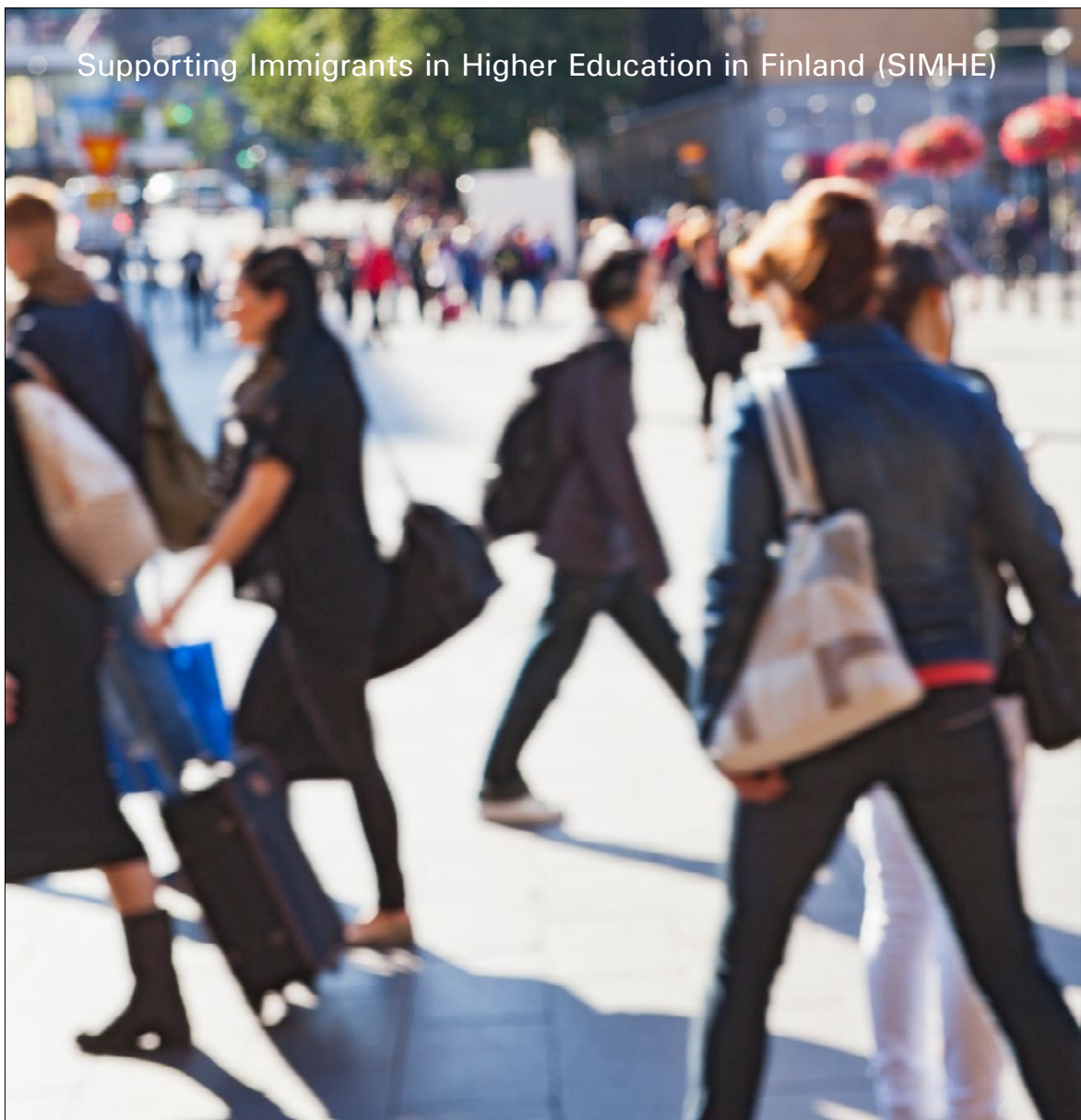


Supporting Immigrants in Higher Education in Finland (SIMHE)



Editors Heidi Stenberg, Marika Antikainen, Eeva Lintala & Marianne Roivas

Towards a Finland of talents together - insights on the SIMHE operations

Publications of Metropolia UAS



Editors

Heidi Stenberg

Marika Antikainen

Eeva Lintala

Marianne Roivas

Collection of Articles

Towards a Finland of talents together – insights on the SIMHE operations

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Preface

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**SUPPORTING IMMIGRANTS IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN FINLAND:
SIMHE ACTIVITIES AS A PROVIDER OF SOLUTIONS**

PREFACE

Finland, together with the rest of Europe, was faced with a new situation in the early autumn of 2015. A record-high number of asylum seekers started to arrive in Finland by different routes. Most of them came from five countries: Iraq, Afghanistan, Somalia, Syria, and Albania. A series of different kinds of measures to address the situation were quickly launched in different sectors of our society. This called for close cooperation between various sectors and authorities.

