

Saimaa University of Applied Sciences  
Tourism and Hospitality, Imatra  
Degree program in Tourism

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## **FOREIGN STUDENTS IN THE PLACEMENT PROCESS**

Bachelor's Thesis 2010

## ABSTRACT

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The purpose of this thesis was to find out how foreign students that are doing bachelor's degree in Finland feel about the placement process in a foreign country. The goal of the thesis was to find out how foreign students are taken when they apply for placement in Finland. The study was done using only students' point of view and it concentrated on foreign students at Saimaa University of Applied Sciences who studied in International Degree Programme in Tourism.

A qualitative research method was used in this research. The study was implemented by using semi-structured theme interview. Seven students were chosen intentionally and interviewed for the research. Books and the Internet articles and sites were used as additional material and theory part of the thesis.

The findings of the study show that there is a little interest to do a placement in Finland from the student's point of view. The ones that had applied were received quite variably. The research shows clearly the importance of the Finnish language when you try to apply for a placement in Finnish company.

It was also questioned in the thesis if any kind of assistance was used during the thesis process. The results show that some was used especially with proof reading and with finding the companies. The interviewed students gave the impression that more assistance would be good, but could not explain what it would be.

The research pointed out that students at Saimaa University of Applied Sciences do not find Finland an attractive place for doing placement and when applying, the Finnish language plays an important role.

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# 1 INTRODUCTION

This bachelor's thesis examines how foreign students are taken when they apply for a placement in Finland while they are studying in degree programmes in a Finnish University of Applied Sciences. It has been researched quite much before how foreign people are trying to get jobs in Finland and how they are taken, and how easy or hard it is for them. The facts about how foreign people will be employed in Finland, after graduating with a Finnish degree have been researched before. This research concentrates on students at Saimaa University of Applied Sciences. They have not been examined before and since the international degree program in tourism has been going on for a couple of years it makes the subject for this thesis quite relevant.

The idea of the subject came from the school and it interested me immediately since I have interest in human resources and, of course in developing the processes to be more suitable for students. The fact that Finland has every year more and more foreign degree students also encouraged to do this research. Since the willingness from students to apply for placement in Finland is rather unknown as well as the facts how students feel about applying for a placement in a foreign country.

This thesis also focuses on the South Karelia area and on students at Saimaa University of Applied Sciences in the degree program in tourism. The capital area has, of course, more foreign students than South Karelia area but the number is growing in South Karelia and it attracts people from Russia at least.

The goal of this thesis is to find out how foreign students are taken when they apply for placement in Finland from their point of view. The questions are related to feelings and experiences of applying in addition to how the process works. There were also some additional questions that the thesis sought answer to:

- was assistance used during the applying process
- would you have needed assistance

- what kind of advice current students would have for new students

With the help of the answers this thesis will try to create an image whether foreign students need more assistance from the teachers in the applying process and what kind of assistance it would be, or if they are satisfied with the situation as it is? Furthermore the thesis seeks the answer how much interest there is to do the placement in Finland. This thesis tries to create a picture of what students would more need in the placement process, and what kind of things they should have taken into consideration before and after that they did not do and what they would wish the present students would do or avoid.

Qualitative research method was used as research method. Qualitative method was used since this thesis wanted to get close to the interviewees. Understanding is named as one of the aims in qualitative research and the research seeks understanding to the given research problems. In this research understanding was sought with the questions how students feel about the placement process, how they feel about assistance given to them and what kind of things they could have done differently (Qualitative Research Methods Overview). The research was implemented as theme interviews with seven foreign students that study at Saimaa University of Applied Sciences in the degree program in tourism. The students were picked randomly and some of them had applied for a placement in Finland while some of them had not. The additional material was gathered from books related to the subjects as well as on the Internet sources, articles and previous researches done on the subject.

The information achieved with the research can be helpful for the teachers, especially the ones in charge of the placement, when they will know how the students feel about it and how teachers could help them in the process. The results could also be used when talking about placement in general to foreign students and to encourage new students to apply for one in Finland. It could also be possible to do follow-up research, for example on how students in every unit of Saimaa University of Applied Sciences are taken when applying for a

placement or then not only concerning on foreign students but Finnish students as well. Follow-up researches could be well extended.

## 2 PLACEMENT

In Finnish literature the term placement has only few definitions. The definitions vary depending from whose point of view it is looked at; is it from adults' view or youngsters' view or formal or informal learning view. Placement is often represented as a combination of various incidents and operations. From that point of view placement can be an alteration of work and theoretical studies, or it can be supervised or self-guided learning and developing one's skills in one's own workplace. (Hulkari, 2006, 26-27)

Placement is part of the degrees in upper secondary education and it means goal-directed study module which takes place in real working life. The main goal of placement is gaining professional abilities. Placement combines supervised functions and the experience which comes from work. Placement differs from normal work and the actions related to that by the supervision and with certain learning goals. The supervision of placement has characteristics from consulting. In the school certain teacher is responsible for the supervision for placement and the in work place there is a person named for the job as well. These two support the learning process of the student in the work environment. (Hulkari, 2006, 13)

Placement is a significant part of degree not only on quantitatively but also contently in Universities of Applied Sciences. The share of placement varies between degrees from 11 percentage to 44 percentage. Placement is the largest single study entity in all degrees. (Salonen, 2007, 25) All degrees that last for three years or more include at least 20 working weeks of placements which mean working and learning in a company of the studied field. Students learn part of the expertise that belongs to their studies by doing placement. (työssäoppiminen kuntoutussäätiö). Legislation defines that the aims of placement are to induct students to hands-on work assignments that are especially crucial to their studies as well as applying their knowledge and abilities to the working life. (Salonen, 2007, 26)

The responsibility of successful placement is based on organisational level to the cooperation contract between school and workplace. At individual level the responsibility falls to the supervisor and of course to the student. Supervisor is in charge of the supervision he is giving, and the student is in charge of his own learning. But it should be kept in mind that learning in the workplace is not separate from the other actions in the workplace so the sociological factors also affect the learning process. (Hulkari, 2006, 13)

## **2.1 Goals of placement**

The general goals of placement have also been defined, although they might have some differences according to each University of Applied Sciences. However, the mutual goals are to increase the responsibility that working life carries of University of Applied Sciences studies, to make it easier for the companies to get qualified staff, enhance moving to the working life for young students, increase students' knowledge about labour market and rules in working life as well as raise cooperation between Universities of Applied Sciences and companies. (työssäoppiminen kuntoutussäätiö)

