Something.

**CE** **CHIAMAKA EZUKA** 1:12:10

Yeah. Yeah, it is something.

I'm gonna take a closer look at it. Yeah.

**OW** **Otto Waris** 1:12:17

OK. And as I said, I'm not familiar.

I would imagine that that, for example, the University of Toroku or Toroko University of Applied Sciences.

And or Academy.

They, I would imagine.

That, that they they have some kind of of of.

Projects or or?

I don't know like systems and and and.

Networks.

That that you've mentioned and talked about, but I'm not sure of course.

**CE** **CHIAMAKA EZUKA** 1:13:02

Yeah.

**OW** **Otto Waris** 1:13:05

As I said, I mean just as an idea that that.

Joining joining.

Or collaborating with with.

Other other universities or companies or so that our master's degree students, international master's degree students would would have opportunities to.

Get employment and and and.

Work sounds great, absolutely.

I'm all for it.

I don't even know what the the the downsides to that could could be or or. Have you heard any sort of objections to to this or?

**CE** **CHIAMAKA EZUKA** 1:13:57

No, I haven't. I haven't.

**OW** **Otto Waris** 1:14:00

Oh yeah. So I mean, sounds really good because.

This might be that I'm wrong but.

Sort of.

If an employer has a good experience of employing.

Well, anyone of course.

But employing an international student.

Then they probably will be more likely to be open to employ an international student in the future.

So sort of getting past that barrier.

**CE** **CHIAMAKA EZUKA** 1:14:40

Yeah.

**OW** **Otto Waris** 1:14:44

Unfortunately, I mean exists of course it.

Varies between between employers, but getting past that would probably do be a good thing because.

I mean.

Trying to break down possible possible employment related.

Prejudices or or sort of those kind of things, I mean.

Would be a really great thing.

**CE** **CHIAMAKA EZUKA** 1:15:20

Yeah.

I think so too.

**OW** **Otto Waris** 1:15:29

Yes. And of course I think this was someone who said this during.

Maybe it was during our.

Personnel meeting when there was this topic regarding I don't, I don't recall anymore, but it was especially one one of the talks was about like international aspects of Novia and and all kinds of things but mentioned that.

Also trying to promote to our our Finnish students and trying to get more.

Collaboration and more interaction between our sort of Finnish students.

Our international students.

Would be a great positive thing because then.

Then hopefully those Finnish students, when they.

Are slightly older and maybe in a position of of being the some of being an employer.

Then they could probably.

Be more open to employing anyone.

Be they finish or international.

So that's one thing also maybe that Novia could try to increase the interaction between between students.



**CHIAMAKA EZUKA** 1:16:58

Yeah.

I agree.

Thank you so much.

I think we've had such a great conversation and honestly, you've you open my mind.

So you know, a couple of things. You know, I think we've had a very insightful conversation and I'm I'm very grateful that, you know, made our time to speak to me.

**OW** **Otto Waris** 1:17:25

K.

Absolutely I.

OK.

I'm really happy to help and if I could be of any help or or provide any I don't know.

As you said, new new thoughts or or so then I'm really really happy.

Really happy.

**CE** **CHIAMAKA EZUKA** 1:17:46

Yeah.

**OW** **Otto Waris** 1:17:48

Really happy to help and if if you wanna discuss something in the future just let me know.

As I said, I'm happy to help if if I in some way can can support or promote our students.

Well-being so I'm always always all for it.

**CE** **CHIAMAKA EZUKA** 1:18:11

Yeah.

Yeah. Thank you so much.

I think I'm exhausted. All my questions and I think I've figured I've figured more than 10 to me.

Right, you know, so I think we've come to the end of the interview.

**OW** **Otto Waris** 1:18:29

Alright, yeah.

**CE** **CHIAMAKA EZUKA** 1:18:29

Yeah. Thank you so much. Yeah.

**OW** **Otto Waris** 1:18:32

No, absolutely.

**CE** **CHIAMAKA EZUKA** 1:18:33

I'll keep the the line of communication open if I have, you know, any further questions.

You know, if I need your, you know, your idea on something. So I'll definitely reach.

**OW** **Otto Waris** 1:18:38

Yeah.

Yeah, yeah, absolutely.

Yes, absolutely.

Don't don't hesitate to contact me in the future. Just.

Send an e-mail my way.

**CE** **CHIAMAKA EZUKA** 1:18:52

OK.

Alright, thank you. OK.

**OW** **Otto Waris** 1:18:53

OK, good.

Have a great day.

**CE** **CHIAMAKA EZUKA** 1:18:55

Enjoy the rest of your day. Yeah, you too. Bye.

**OW** **Otto Waris** 1:18:58

Bye bye.

**CHIAMAKA EZUKA** stopped transcription

□

## **Appendix VIII: Feedback from the Students Regarding the Services on the Flyer**

### **Pediya Wickramasinghe**

This flyer captures my attention; especially mental health and having group of friends or peers, I think relationship is vital. Nevertheless, if the services offered contained outdoors or involved sustainability clubs such as nature interest clubs then I wish they were included.

### **Hanh Nguyen**

I love the focus on support services, yet it could also suggest more face-to-face communication activities, such as cultural exchanges or study-circle conversations to practice the local language. This would be useful to students like me to counter social exclusion and better immerse themselves in Finnish culture.

### **Olawale Oluwasegun**

Those services mentioned are valuable particularly the provided mental health workshops as well as counselling. More preferable, the flyer should also address or provide information

about networking or opportunities on how student like me could manage academic work and part time job.

**Abina Appiah**

This concerns with regard to mental health and wellbeing of learner are praiseworthy. However, the flyer should attract more the attention of students like me by providing information that could point towards sources which address stress to students or ways of coping with high pressure tests and number of assignments.

**Arhaan Patel**

The services advertised in the flyer are necessary; however, something like advocacy for intercultural exchange and academic adjustment service would be even more effective were emphasized in the flyer. These are very important especially to the international students transiting into the new academic setting and new social settings.