Metropolia wanted to respond to this challenge by offering its expertise and networks. An initial survey commissioned by the Ministry of Education and Culture at the beginning of 2016 revealed that over 80% of the immigrants were under 34 years of age, and 27% had some kind of higher education background. They might have completed a degree in whole or in part. We made a proposal on the piloting of models for the recognition of prior learning of, and guidance for, these individuals to the Ministry of Education and Culture at the end of 2015. We received funding for the piloting, with the help of which we opened our service to our first clients in April 2016.

The situation was challenging in many ways from the point of view of asylum seekers and service providers alike. We chose client orientation and networking as the basis for developing Metropolia's services. This meant, first, increasing our understanding of our clients by getting to know the asylum seekers personally at the reception centres. At the same time, we built strong cooperation with the Ministry of Education and Culture and other operators, such as municipalities, Employment and Economic Development Centres and companies in the Helsinki Metropolitan Area.

Together with the Ministry of Education and Culture and the University of Jyväskylä, we decided fairly quickly to develop a national SIMHE (Supporting Immigrants in Higher Education in Finland) operating model. The objective was to make services available in different parts of Finland and to also develop the services in close interaction. This laid the foundation for the current SIMHE operations, which have

subsequently expanded to many higher education institutions and cover all immigrants with a higher education background in Finland.

A lot has been achieved in four years. New solutions have been developed for the recognition of prior learning, guidance models and working-life oriented learning paths alike. We have successfully guided many people to work duties that match their competence and skills.

New technologies have been utilised in the services, and this has made it possible to expand the provision of services to increasingly numerous and diverse client groups. The lessons learned and solutions proven in Metropolia's SIMHE operations have found their place in our service model for continuous learning known as Metropolia Match®.

In this publication, we will highlight, together with our partners, this inspiring, challenging and, in many ways, instructive journey. We have accomplished a great deal together. I am particularly pleased and impressed how much our experiences and solutions have been used in different parts of Finland and how new solutions have emerged along with them.

Finland needs bold experiments and people who get things done. There are many such people involved with the SIMHE operations, and I would like to extend my warmest thanks to each one of them and to encourage continuous co-creation.

Helsinki, 8 September 2020
Riitta Konkola
President and CEO
Metropolia University of Applied Sciences

SUPPORTING IMMIGRANTS IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN FINLAND: SIMHE ACTIVITIES AS A PROVIDER OF SOLUTIONS

From the integration challenges of asylum seekers to enhanced integration of international talents and students into the Finnish labour market – many kinds of challenges have been identified and solutions developed to address them during the SIMHE journey over the past four years.

The launch of the Supporting Immigrants in Higher Education in Finland project in 2016 was one of the first measures taken by the Ministry of Education and Culture to address the education of immigrants and to streamline and expedite their transition to working life. The objectives defined for the Supporting Immigrants in Higher Education in Finland project included developing, offering and establishing solutions to address the identified challenges posed by long transitions and standstill between studies and working life. Furthermore, the development of the recognition of the prior learning of immigrants with a higher education background was perceived as an additional principal means. (Syrjänen 2018, 3.)

Soon after the launch of the Supporting Immigrants in Higher Education in Finland project, the acronym SIMHE was widely adopted as a shorthand designation for the project. Initially, SIMHE activities referred to the guidance and recognition of prior learning services launched by the University of Jyväskylä and Metropolia University of Applied Sciences, for the development of which separate funding was granted by the Ministry of Education and Culture. The development of guidance services was at the centre of the SIMHE activities. In the service solutions developed, the emphasis was on not only regional but also on client and university context-oriented activities. (Ministry of Education and Culture 2017, 18–28.) Additionally, a more in-depth recognition of prior learning and competences service was developed at the Metropolia University of Applied Sciences. Developed into a concept, the recognition of prior learning service was perceived as helping the

person concerned to verbalise their competences to better meet the demands of Finnish working life. On the other hand, the document given as part of the recognition of prior learning process was perceived as serving as a competence reference for the employer in a recruitment situation alongside the degree certificate. (Autero 2018; Stenberg et al. 2018.)

At the beginning of 2017, under strategy funding from the Ministry of Education and Culture, four new higher education institutions in addition to the University of Jyväskylä and Metropolia University of Applied Sciences were assigned as new SIMHE higher education institutions: The Universities of Helsinki and Turku and the Karelia and Oulu Universities of Applied Sciences. Alongside the service activities, RDI (research, development, and innovation) activities carried out in the form of separate projects were also initiated. Different kind of project funding was used to address the development needs identified in the SIMHE activities by providing different kinds of solutions to challenges such as appropriate education and career paths.