Each field has its own guidelines for placements. In hospitality and restaurant business they have their own, and they say the following about the placement recommendations: Placement is goal-directed. The student will set personal learning goals which are linked to the study program. When setting these goals the stage where the student is in his studies must be taken into consideration. There are certain names that are recommended to be used in the field. At the beginning of the studies placement is called basic placement and at the end of the studies it is called advanced placement. If there are more than two placement periods the third, which takes place in the middle of studies, is called professional placement. During the advanced placement it is useful to discuss the possibility to make the final year thesis for the company one is doing the placement in. It is highly recommended and quite natural to do the thesis to the advanced placement company. (Keskipohjanmaan ammattikorkeakoulu 2006b, 22-23)



The first placement period should be done as a fulltime job in one company. The placement done at the middle or in the end of study time can also be done fully or partly as part-time job although it has to be agreed separately. It is recommended that the placement will be done in more than one period because that way the goals set to the placement will most likely be fulfilled. In the basic placement the student will learn basic knowledge of his own field as well as general policies of working life. During the next placements the student will widen his knowledge and his professional know-how. He will also develop his management and specialist skills. (Keskipohjanmaan ammattikorkeakoulu 2006b, 22-23)

A placement plan with learning objectives is always done because that creates foundation for the learning in the work place. The placement plan can also include a placement contract. The placement contract must be done when the placement is done unpaid. With the contract, for example the student's insurance will be covered. The placement contract can also be done in addition to employment contract when placement is done in paid employment. (Keskipohjanmaan ammattikorkeakoulu 2006b, 22-23)

Placement cannot be replaced with previous work experience. Placement done in other University or University of Applied Science degrees can be compensated in another degree; this can be applied, for example with transfer students. (Keskipohjanmaan ammattikorkeakoulu 2006b, 22-23)

Making the placement plan and contract are crucial things to be done before actually starting the work. The plan should include the main work assignments and the learning objectives that are suitable for this placement. They both should be done with the placement supervisor, so the process includes student and placement supervisors from school and the company where the placement will take place. With the objectives it is possible to concentrate just on one bigger assignment or do several versatile tasks. (Keskipohjanmaan ammattikorkeakoulu 2006b, 22-23)

During the placement the student will keep regularly a placement diary. In the diary the objectives of the placement will be answered and there will be also possibility to talk about the tasks given and the success in them, or problems related to them. One will also write down the learned things and observations. With the help of the diary the student can describe experiences, professional growth and also recognize strengths and issues where learning is still needed during the placement. The placement diary will also support the evaluation and record any ideas that may occur during work. After the placement the student will write a placement report with given instructions. (Keskipohjanmaan ammattikorkeakoulu 2006b, 22-23)

Placement will always be evaluated. The evaluation is based on the goal achieved during the placement. The placement will be either evaluated as approved or with one to five evaluation scale. (Keskipohjanmaan ammattikorkeakoulu 2006b, 22-23)

International placement has the same policies as placement done in Finland.

Universities of Applied Sciences must ensure enough resources for the supervision for the placement so that the objectives can be achieved. (Keskipohjanmaan ammattikorkeakoulu 2006b, 22-23)

## **2.2 International placement**

For the sake of language skills and occupational development it is recommended that the student would do one placement or part of it abroad. The placement should last at least three months that it would be notified in the studies. A foreign employer can also require longer placement contract from four to six months. In these cases basic placement and advanced placement can be combined. This means that all the 30 credits will be earned during one placement period. The continuous period abroad would be natural to do between the second and the third year of studies because during that time the

student has already gained basic readiness to work in the field by having done most of theoretical studies. (Keskipohjanmaan Ammattikorkeakoulu, 2006, 20)

The planning of doing placement abroad should begin before the actual placement period. The company where the student would like to work he can find himself or use contacts that the school can provide. (Keskipohjanmaan Ammattikorkeakoulu, 2006, 20) Depending on the field the student can also get some guidance from teachers when they are trying to find a suitable placement company. It has been quoted that students might actually need mental support when searching placement companies. (Mutanen, 2009, 13)

Compared to University students the students in Universities of Applied Sciences expect more guidance when it comes to international placement. In some fields it is rather hard to find placement companies and some Universities of Applied Sciences do not even encourage students to find them by themselves since they cannot guarantee the quality of placement. The quality of placement is developing and the ways that schools have used are monitoring the company, educating it as well as cooperating more with the representatives of the chosen company. This kind of controlling of course limits the number of places and there are certain countries which might not support the strategies of the University of Applied Sciences and will be soon left out when considering placement companies. (Mutanen, 2009, 13)

The same guidelines will affect the placement abroad as in Finland. All the contracts vary in the international placement because different countries have different policies as do different companies. In the international placement all the documents, such as placement plan, contract and evaluation are done in English or in the language of the concerned country. (Keskipohjanmaan Ammattikorkeakoulu, 2006, 20)

International placement as a business is interesting and interestingly challenging. The restrictions that international placement has guarantee this. The knowledge about placement differs a lot between countries. Since the different cultures in working life in different countries managing and executing placement programs

is challenging. Achieving quality placement cooperation requires years of working. A successful international placement program requires a lot of knowledge about management, conditions and ways of working of the country where the company exists as well as information about people's exchange in process level. (Mutanen, 2009, 26)

The international placement in Saimaa University of Applied Sciences is similar to all international placements in other Universities of Applied Sciences. In Saimaa University of Applied Sciences you can do international placement throughout the year, but mainly basic and advanced placements are done during summer time. The placement has to take place in companies that are linked to travel industry, and the suitability of placement is ensured with placement plan and contract of placement of employment where all the tasks are shown clearly. Advanced placement has to be more demanding with its tasks than basic placement because it should be management level tasks. Saimaa University of Applied Sciences supports its students' international placement financially with its own funds or with Ministry of Educations' capital or with Erasmus support money. The financial support comes because the school wants to encourage students to internationalization and doing placement in a foreign country. (Häkli Jaana)

### **2.3 Foreign students doing placement in Finland – Who are they?**

Foreign students, who are doing a placement in Finland study at Universities, Universities of Applied Sciences or at vocational institutes, or they can as well be just graduates. They have to be 18 years old and have at least studied a year before applying for placement, or have finished their studies two years before applying. Most of them have previous work experience and one of the requirements for getting a placement is good language skills. For many of the students it is part of their professional qualification to do placement abroad and that is why their work motivation is high. More and more foreign trainees pick Finland as a country to do their placement since Finnish employers have good reputation abroad. (CIMO, ulkomaisen harjoittelijan palkkaaminen)

The Centre of International Mobility (CIMO) has brought students from environmental, technical, humanistic and business fields to Finland to do their placement. These students have been from all over the world. These students know well their own culture and the ways of working in their home country. If the employers have used these skills in the right way the trainees have opened possibilities to cooperate with the companies in their home countries and Finnish companies might have created long-lasting customer relationships. (CIMO, ulkomaisen harjoittelijan palkkaaminen)