At the close of the strategy period 2017–2020, it is possible to describe and evaluate the SIMHE activities of the past years based on a range of materials – written reports and other publications – and expert and client interviews related to the SIMHE activities. This article discusses how SIMHE activities have been able to meet the objectives set for them and what kind of solutions have emerged during the years of operation.

TARGETING APPROPRIATE EDUCATION AND CAREER PATHS

What is the right education for me and what kind of career can I pursue in Finland? How can we put the immigrants' competence to use as efficiently and quickly as possible? Integration is seen as a two-way process, which requires commitment both from the immigrants themselves and from the receiving society. The idea of 'right', suitable, and appropriate education and career path is also strongly linked to the Act on the Promotion of Immigrant Integration, the purpose of which is to support and promote integration and make it easier for immigrants to play an active role in Finnish society (1386/2010, section 1). This concept, which is central to the SIMHE activities, is discussed in this article based on reports and publications of the relevant ministries on the one hand and, on the other hand, based on the material obtained from eight expert and six client interviews.

In the written materials, points of view related to content, duration, services, integration, and employment can be found concerning the appropriateness of the education path, especially as described at the level of society and organisations. For example, in the report entitled *The educational tracks and integration of immigrants. Problematic areas and proposals for procedures* published by the Ministry of Education and Culture, it is concluded that:

Those who have completed higher education or vocational studies should, as soon as possible, be referred to *supplementary education that is appropriate to them. Higher education institutions should be involved at an early stage in the recognition of prior learning and referral to further education and working life of immigrants with a higher education background.* (Ministry of Education and Culture 2016, 7–27.)

In its report, the Faster Education Paths and Flexible Transitions for Immigrants working group of the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment highlighted the central importance of information, advisory and guidance services as well as the role of employment and economic development offices and educational institutions in the pursuit of an integrated whole that is appropriate in view of the integration and employment of immigrants. According to the report, it is the responsibility of the higher education institutions responsible for SIMHE activities to direct those aiming at completing a degree or parts thereof to seek admission to an appropriate education programme. In the action proposals presented in the report, an appropriate education path was noted to include support for the development of language skills that support transition to the labour market alongside other studies. (Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment 2017, 24–34.)

In practice, appropriate training paths have been promoted by a variety of means: through SIMHE activities, educational offerings and guidance have been developed, and understanding has been improved concerning obstacles in access to higher education and development needs concerning the recognition of prior learning. The Finnish National Agency for Education has supported those engaged in counselling work by means of training and production of information. (Ministry of Education and Culture 2019a, 13, 38–39.) The identified development targets in the Finnish higher education system include the need to package complementary studies and competences in higher education institutions to meet the identified national needs and the need to take into account the sparse supply of Finnish and Swedish language courses as

the main obstacle to speeding up the employment and education paths, especially with regard to more advanced courses and study units related to professional terminology (Ministry of Education and Culture 2019a, 31).

The **interview participants** included four experts who were engaged in counselling work as part of the SIMHE services in different parts of Finland, one person who worked in other SIMHE-related expert duties at the higher education institution concerned, two experts from the employment and economic development services, and one ministry representative. Of the six SIMHE guidance and counselling clients interviewed, four were from the Helsinki Metropolitan Area, while the other two represented other areas of the SIMHE activities. The time of immigration of the SIMHE guidance and counselling clients varied from one year to 30 years. The reasons for coming to Finland included work-based immigration (1), studying (1), asylum seeking (1) and family-related reasons (3). One of the interviewees was in an employment relationship, while the rest were unemployed jobseekers at an employment and economic development office. An interesting dual role could also be seen in the answers of some of the counselling clients: their personal experience on receiving counselling and, on the other hand, work experience as a counsellor for other immigrants.

When considering guidance for appropriate education and career paths, the experts examined the points of view of society, their own organisation, the individual concerned, and working life. On the other hand, the SIMHE guidance and counselling clients approached the matter by raising points of view and experiences related to their prior learning and competences, occupation, work history, life situation, personal capabilities, interest and motivation, and the guidance they had received.

CLIENT-CENTREDNESS AS THE STARTING POINT OF SIMHE ACTIVITIES

Based on the interviews, the starting point in the **SIMHE services** is primarily the point of view of the individual, in this case the guidance and counselling client, when the client concerned is referred to appropriate education and career paths. However, the point of view of society is also taken into account, as **education is perceived as a principal tool for employment**. The role of the person receiving guidance and counselling is that of an active actor who, in the light of the information provided, can make a decision on their own appropriate education path:

The people being guided are so different and their backgrounds so diverse that this poses an additional challenge regarding these matters, or on many occasions the language skills [...] that instead of providing education just for the sake of education, we must think about what, after completing the education, the realistic employment prospects actually are. The student makes the final decision, but as a counsellor, however, you seek to present the alternatives for pursuing studies and what kind of educational tracks there are available. But at the end of the day, the student will have to independently make their decision. The counsellor can clearly present the career paths available, meaning how long the studies will take, what they will graduate as, what kind of employment prospects they will have. (SIMHE counsellor)

SIMHE was more like one-to-one guidance, so it was more personalized for me. ... was basic orientation course for more than 18 to 20 people from different countries. So it was not that much one to one, like personal guidance. Similarity was, both gave me a clear idea, what I have to do and what I need to do, and where do I find that. ... is a little universal for me, anyone in Finland... number one was personalized service, SIMHE is personalized. (SIMHE-ohjausasiakas)

[...] When the counselling appointment was available [...] she was very very nice, business-like, bold and encouraging, and there was actual concrete discussion [...] Personally, I've had positive experiences and received enough guidance and counselling, but I have also been able to look for it, I immediately had very close contacts with the Finnish society [...] I believe that, when I taught immigrants Finnish and provided them with guidance counselling in their studies for several years, that five years ago it was pretty much so that girls were instructed to become practical nurses and boys car mechanics, but this was always also in view of what the potential employment prospects would be and what the objects of their own interests were. (SIMHE guidance and counselling client)

In the guidance provided by the **employment and economic development services**, the societal point of view, in particular the needs of the labour market, seemed to underlie the education and career path. However, the need for individual service has been recognised as well.

From the employment and economic development office point of view, this matter as a whole is perceived such that the intention is to support the needs of the labour market in particular, the kinds of competence needs that exist there, so perhaps we also tend to direct our clients in that direction to strengthen that kind of competence or to recognise similar competence acquired somewhere else. Considering how heterogeneous that group is and how highly individual its needs are, it would in my opinion be somewhat irresponsible to try to generalise a specific path as the one that would most commonly serve this target group. In view of effectiveness, recruitment-type training sessions are the best option. (Expert from an employment and economic development office)

An appropriate career path would probably be such that a person finds employment in duties that corresponds to their competences and objects of interest, so we don't consider the education path a primary objective as such, but instead we always consider the employment prospects, that is, if a person is able to find employment without education, then that is the appropriate path, and if a person needs additional or further education to find employment, then that is the proper intermediate step to be taken in such a case. (Expert from an employment and economic development office)

The reference to a path that promotes rapid employment is frequently encountered in the written material, but what exactly is the concrete time span targeted with an appropriate education and career path for people with a higher education background? In the interviews conducted with experts, the duration and content aspects were discussed, e.g., in the following ways:

It has not actually been defined in any way duration-wise, but our performance and the success of the current integration process is in fact measured such that it cannot take years, and indeed the target is that if the maximum integration time is three years, and even this should be individual, the client would within these three years, and preferably even sooner, be in working life, and indeed as soon as possible, that is the bottom line. That is, no side steps, no long routes, but as quickly as possible with specific targeted measures, and that would probably be one of the things that need

further improvement in this field. (Expert from an employment and economic development office)

Career paths would be based on the goals and wishes of the individual concerned, and they should be kept as short as possible, so that there would be no need, for example, to pursue additional studies if they do not really advance one's career. For some, the path may be longer, but it should be appropriate in that any previously acquired competences have been taken into account in the career path if the client so wishes. Of course, there are also people who want to change their career completely. But in that case, that is appropriate for the individual concerned. (SIMHE expert)

In the reflections on the concrete time span, the three-year maximum duration defined for integration is frequently taken up. As a rule, a fast path seems to have been understood such that the essential thing is to draw up a target-oriented employment plan taking into account the prior learning and competences and personal aspirations of the individual concerned.

The stories of the guidance and counselling clients highlight the impact of not only prior learning and competences, but also work, language skills and personal life situation on what kind of education and career path they perceive as possible and meaningful. The experiences on services and the guidance received are also pinpointed as being of significance regarding the education and career path they end up following and how motivated and self-directed they perceive themselves to be.

The life here is so impressive and so good. One thing I struggle with, it is finding a good job. Unless you know Finnish language, it is impossible... Because the most important thing in life is how to support and feed your family, and to live passionate about the jobs. It's not only about work, job, but it's also capable of earning money. I'm already... old and my twenties is behind my back. And a married person. And this time to get fast education and to find a well-paid job.

I dream of returning to my own profession, so indeed I do dream of working at some point as [...] maybe people could be helped in pursuing not the same profession, but a profession that is somewhat similar to their former profession.