Universities and Universities of Applied Sciences bring students from all over the world to Finland, either to do a whole degree, a part of it, exchange program or placement. Placement is meant to provide many things for students, especially for international students. There are four key areas in which placement plays a part. These four are career development, networking, supporting knowledge learned in school, and cultural adaptation. For international students, networking and cultural adaptation can be seen as the most important area of the four, especially if the student intends to stay in the country. (Open and hidden labour markets)

Foreign students are similar to Finnish students doing the same degrees as they are. The only factor that differs is that foreign students are doing studies, placements and thesis away from their home country. They might have more experience of the field than Finnish students but they lack language skills. The priority is that both the foreign and Finnish student need to strengthen their skills and knowledge they have already learned, and gain more knowledge from the field that might be previously unfamiliar. By doing placements foreign students will gain experiences and abroad view of the field. They will also form contacts that might help when they are looking for career path after graduation. Networking with the employees and employers in the companies can be very beneficial to foreign students that might not have as many contacts in the new country as the residents of the country. Good networking, great input while working and outgoing attitude can be beneficial for foreign students when they

try to look for a job and it will also keep them in employers' mind when companies need more labour. (Open and hidden labour markets)

## **2.4 Role of placement in changing working life**

The placement should not only be seen as the student's action as he gets acquainted with work tasks and applies the studied things in action. Placement should be seen as a junction between education and working life. Placement should be benefitted as learning environment which would include learning new things, be the developer for educational content and also as a tool to develop working life. (Salonen, 2007, 27)

Placement ought not to be seen as part of studies but also as a possibility to develop cooperation between teaching and business life (Salonen, 2007, 27-28). Placement period can also be seen as reinforcement of the knowledge learned and to give the student work experience which cannot be provided in the school. It has been stated that the workplace has become an important place for learning in the rapidly changing world (Jarvis, Holford, Griffin, 2003, 66) Placement is a natural way for teachers to create contacts with businesses and organisations in the studied field. This would also increase the volume of research and development actions that Universities of Applied Sciences are carrying out. The quality of placement as well as the contacts in business life can be developed and improved by enhancing the supervision of placements. The enhancement has had many positive effects to the Universities of Applied Sciences and business life organisations as well as the cooperation between these two. Here are some of the positive outcomes of the enhancements in placement supervision for Universities of Applied Sciences: development of teaching, reducing the gap between theory and action, improvement of contacts for teachers, conspicuousness of the degrees and the organisation of Universities of Applied Sciences. There are also some benefits for the company where the placement is done. Companies can get final year thesis done for the company and other development projects, as well as making themselves known for the potential employee. There is also the possibility for new information and

innovations to be transferred between Universities of Applied Sciences and companies in the field. (Salonen, 2007, 27-28)

The latest specialist views report that the entire organisation belonging to the placement process in anyway should form a network of specialists. There are three different factors affecting the possibility of placement becoming such a network and a learning environment; they are the internal organisation of Universities of Applied Sciences, the interaction between partners from Universities of Applied Sciences and companies and the mutual goals as well as arranging the work load in the workplace when doing a placement. (Salonen, 2007, 28)

It has been normally thought that resourcing a placement is money off from some other project. If you think in new way which was represented before so putting more effort to the supervision you could actually enhance the relationship and cooperation with businesses in the field. (Salonen, 2007, 28)

For the companies placement is a way to recruit because in that way they get to know the student and the potential new employee. During the placement the student will develop expertise, get to know the organisation and its functions and will learn how the company works. The student can bring new ideas and fresh perspectives to the company. When the organisation needs more employees they might contact the one that was doing placement there because they know him already and know the way he works. (Salonen, 2007, 28)

An international student doing a placement in Finland will bring touch of his own business culture and potential contacts from his own country to the company he is working in. He can also enhance the language barrier and possibilities to work in a multicultural working environment. (Salonen, 2007, 28) The foreign student will also get a lot of things for himself from the placement done in a foreign country although it would be the country where they are doing their bachelor's degree. Training in a company in a foreign country offers a chance for a student to further improve his knowledge of the language, not only the everyday language but also the formalities and tones of the working life language. A

stronger knowledge of native language can help to create a stronger cultural bond, however, learning the language is only second to learning the culture (Sarles, 2001).

### **3 INTERNATIONALIZATION OF UNIVERSITIES OF APPLIED SCIENCES**

As it is stated in the government program of Matti Vanhanen's second government, national strategy will be created for the internationalizing the academy level of education. It will increase the mobility of students, teachers and researchers. In January 2009 the academy level education's internationalizing strategy was published and it set certain guidelines for internationalizing for the years 2009-2015. It is part of the renewal of academy level education. (Diak, Korkeakoulujen kansainvälistyminen)

The goal of the strategy is to create an internationally strong and attractive college and research community to Finland. This would enhance society's ability to function in international environment as well as support the development of multicultural society in addition to be able to take part in global problem solving. The strategy sets five main targets: genuinely international community in University of Applied Sciences, increase of the quality and attraction of academy level of education, enhancement of export of knowhow, supporting multicultural society and enhancement of global responsibility. (Diak, Korkeakoulujen kansainvälistyminen)

The goal has been set to 20 000 degree students in all colleges. The foreign degree students' number would increase from 3.7 percent to seven percent. (Diak, Korkeakoulujen kansainvälistyminen)



### **3.1 Genuinely international learning and working environment**

In genuinely international college community everyone from students to teachers as well as from researchers to staff has the possibility to achieve readiness for international cooperation and opportunity to work in international tasks which the school provides. The international readiness among students is supported with mobility periods that are a part of studies and will be executed in a foreign country as well as increasing elements of internationality in teaching. When planning studies internationality is taken well into account so that the students could finish their studies in estimated time. Schools should support mobility of students by accepting courses done in other of the education units same level. The basis for these mobility periods comes from at least a three-month period spent abroad. This means doing either placement or being as exchange student, but this is not necessary for all students since the time spent abroad can also come from certain research projects and shorter periods of time spend abroad. Research projects and shorter study periods are especially vital for adult students. Different fields use different ways to become more international and increase it with their students. With the fields that do not carry so much other activities, such as research abroad, the placement periods abroad are very important to get the students acquainted internationally at least in some way. (Opetusministeriö Korkeakoulujen kansainvälistymisstrategia 28-29)

Attracting and getting more foreign students to degree programs and increasing the number of staff exchange are crucial points for internationalizing the colleges. Teaching in foreign language supports the possibility for foreign teachers to get a job in Finland. It also offers the possibility for Finnish students to study in a foreign language in multicultural environment in their own country. Improving the quality of teaching in a foreign-language is all the time under development because it takes time to create a genuinely international community. With the cooperation between different schools and different fields as well as with foreign staff and multicultural student community, it could be possible to create internationally functioning study entity. In international degree programs the cooperation with working life will be increased. This helps students to get employed in a Finnish company. The clarifying of career paths will increase the

attractiveness and passing of the international degree programs in Finland. (Opetusministeriö Korkeakoulujen kansainvälistymisstrategia, 29)