I sent a message and, well who was it now [...], who kindly replied that sure, come on in for a chat, but since the first guidance

appointment will only be available after the expiry of the joint application period, just go ahead and apply for admission, it will not cost you anything, and so I applied. My idea was just to go see what the entrance examination is like, and I was very surprised when the results came in November, saying that I was admitted to pursue full-time studies... considering that I came from a world where nothing was ever readily available and there was always a terrible rush, never time for anything, as every minute counted, [...] So just the fact that I got a positive and calm answer that, yes, there is time, but not just right now, but later yes, just come on in and let's have a chat. This alone was a very significant and positive thing, and then the concrete instructions to go on and submit an application now as it will not cost you anything, otherwise I would never have dared to put in the application.

I am a relatively well-experienced worker and I have a higher education background, so why can I not even try, but she said because [...] Finland has no need for [...] I was made very clear that I do not deserve a better job. Many immigrants experience difficulties or even discrimination because they cannot even imagine that it is good to be in the Finnish society like a full-fledged citizen.

Based on the client stories, it can be concluded that it is very important to continue to pay special attention to the competence and client service attitude of the persons providing guidance in terms of both the appropriate education and career path and the equality objective stated in the integration programme. Guidance competence is of major importance, but also small things, such as kindness and encouraging attitude, play a major role in formation of the education and career paths.

FINLAND IN EUROPEAN COMPARISON: UNIVERSITY NETWORK COOPERATION MODEL AS A DISTINCTIVE FEATURE

From the European perspective, it can be concluded that even though the number of asylum seekers and refugees that increased sharply in 2015 posed a common challenge for Europe, the solutions opted for in the education sector in different Member States appear different.

The common solution opted for was, within the framework of the Erasmus+ programme of the European Union, to support projects promoting social inclusion in the education and youth sector. Addition-

ally, the online linguistic support (OLS) digital platform for the students' language learning and language proficiency testing was extended to also include refugees and asylum seekers through the 'OLS for Refugees' functionality (EDUFI n.d.). According to the estimate of the Finnish National Agency for Education, this support measure was especially utilised by the higher education institutions that were actively involved in the SIMHE activities, and the utilisation rate of the OLS tool (licences applied for/used) was at the European average level. Finnish and Swedish language courses were completed by less than 400 participants, and the tool was also used to improve proficiency in other languages. Regarding the Finnish language, the use of 'OLS for Refugees' feature was limited by the fact that only an elementary level course was available on the platform.

Measures with objectives similar to those of the SIMHE activities that support transition to higher education and working life have also been developed in other countries. Where in Finland the emphasis has been on guidance and counselling and the recognition of prior learning and competences, in the European perspective, measures related to the improvement of language skills are most frequently highlighted in the measures specifically directed at asylum seekers and refugees. Additionally, common support measures to facilitate access to higher education are exemptions to tuition fees and grants or scholarships (Eurydice 2019, 15–16). This is seen as a central measure also outside of Europe, for example, in countries such as the United States (IIE 2020).

In Germany, the measures taken to integrate asylum seekers and refugees to higher education are the most extensive in European comparison (Eurydice 2019, 10–17). Federal funding for the measures of higher education institutions has been channelled especially via the German Academic Exchange Services (DAAD). The support and development measures have focused on the recognition of prior learning and competence, the provision of education preparing for higher education studies, guidance and counselling services, and purely financial support. (DAAD n.d.)

In the other Nordic countries, support measures have especially been used to streamline access to higher education. In Sweden, the measures have been especially targeted at the recognition of prior learning and competence and the recognition of foreign degrees for the needs of working life (Eurydice 2019, 16–18).

When comparing the measures of different countries, Finland's SIMHE activities are characterised by the model of regional SIMHE higher education institutions and the aim of nationwide cooperation,

which in practice has been implemented, for example, through the operation of the joint counsellor network of higher education institutions.

Another distinctive characteristic of Finland's solution is the aim to create more permanent structures, services, and practices and to develop the operations to serve different groups of applicants and students as comprehensively as possible. Since the beginning, SIMHE measures have been targeted not only at asylum seekers and refugees but also more generally at immigrants with a higher education background. This choice is easy to understand, as in European comparison, however, relatively few asylum seekers and refugees arrived in Finland in 2015. Also, the number of students with an immigrant background in higher education institutions is still rather small as such (Airas et al. 2019, 44–45). Developing narrowly segmented services and support measures for different groups of applicants and students with an immigrant background would not have been feasible.