### **3.2 Why internationalize?**

Within science internationalization has been self-evident. In the last decades there have been rather big changes in the academy level education, such as rapid increase of education without borders, integration of college structure and the diversifying of the college education form. Requirements for internationalization concern all the functions in Universities and Universities of Applied Sciences now more than ever before. The benefit that comes from it can be seen in the students, teachers, researchers, single colleges and from all the systems' perspective. In the following some reasons will be presented why it is so important to internationalize. Since our mental and economic resources are limited, a great deal of the information that we need is produced abroad. We need international cooperation to get access to this information as well as to improve quality and eliminate overlapping functions. It is important to gather domestic and international knowhow for common projects. Also the domestic top quality knowhow is essential when competing and interacting with the global businesses. (Opetusministeriö Korkeakoulujen kansainvälistymisstrategia 15-17)

Academies have a crucial role in internationalizing the economy and society life. Colleges attract foreign employees as well as foreign investors. By networking at international level Universities and Universities of Applied Sciences can strengthen the potential in their own area, general knowhow, and ability to compete and innovate in addition to diversify of the economic life in the area their affect. It is also the function of academies to increase the knowledge of Finnish culture and making it a part of world's cultural variety. (Opetusministeriö Korkeakoulujen kansainvälistymisstrategia 15-17)

International mobility gives the possibility to work and network with the top workers of your own field. There is also the possibility to get to know new research methods, research fields and ideas. The foreign teachers and

researchers bring new knowhow and new perspectives to the college world. Teaching, studying or working abroad improves language skills, labour market position, and understanding different cultures and societies. (Opetusministeriö Korkeakoulujen kansainvälistymisstrategia 15-17)

There is a lot of silent information connected to international networking and this information is important for the development of education as well as science. It is in addition vital for the renewal of society. Internationalization also enhances mental growth of people and understanding global responsibilities, because global problems need international cooperation to be solved. (Opetusministeriö Korkeakoulujen kansainvälistymisstrategia 15-17)

Academies, education and science fields have significant differences when it comes to internationalizing. Also the obstacles and possibilities with internationalization vary. It has been unanimously stated by academies and working community that Finnish academy level education does not offer genuinely international and multicultural environment to its students, researchers, teachers and staff members. (Opetusministeriö Korkeakoulujen kansainvälistymisstrategia 15-17)

## **4 EMPLOYERS' ATTITUDE TOWARDS FOREIGN DEGREE STUDENTS AND FOREIGN JOBSEEKERS**

In the book *Ulkomaalaiset työnantajansilmin* written in 2005 it was said that foreign employees are a rare phenomenon in Finland and that employers have single experiences of them. It is stated that Finland had in 2005 about 55 000 foreign employees in about 320 000 work places. The most experience of foreign employees have community employers (53%), the next 44 % experience comes from government employees and the remaining 39% comes from the private sector. Thus private sector has the least experience of foreign employees. The biggest percentage, 53 percent can be explained with the fact that communities are trying to employ long-term unemployed people. The

government experiences can be explained with the EU and the internationalization that has followed being part of the EU. Government employers can hire foreign experts for speciality tasks and to producing jobs. (Söderqvist, 2005, 41-42)

Employers have experience of foreign workers in many tasks. Usually foreigners start from so called floor level tasks. This means that, for example in private sector most of the foreign employees are in production and secondly in specialist tasks. In community jobs the foreigners get employed mostly in production, customer service and in specialist tasks. There are three main reasons why foreigners have not been employed. First there is no need which is the biggest reason, second is that there are no applicants and third is that it is too complicated. The complications come usually from lack of knowledge. Employers have said that one of the reasons why a foreign person has not been accepted for placement is that they have not volunteered as trainees. Foreign applicants should apply for all sized companies in all fields all over Finland. (Söderqvist, 2005, 42-43)

Districts have become more multicultural and business life has become more international with the help of colleges in the area. Research was done to employees in the districts and 30 percent agreed that colleges have internationalized their area. If we are looking at Finland, the most areas that were affected were Savonia-Karelia area and Ostrobothnia. Ten percent thought that there has been no effect at all by the Academy level education being in the area. When asked of the employers if academies helped businesses to internationalize, 26 percent agreed on this while 25 percent did not know at all. The strongest agreeing areas where Savonia-Karelia area while Lapland and northern Finland disagreed. In their point of view academies had not helped businesses to become more international. What comes to the size of companies, the big companies were the most convinced that colleges have helped them to become more international. The surprise was that small companies thought that as well while medium sized companies were not so convinced. (Söderqvist, 2005, 45-47)

One quarter of employers that took part in the research and answered the questions concerning education in Finland and the need to have foreigners that have graduated from degree program in Finland agreed that they would need them. The ones that had experience of hiring foreigners from them, one third thought they would need foreigners that have done their degree in Finland. If the question had been looked from the point of view of the size of the company, it is seen that bigger company representatives think it is more necessary than the small company representatives. When looking the at question geographically, the same areas (Ostrobothnia and Savonia-Karelia) that have more interest in foreigners in previous questions, need the foreigners to have a Finnish degree as well. (Söderqvist, 2005, 47-48)

The public sector has more foreign trainees than the private sector. Generally foreign trainees in a company are a rare phenomenon. Management level is usually quite unaware of the trainees in the company. Some reasons for this unawareness might be that managers have not been in the position for a long time, trainees are constantly changing or managers are not involved with hiring trainees and supervising them. The number of trainees is related to the size of the company; the bigger the company is the more they have had foreign trainees. Industry and service fields have the most interns while production has the least. Actually hiring foreign persons for a job after graduation and only 17 percent have done that of the employers which already have experience of foreign employees. (Söderqvist, 2005, 48-49)

## **5 IMPLEMENTATION OF THE RESEARCH**

This research was executed during the time between spring 2009 and summer 2010. The idea of this thesis came as early as 2008 during the spring semester. The actual work for the research began during January and February 2009 when the search for information and sources. Before that I had been reading literature concerning the subject. The empirical part was executed during the spring and summer 2009 by interviewing seven foreign students in the degree

program in tourism at Saimaa University of Applied Sciences. Material books and Internet articles were used to create the literature part. The results of the research were analysed during the summer 2010.

### **5.1 The research problem and the goals of the research**

The goal of this thesis is to find out how foreign students are taken when they apply for a placement in Finland. The main point of view used here is the students and how they feel in the process of finding companies for placements. Furthermore there were some additional questions that I was looking answers to:

- Was assistance used when applying for a placement?
- Would you have needed assistance?
- What kind of advice would current students have for new students

With these questions and the feelings as well as the experiences students share with me, the purpose of the research is to find out if it is easy or hard for foreign students to find a placement in Finland, and if there is interest to do the placement in Finland, and what kind of feelings the whole placement process raises.