SOLUTIONS TO ENABLE CONTINUOUS LEARNING

Published in 2019, the Vision for Higher Education 2030 defines key objectives for higher education that are also relevant for the development of the SIMHE activities. The vision has as its objectives that over 50% of all young adults (aged 25 to 34 years) complete a higher education degree and that continuous learning is possible in different situations of life. The educational offerings of higher education institutions must be flexibly available to different user groups. (Ministry of Education and Culture 2019b, 4.)

One of the principal challenges for continuous learning is indeed to **respond to the educational needs** arising from increasing immigration and the education of the immigrants who have moved to Finland. Relating to this theme, in its *Background matters* report, the FINEEC evaluation group examined the national situation of the inclusion and participation of students with an immigrant background in higher education, the related obstacles and the currently functioning practices. The evaluation group ended up giving the following recommendations for increasing inclusion (Airas et al. 2019, 12–13):

- The identification of students with an immigrant background must be improved: higher education institutions must implement a common and systematic identification practice so that the monitoring and reaching of applicants with an immigrant background would become possible.

- The need for affirmative action must be identified.
- S2 teaching is not always realised as intended.
- In the future, higher education institutions should identify the needs of students with an immigrant background when it comes to the development of specialist-level language skills.
- The connection between studies and working life must be strengthened.
- A project-driven approach does not support systematic development of operations.
- A follow-up evaluation must be implemented after five years, targeting the group that does not access higher education.

In SIMHE work, in addition to services related to counselling and recognition of prior learning, solutions to facilitate access to higher education have been developed both in universities of applied sciences and in universities (see Lehtonen; Niemelä et al.; Stenberg in this volume). In addition to preparatory education, solutions have been developed to support the development of the immigrants' Finnish language proficiency in different educational models supporting employment (see Ezeonodo et al.; Johansson et al.; Lemettinen, Jäppinen, Pitkäpaasi, Pääskylvuori, Saarikko & Säteri; Lemettinen, Kukkohovi, Saaristo & Autero in this volume). Metropolia's SIMHE further development project, on the other hand, develops a model for Finnish language learning and career guidance that promotes the integration and employment of international undergraduate students in Finland (see Antikainen, Descille & Iso-Heiniemi in this volume).

Successful integration can be an opportunity to address the challenges posed by Finland's dependency ratio and the mismatch between supply and demand on the labour market. In the SIMHE activities, development needs have been identified concerning the **attainment of the key integration targets** indicated in the Government Integration Programme for 2016–2019 (VALKOII). **These needs relate, among other things, to the individualisation of services and improvement of their flexibility as well as to the development of paths and a service system to expedite employment, with due account taken of the individuality principle.** (Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment 2016, 10–16.)

The Deploying Competence in Finland project funded by the Finnish National Agency for Education has addressed the objectives of the integration programme in a concrete manner by developing solutions to meet the challenges of cross-administrative cooperation and

guidance recognised in the Helsinki Metropolitan Area (Metropolia University of Applied Sciences n.d.). One of the results of the project was the modelling of a counselling-based ecosystem for integration. Based on this model, a centre of excellence for immigrants with a higher education background in the Helsinki Metropolitan Area, funded by the Ministry of Education and Culture, has been set up and piloted as part of the municipal experiments conducted in Espoo, Helsinki, and Vantaa–Kerava (Metropolia University of Applied Sciences 2020). The SIMHE service and education models will certainly be developed further as established continuous learning services that provide solution to meet future needs. Examples of this include the continuation of SIMHE activities as part of the Metropolia Match service model established at Metropolia (Ruotsalainen 2020).

GOOD PRACTICES FOR UTILISATION IN THE ENTIRE HIGHER EDUCATION FIELD

Has SIMHE met the objectives and expectations set for it? From the expert interviews, especially the identification of sore points and the production of needs-driven solutions, as well as target-oriented cross-administrative cooperation, can be pinpointed as success stories in the SIMHE work.

[...] the SIMHE activities have served as a sort of an eye-opener [...] that a person should not only be helped for merely humanitarian reasons, but that we should now support competitiveness and the whole nation so as to set the wheels in motion or to keep them in motion. In other words, some apparent change has occurred in this regard. (Ministry representative)

Well, if we begin with the points of departure, an awful lot has been developed around all this, indeed a whole lot more compared to what we started with [...] what would be good, or I think would be good, is to have, say, neutral, free-form counselling activities in place in the future that are available for any client group irrespective of age. And then these recognition of prior learning services, they would be a good thing to have, that would refer to an education path, or to what in the SIMHE path [...] or in the Deploying Competence in Finland, or in the current preparatory education, when the separate application process opens, that there would really be a path option available. And in my opinion,

there has been, like, really good development during, say, the past four years or so, that such practices have been modelled, tried out, tested and then, if they really remain in place, but it is always up to the funding as to which of them are perceived as being important. But perhaps, in a way, a head start has been made, proving that something like this can be done, so perhaps someone can be found who wants to finance it, too. (SIMHE counsellor)

It has, for the time being, been a sort of an interest-free zone, that we can really start from the person's point of view, well I think it is like a control room that also works with a similar principle. (SIMHE counsellor)

There has been a lot of cooperation, and we cooperate a lot with various organisations, and I think that, if I compare it to the regular admissions service or some other service at a university, it is also new, too, and this is entirely understandable, because they focus on the courses offering of their own university, but somehow I think that cooperation between many sectors and operators that aims at common objectives is terribly important, so I think that it should be brought up in some way. (SIMHE counsellor)

What have been the benefits of the SIMHE activities? What should be considered in the future? The interviews with counselling highlight experiences of an encouraging, client-oriented, empowering experience that helped in pursuing one's own goals.

Well it was very encouraging and information wise, it really gave me the idea, how I should do the process step by step. Foreigners, we don't have a clue how the system, work, so we need guidance really.

At the moment, as a surprise to myself and even everyone close to me, I am a first-year nursing student. And all this it pretty much thanks to SIMHE.

After completing the preparatory education in the SIMHE project, I then tried to find a job, and succeeded, too.

[...] was really friendly and helpful, and I immediately got the feeling that this was not a formal appointment for her. She un-

derstood that I needed assistance. One additional wish, perhaps, would be that I had not previously heard of SIMHE. My [...] friend told me about it and gave me the link. Well, perhaps if there could be more advertising.

This collection of articles summarises the experiences of SIMHE higher education institutions on network collaboration and describes the solutions developed not only for promoting capabilities for higher education and employment, but also in respect of counselling that is at the core of the activities. The collection of articles seeks to present, in as diverse a manner as possible, points of view to the SIMHE activities and the associated wider network supporting integration.

The notion of integration inevitable involves the question of what kind of objectives, services, and educational offerings it is supported with. Neither should we forget the need to define an integrated whole comprising the time span, the funding base and the operators involved in the service process. The strategy funding for SIMHE activities 2017–2020 is about to expire, but the SIMHE work will be continued and expanded with the Talent Boost action programme. The purpose of this collection of articles is to inform the public about what kind of activities have been carried out and how and what has been achieved with them. We hope that this collection of expert and client articles also contributes to the generation of new ideas on how to further develop the SIMHE activities.

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PART I

FROM ABROAD TO FINLAND - EXPERIENCES OF TALENTS

Juliana Holanda

FINDING YOURSELF WITH NOTHING... AGAIN

Daniel Boateng

A HOME AWAY FROM HOME: JOURNEY AND EXPERIENCES IN FINLAND

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Malgorzata Szczypka-van Heeswijk

FINDING MY PATH IN FINLAND

Samiul Sultana

JOURNEY IN FINLAND

Seblewongel Tariku

ADAPTING TO A NEW SOCIETY

Juliana Holanda

FINDING YOURSELF WITH NOTHING... AGAIN

When I'm writing these words, sitting in a workspace at Oodi Library, my daughter Laura is about to turn 2 years old. She was born in Colombia to Brazilian parents and shortly after, our family moved to Helsinki. One thing you won't notice about Laura when you meet this extremely happy-expressive-talkative baby is that she struggled a lot to learn how to walk.

That had never bothered us until we moved here. It's funny to be writing about it in Oodi because I once walked out of this building in tears. I was so frustrated about her inability to walk, that it was painful to see small babies being active in the playground area in the library while Laura was sitting there just staring at them.

It's incredible how things can get emotional when you move abroad. Everyday errands like doing groceries, going to the pharmacy, or trying to dress accordingly for the weather suddenly becomes much more difficult when you are a fresh expat. Immigrating is never easy, even when you decide to do so.

We chose to live in Finland to give Laura a good future. Coming to this country was genuinely desired by our family but settling in was harder than what we had anticipated. For my husband, November weather took its toll on him. For me, it was finding myself having to figure out my professional life. Again.

DECIDING TO IMMIGRATE

I had an established career in journalism in Brazil for 20 years. But in 2015, the country was sinking into a major economic and political crisis, and the company I worked for filed for bankruptcy. As a result, I was fired.

Meanwhile, I found the love of my life, and as our relationship was getting serious, we started talking about moving abroad. Shortly after that, he got himself a job in a big American company based in Co-

lombia, and we moved there and became a family in a new country. We took nothing but our clothes with us. And our dog, Tito.

Suddenly I was alone for the best part of the days in another culture, with no friends or a job. I had no work for the first time in my life. I decided to pursue an old dream of mine in the form of owning a business. So I started making cement plant pots, which I managed to sell on the internet and in local shops. On top of that, I was conducting workshops to teach people how to make them. But then I got pregnant and we decided to immigrate again.