### **5.2 Limitation of the research**

Good and successful research always needs to be limited in some way. With the limitation of the subject the goal is to specify the idea what you want to know and what you want to show with the gathered material. In some cases the subject already contains a limitation. For example, if the research concerns a certain target group it already contains limitations. (Hirsjärvi, Remes & Saajavaara, 1997, 77-78)

This research was limited the target group. In the research the feelings and the experiences of foreign students at Saimaa University of Applied Sciences were examined. The research tried to find out how foreign students are taken when

applying for a placement in Finland. How are they received by the employees of the companies and how the students feel about the applying process? The focus is on students, thus no representatives of companies were interviewed. By this the intention is to provide better information for the teachers on how the students take the whole placement process and what could be done differently to help foreign students to apply.

### **5.3 Research process**

The word research methods means concrete gathering of material and information as well analysing methods. These methods can be categorised into qualitative and quantitative methods. (Hirsjärvi, Remes & Sajavaara, 2003, 124)

One of the main goals with the qualitative research method is to get as close as possible to the target you are going to survey. The target is to find out the examinees' subjective opinions about the surveyed issues. Information gathering is usually done with the help of interviews and observation in the qualitative research method. Diaries, biographies and other material which comes up in daily life can also be used as source of information in qualitative research. (Kiviniemi, 2001, 68)

The qualitative research method was chosen because it brings the subject close to the examined students. It gives a closer picture about what has happened and about the feelings related to the events than the quantitative research method. While in quantitative method the researcher knows in advance what to look for, in the qualitative one it is not that clear what is looked for and it might turn out to be something very different from what was thought of. Qualitative method is as well more flexible which was needed in this research. This thesis does not want to tie the examinees' feeling into numerical data and make statistics out of it, which are characteristic to quantitative research. The researcher wanted to create some kind of general ideas and conclusion which are more characteristic to quantitative research method as well as statistics and percentages that are now going to be only partly presented. The researcher will

go really deep into the subject but still remain objective to the issue, here the research methods mix up a little but still the qualitative side comes more up in this research. (Qualitative versus Quantitative Research)

### **5.3.1 Material gathering**

The intention of this thesis is to survey experiences and because of that I chose the qualitative research method to be used. My goal is to analyse the interviews I did with the students of their own experiences. In the process I used the semi-structured interviews. Semi-structure interviews were used because they have fairly open framework and allow conversational two-way communication. With this method you can also create a guideline, but not all questions need to be designed before the interviews since the interview structure is in process and more questions can arise during the interview. In this thesis it was important not just to hear the answers but also the reasons for, them which is typical for semi-structured interviews. People also tend to discuss more sensitive issues when they are individually interviewed. (Tool 9: Semi-structured interviews) Before interviewing I told the students about my thesis and that I would like to hear their experiences about the placement process and how they feel about it. They also agreed to be interviewed since their names are not mentioned in the survey.

I did the interviews between the weeks 17 and 19 in 2009. I did three quarters of the interviews in person and one quarter of them by using skype because of timetable issues. After all the interviews were done I transcribed them all word by word. After transcribing I searched for common themes in them and some similarities in the answers after I had listened to them one more time. Having read what I had written I started writing the results part of the thesis.

### **5.3.2 Research material**

Material for the research came from the students I interviewed. They all study in the Degree Programme in Tourism at Saimaa University of Applied Sciences. They all have experience in doing a placement and some of them applied for



Finnish companies in Finland while the others might not have done it. As help in the interviews I used semi-structured form. Although I wanted the students to speak as freely as possible I had certain questions I needed to get answers to and I did not want to lose the subject that we were discussing, so therefore there might be a need for a question form. I also wanted to keep the interviewees anonymous since I am dealing with sensitive issues.

### **5.3.3 Research method**

Research task is to gather foreign degree programme students' experiences and feelings in applying for a placement in Finland. The word experience can be understood in many different ways; one used in everyday life and the other used in scientific purposes. In day-to-day life it can be referred to experience of life. We think that people who have a long life experience are wise. A person can also be skilled or have practice in matters. By the time opinions of matters will increase and people will gain ability to control situations. Experience can also be defined as brief or spontaneous emotional response which is experienced to be meaningful and memorable. (Kotkavirta, 2002, 15-16)

It takes a lot of work and familiarization with the subject from the researcher that the survey would be good. The directions which you will use to get closer to the surveyed subject, the research problem and point of view usually lead the way to the right method to do your research. (Heikkilä, 2001, 14-16)

Qualitative research aims to understand and explain behaviour and decisions of human beings (Heikkilä, 2001, 16). For this research type it is distinctive to find deep and specific information from compact and discretionary sampling (Vehkaperä, 2003). Qualitative research differs from statistical research methods because it is so subjective. Research has a big role in gathering information and interpreting it in qualitative research. In addition research material is based on examinees' specific and subjective experiences. (Grönfors, 1985, 13-14).

Qualitative research method is justified in this survey because examinees have been chosen for certain reasons. With the researched it is meant to bring the opinions of the examinees out in the open. My role was two-sided; I was the interviewer as well as the fellow student who might have had effect on the answers.

#### **5.3.4 Theme interviews**

The study is implemented by using semi-structured method of interviewing; this method can also be called theme interview. A half structured interview has features from an open interview as well as from form interview. It is typical for this kind of interview that the themes of the questions are known, but the interviewer can change the order of the questions and the structure of the interview. (Hirsjärvi, Remes & Saajavaara. 1997, 204 – 205.) Theme interviews are a great research method when the subject is emotional and difficult for the interviewee. It is mainly used when the purpose of the study is to find out information which is not recognized and dealt in everyday life. (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2004, 35.)

Interview suits for many research types because it is so flexible. Since the direct contact between interviewer and interviewee, some tips which are not said aloud, can change the way how the answers are interpreted. In the interview some defining questions can be asked as well as justifications to the interviewee's opinion. These are done to make the study more specific and complete. The downsides of this kind of interview method are that it takes a lot of time from the interviewer and from the interviewee. (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2004, 34-35.)

It might be hard to receive honest answers and that is why it is very important to make the questions meticulously.

When all the material for the research has been gathered the transcribing of the tapes begins. There are two ways to implement this. The first is the most common at least when there are many interviewees to make a clean copy by

writing the tapes word by word on to paper, this can be made of the whole dialogue, theme areas or only of the speech of the interviewee. The other way is to code the interview with different themes and conclusions already on tape. So it will not be in text form at all. All the scientific information is based on observations of real life, which means that observing is the same and necessary for all the branches of science. Each field has developed its own method of observing which works best for them. (Hirsjärvi & Hurme, 2000, 37, 138.)

#### **5.4 Reliability of research**

Reliability of qualitative research is based on validity of material and conclusions. The material and conclusions must reflect the reality of the research problem as well as the theoretical starting points. The main criterion for reliability is the researcher. (Syrjälä, Ahonen, Syrjäläinen & Saari, 1994, 129-130.)

On the other hand the reliability of the interview material is dependent of its quality. This quality is formed from several components such as all the examinees interviewed, or if the tapes are of bad quality. If these components occur then it can be said that the research has possibility of not being reliable. When making clean copies the same methods must be used in all the interviews because different methods in writing can also affect the reliability. (Hirsjärvi & Hurme, 2000, 185.)

Interviewers are not born good but result of hard work and long time as interviewer. If the interviewer is not experienced and leads the interviewee, the research can be considered not reliable. The whole atmosphere in the interview situation, and the interviewer affect to the results in the interview. So before the interview the interviewer should read and familiarize herself to control the interview situation before. (Hirsjärvi & Hurme, 2000, 68.)

In this thesis reliability will affect the sources that are used for the theory part. For the theme interviews will affect the fact that the interviewer had no experience of doing interviews before. Interviews were done more reliable

because the interviewer read material on theme interviews prior to the interviews and discussed the questionnaire with the supervising teacher. The interviews would have been even more reliable if there had been more interviewees. Half structured interviews succeeded and doing the clean copies took place in the same way with each interview. These facts increase the reliability of the interviews.

## **6 SAIMAA UNIVERSITY OF APPLIED SCIENCES**

South-Karelia Polytechnic functioned as temporary polytechnic from the year 1992. It became permanent on the first of August 1999. Operations in Polytechnics are based on law and regulations concerning polytechnic studies. (Opinto-opas,2008). South-Karelia Polytechnic became Saimaa University of Applied Sciences (SUAS) on the first of January in 2009. It has units in Imatra and Lappeenranta; altogether four campuses, two in both towns. In SUAS you can get education in five different fields. The fields are technology, social and health, business, hospitality and restaurant business as well as culture. These five are divided into 18 degrees of which four are taught completely in English. There are also four degrees that lead to master's degree and one of them is entirely in English. There are also several chances to do exchange abroad since SUAS offers possibilities in Western Europe, Russia, the Baltic countries, the USA, China and Malaysia.

Altogether SUAS had approximately 3050 students in 2010. Of the 3050 students 300 are foreigners. The perceptual share of students in each field can be seen in the chart in attachment one. Technology is the biggest field with 36 percent and the smallest one is culture with 6 percent of all student in SUAS. In 2009 SUAS had about 300 staff members. (Saimia Intranet)

SUAS is known and appreciated nationwide and in selected knowhow areas internationally. The special knowhow areas in SUAS include Russian business environment and Russian travel and culture knowhow, chemical forest industry

knowhow in addition to construction and construction technology knowhow. What comes to the mission of SUAS it has two dimensions, provincial and national. The basic mission provincially is to educate, train and create knowhow for the needs of the public sector and any business life in the area. The operational volume in SUAS consists mainly of the basic provincial mission. (Opinto-opas, 2008, 41-42) There are three points that SUAS emphasizes strategically: user-oriented technologies and their commercialization, leadership and entrepreneurship as well as health and well-being services and service processes. (saimia). In the national mission the University of Applied Science has to produce and develop education with the strategically emphasized points and research and development action which will be nationally recognized. Those are also the points with which SUAS tries to attract students to come to study there and after studies find employment in South Karelia. Nationally important areas are the already mentioned Russian business related issues as well as forest industry. (Opinto-opas, 2008, 42)

SUAS is an ensemble that consists of five very different fields. The challenge for the management is to combine these and make them function as an entity. The basis for the development is to increase the cooperation between fields and in this way widely benefitting from the difference each field of study brings. The goal is to create possibilities over one's own academic discipline so you could use also the other fields of study to achieve the degree. (Opinto-opas, 2008, 44-45)

The strategy of SUAS has four goals. The first is to educate future employers for companies in the South Karelia area. The second is to produce education for specialization, especially for south-eastern Finland as well as to other parts of Finland in addition to north-western Russia. (Saimia Intra)

## **6.1 Placement in Saimaa University of Applied Sciences**

Placement is a part of studies in the University of Applied Sciences. The placement is meant to enhance the professional ability, and the aims are to introduce the student to work that is related to especially professional studies as well as applying already learned knowhow and skills to working life. One whole placement week equals to one point five credit units.

The placement that is required for the degree needs to be instructed training. The content and amount varies by degrees. The placement will be done in placement periods and in other specified periods, for example during vacations. The placement can be done either in Finland or in another country. (Saimia)

## **6.2 Degree program in Tourism**

This thesis concentrates on students from the degree program of tourism so it is in order to tell more specifically about the degree. It has been available in SUAS from the year 2006. Internationality has been highlighted in Imatra since then because there have been degree students from foreign countries when there used to be just exchange students. English is spoken more widely in the unit of tourism and it is considered to be the second language there. (Toimintakertomus, 2006, 35)

The structure and extent of the degree of tourism is the followings. The student will do altogether 210 credits that consist of core studies that make 11 credits. These are the courses that all the degrees students have to do. Basic and specialized studies are the biggest number of credits (154). Those 154 credits also include elective studies that have to be done for the worth of 15 credits. The basic and specialized courses consist of the core competencies such as international tourism, cultural and event tourism, destination management as well as planning tourism in addition to management courses specialized in tourism companies. The courses also include extensive language studies and marketing. Both (basic and advanced) practical trainings are in total 30 credits.

The last 15 credits come from the bachelor's thesis. The graduates will be called Bachelors of Hospitality Management. (SoleOPS)

After graduation the students will be able to work in the field of tourism in various tasks such as planning, marketing and managing. Graduates can also get employed in ebusiness and customer orientation. They have also learned about global trends and the future of the tourism business. (SoleOPS)

## **7 RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH**

In this chapter the results of the research will be represented and explained. The results were categorized with the help of the questions and themes of the interviews. The goal was to find an answer to the research question and reach the aims set at the beginning of the thesis.

### **7.1 Have you applied for a placement in Finland – Starting point**

In the beginning of the interviews I found out how many had applied and how many had not applied of the people I was interviewing. This would give me a picture of how the interview would shape up concerning the rest of the questions because it would be different if the interviewee had applied or not. From the group I was interviewing three out of seven had applied which is about 43 percent and four out of seven had not applied which is about 57 percent.

Although 57 percent had not applied at all 29 percent of them had thought of it a lot before making the decision not to apply. Among those who had not applied three reasons rise why they had not done it. One of them was the reason  $\frac{3}{4}$  of them mentioned, and it was missing family and friends back in their home country. These were very simple and understandable reasons since these students already stay in Finland for the full semester. It is clear that they would like to spend some time during the holidays with their family and friends. Since

the placements are usually done during the holidays it is very easy for them to apply in their home towns. Two other reasons that came up were: Imatra not being attractive and a bit boring as well as interest to go to another country and learn another language during the placement time.

The 43 percent, who had applied, mentioned reasons why they had applied. The major reason was to learn more Finnish and the other was to learn how the tourism companies operate in Finland because it is different from their home countries. The atmosphere was very positive in these interviews and the applicants that had got the job were truly happy about it.

## **7.2 Applying process and responds**

Two out of the three that applied did a written application which they sent to the company of their choice. One of them went there in person right away and got the job. What happened with the written applications? One of the applicants sent them in English all a long and did not end up with a placement. The other one sent them first in English but after not receiving a single answer, wrote the applications again in Finnish and started getting responses right away. After mentioning that applications had been sent already once in English and not receiving any response the company representatives told they were sorry for not responding but had not realised that the applicant could write and speak some Finnish. The process continued in interview which was done partly in Finnish, partly in English. The applicant ended up with a placement from a company not the first that had replied but the one applicant had more interest in and considered to be better one.

The two applicants who ended up with placement emphasized the meaning of Finnish in the applying process. Especially the one who wrote first the application in English and then in Finnish pointed out that the immediate answers after Finnish application were amazing after the total ignorance after sending the English ones. Few other points also came up during the interviews concerning the applying process. It is important to have the right attitude when



you apply and if you try really hard and you are determined that you will get something you will end up with something as well. Positive and determined attitude will carry you far. It is not enough if you send the application, and after not receiving any answer, decide to go somewhere else because it is easier. You have to push it and show that you have knowledge of the Finnish language even if it would be small.

### **7.3 Assistance needed or not?**

One question during the interview was: did you get any assistance in the applying process? One of the seven has answered that no assistance was needed. This applicant acted independently and with determination gained a placement.

The two others who applied with written applications quoted that some assistance was needed or would have been needed during the process. The applicant who managed to get a placement said that during the process, and especially when writing the applications in Finnish, help of a Finnish student as a proof reader was used. This student had also used the help of teacher when trying to find companies where to apply. Although the applicant said that the information could have been found on the Internet it was easier when teachers gave direct addresses and persons whom to contact in the process. One of seven who applied, but did not receive a placement in a Finnish company said during the interviews that help from a teacher had been used during applying. Help in this context means the same as before with the other applicant. The teacher had been helping with providing contact information to certain companies of the applicant's interest. Both of the applicants stressed that with this help it was easier for them to apply although they could have found the information also on the Internet but this way they saved time and effort.

All in all, the question gave the picture that applicants would want some kind of assistance but they really could not define what kind of assistance it would be. One of the four who did not apply said that help in proofreading would have

been needed if this applicant had written a Finnish application. One of them also pointed out that it would be easier to apply for places that did cooperation with the school, and those students who applied for these companies got more assistance than those who found the companies by themselves.

## **7.4 Advice for future students**

During the interviews, plenty of good advice came up for future students from the interviewees. They mentioned these things as things they could have needed during the process, they discovered to be useful after the process or what the future students could do differently from the previous ones.

### **7.4.1 Finnish language**

The meaning of the Finnish language came up with every single one of the interviewees. They all assured that Finnish is very important, of course because we are in Finland. The level of the skills after the first course in Finnish language during the first year of studies also made tongues wag. The overall opinion was that after the first course students' Finnish is not that advanced that they could survive in the working world. One of the interviewees said that it would require a huge amount of self study or previous knowledge of Finnish to be able to do placement in Finland after the first course taught at school. One of the students said that after the first course it would be possible to survive in a Finnish speaking situation. This student had been in a situation where only Finnish was spoken and stated that it had been difficult to follow first but after really concentrating on the subject it had become easier. The entire situation had surprised this student positively as more had been understood than she thought.

The meaning of spoken language rose in the conversations. Few of the students struggled with the spoken language and mentioned that it was not taught enough during the Finnish classes. One of them suggested spoken courses that would concentrate only to speaking and the teacher would speak only Finnish. Many of the interviewees mentioned that they tried to speak among their Finnish

friends and this helped them a lot and their friends always corrected if they said something wrong or did not make themselves understood. One of the seven that were interviewed mentioned that listening was important. When listening to Finnish people talk, you could learn a lot and especially the spoken language. The spoken language according to this student and few others is totally different from the written language and from the language they study. On the other hand, this spoken language is the one used in companies and is the one they should know when applying or starting to work.

#### **7.4.2 Passes and applications**

The hygiene and alcohol (duty manager) passes came up during one interview. This student mentioned that the passes would be recommendable because during your studies you could complete them free of charge. According to this interviewee both of them are very handy when applying for a placement in Finland because all restaurants require them and many hotels have a bar around the reception area. Neither of them has validation dates so once you have done them they will be valid.

During the conversation of the applying process one the applicants mentioned that when writing the application it is good to explain yourself. This student pointed out that in every country the applying process for a job or for a placement is a bit different and in Finland it is good to write a lot and let the company know who you are, where you are from, why you apply and what your Finnish skills are. According to the interview if you do not mention that you speak even a little Finnish the risk that you will not get an answer will be bigger.

#### **7.4.3 Opportunities for future**

Many of the students mentioned in the interview how great an opportunity it would be to do the placement in Finland. This was mentioned especially in the content of staying in Finland. The students that I interviewed did not know exactly their future plans yet but some of them mentioned that they had a lot of

friends and that they would like to stay in Finland after graduating. Of course it makes the job hunting after graduation easier if you can present that you have worked in a Finnish company before even if it is for a placement. But according to a few students this would show eagerness and willingness to stay in Finland for a longer period of time which would impress the company representatives. They also mentioned that placement could easily lead to part time or full time job in the company.

## **8 CONCLUSIONS**

A little less than 20 foreign students studied in the degree programme in tourism in its second year (2007) in Imatra. From this number only a few did their placement in Finland or applied for one during their whole study time. More students went abroad to some other country including their home country. The interest not to do the basic or professional placement was explained with the lack of interest in Imatra and also because students who took part in this research thought Imatra is boring. On the other hand, there was no interest what so ever to do placement in other places in Finland either, mainly because of money issues and not finding Finland so attractive. Although Finland was said to be a nice country and good place to study, in several interviews done during the research still students' home countries drew them back primarily since their family and friends where there.

Students who are going to stay in Finland for the summer vacations say that they are really looking forward to learning more about Finnish culture and ways of working in the Finnish companies and of course the Finnish language which they already have some knowledge of, but the most they want to be able to communicate daily with only Finnish. This confirms Sarles theory (2001) that adapting to culture happens more efficiently when you are working in a company. It is easier for students who are doing their placements in Finland to understand about the Finnish way of life and working after the summer they have done their

placement. Like Sarles stated in her journal (2001) learning the language is only second to learning the culture and the stronger knowledge you have of the native language the stronger cultural bond you are able to create.

As the results of the research showed it is important to write the placement applications in Finnish to get more answers and a possible place. Although the student's language skills would not be so advanced it is better to at least try than to use English because that may lead to total ignorance from the companies' side. Writing in Finnish should not be that difficult since students can get assistance from fellow students as well as from teachers. Proof reading came up in the interviews but the researched students assured that if they had needed any other kind of assistance they would have got it by asking. The research showed that it is good to show the company representatives the skills in Finnish language which you carry, but also to be honest if the skills are not that enhanced do not act like they are and when not understood everything ask before promising anything. When it comes to assistance, a few of the researched students mentioned that they had a feeling teachers gave more assistance to students who applied for a placement in companies which the school did cooperation with. It was not clear what kind of assistance was meant by this and what kind of assistance these students sought who mentioned this.

In the research the meaning of the spoken Finnish language came up as very important part of the whole language learning. The examinees mentioned that they did not get enough education in the spoken language and although they could speak with their Finnish friends and classmates they still found it the hardest to learn. In the interviews it was suggested that some spoken language courses could be organised. After the interviews I asked about this of some students, and all of them found it a very good idea.

The role of the placement has grown a lot with the years and with the development of Universities of Applied Sciences. These days more and more effort is put on them. Jarvis, Holford and Griffin stated in their book *The Theory & Practice of Learning* (2003) that placement period can also be seen as reinforcement of the knowledge learned and means to give student work

experience which cannot be provided in the school. Placement is not only beneficial for students' development in the field, it is also useful for teachers as they create contacts with businesses and organisations. The cooperation increases the research volume in Universities of Applied Sciences (Salonen, 2007, 28). In Saimaa University of Applied Sciences the placement is part of the studies in the international degree programme in tourism is 30 credits of the entire 210 (SoleOPS). Placement is becoming a more and more important part of the studies and it creates the student a possibility to get relationships in the working life.

Finland is becoming more and more international by years. Many companies have branched out abroad and many foreign workers are coming to work in Finland. The ones that are coming to study in a degree programme will get Finnish education as well and get to know the culture and language while studying. The ones who wish to stay in Finland after graduation should be granted the opportunity. Foreigners bring internationality to the companies and may even bring new contacts and possibilities to cooperate with companies in the same field in their own countries. It should be more supported that students would do their placements in Finland, especially if they are planning to stay after their studies. The school already provides education in the field as well as passes (hygienic and duty manager) needed in the tourism field in addition to language training. A foreigner who comes to Finland just to work does not have the benefits which students have.

Finland is not seen as such an attractive country through students' eyes although it is recognized that Finland can provide good education. Still companies should be more open to taking foreigners to work for them and schools should try to make Finland a more attractive place for their students.

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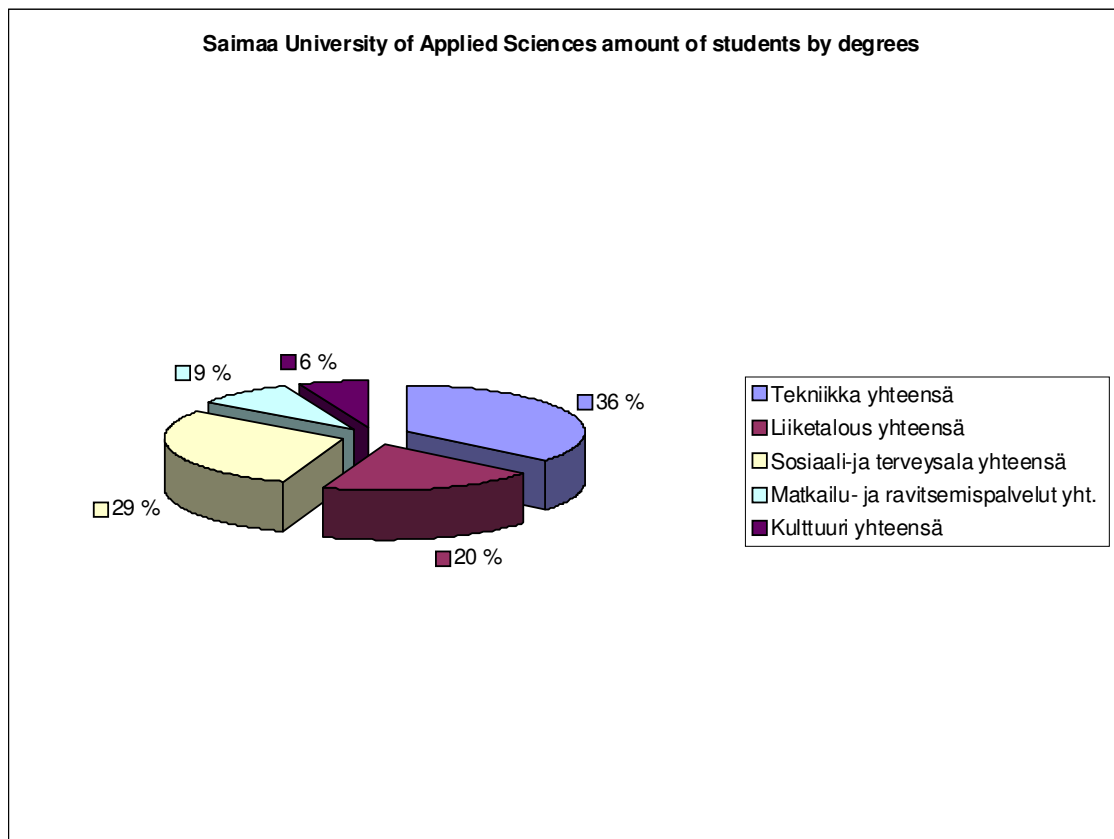
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## 10 ATTACHMENT

### 10.1 Attachment 1

Here is presented by percent how each degree has students in Saimaa University of Applied Sciences



## **10.2 Attachment 2**

### QUESTION FORM

First I will tell what we are doing and why. Then I will explain why I would like to record this and that I cannot comment or discuss because I want to get their opinions and not lead the answers in anyway. Their names will not be mentioned in anyway, it will be impossible to track who answered.

### **QUESTIONS**

Have you applied for a placement in Finland?

How did you do it?

Did you get any assistance in the applying process?

If yes

What kind of responses did you get?

What were your reactions after the responses?

How did the situation end up with the placements?

If no

What could have been done differently?

Would you need any kind of assistance?

What would have to be different for you to apply for a placement in Finland?