Besides the immigration, being a mom is a life changer, and there's no way of getting rid of that feeling of losing your identity. When we arrived in Helsinki I felt like going back to square one.

FINDING YOUR NETWORK

Instinctively I knew I would need a support network in Finland – much like in Colombia I had none –, and I was delighted to discover Metropolia's services for immigrants (SIMHE). That was the start, as I was able to realize what options there were for me in this new country. At the same time, I was going to “Albert Living Room,” a place for parents where a lot of Finnish and immigrant parents unite. And even before we moved to Helsinki, I started following Facebook groups of international moms and working women in Finland. That all combined was how I have started my tiny network.

As I got to meet many women in the same situation as mine, following their husbands and finding themselves in a place of self-doubt, I realized I was not alone. During those nine months of living in Finland, I got to know the most wonderful people and have been welcomed by moms in so many ways that it still inspires me.

After talking to them, I decided to apply for a Master in Business and Digital Communication. But it became clear to me that if I was going back to school to learn a new career, it would only make sense if I could use my new learnings to help other businesswomen to succeed.

Being an immigrant in Finland had a profound impact on me. So much so that I started to think about how I could help other women arriving in this country, feeling lonely, and choosing entrepreneurship in order to create new paths in their lives. I believe that having your own business is one of the ways for many of us to find our identity again.

So, I decided to be a consultant for entrepreneur women in regards to their digital communication strategy.

WRITING YOUR OWN STORY

I had this insight into my business about the same time as my daughter started walking.

Before the 2020 coronavirus pandemic, I was taking her to a Russian physiotherapist in Van-taa. It was a hard process for me, as I blamed myself for Laura not learning how to walk. I saw that as a parable with me not being able to walk by myself through my professional life.

One day, when we were on the bus on our way back home, I looked her in the eyes and said: “Ok, darling. Now it’s the time for both of us to learn how to walk by ourselves”.

I feel this got us here. After a few falls, Laura is now completely in charge of her movements and is a great walker. For me, it’s time to try these baby steps into a new life.

Thanks to the network I was able to start in Finland, I’m already working with some clients. I get myself dreaming about everything I still want to accomplish and all the impact I want to make on other women’s business. In the end, it is all about giving back the support I received when I arrived here.

Nowadays, I don’t feel like I have nothing anymore. I feel I have the strength of the women who supported me all the way here.

Originally written in English.

Daniel Boateng

A HOME AWAY FROM HOME: JOURNEY AND EXPERIENCES IN FINLAND

Sitting quietly under the trees in my local park, watching the kids playing and laughing hysterically gave me something to reflect on; how I was once like them, and how fast time goes by. It seems like yesterday when I arrived in Finland some ten years ago. I vividly remember when the airplane was descending to land, I saw the beautiful area view of Helsinki with most of it looking so green from above.

DREAMING OF COMING TO FINLAND

I was fascinated by having a western form of education after my secondary education while in my native country Ghana. As a teenager growing up, my friends and I were influenced by the lifestyle, and how students or schools were portrayed in few western movies and programs shown on the national television channel. But this dream was merely impossible to achieve as I did not have means of fulfilling it. I come from a low-income earning family of 8 and none from my family had ever travelled abroad or better said, sat in an airplane. The availability of internet in Ghana gave me a gleam of hope that I could fulfil this dream of studying abroad, but there was a setback in my school search in UK, US or Canada. I changed my intention of getting a school from UK, US, and Canada due to their huge tuition fees charged which I could not afford. A friend therefore suggested that I should try Finland because it was a tuition free country at that time.

UNIVERSITY EDUCATION IN FINLAND

I was excited by the prospect of studying abroad when I was accepted to study a Bachelor of Business Administration program in Laurea University of Applied Sciences. However, this came with a short notice

to prepare myself. There is no Finnish Embassy in Ghana, so I had to travel by road to the Finnish Embassy in Nigeria. Upon receiving my visa came with mixed feelings. I was excited to travel abroad, yet also sad to leave my family, especially my mother and friends. I arrived in Finland late when the academic calendar had already started with studies in my university ongoing.

Everything in my new environment seemed so well organized and nice. The first thought I had was, I am now living the dream; it is a reality. I was introduced to my class and given a great welcome. I felt very comfortable and settled in with the Finnish and other international students. My newly found friends and course teachers were nice and helpful, but life outside the school's campus was different to me.

GETTING ON DAILY

I had to learn how to live again on my arrival in Finland. I was thought by my friend I lived with for four months about Finnish culture and how to use the transportation system (bus, train and metro). Few times, I got lost on my way home because I took the wrong train, bus, or simply missed the stop where I am supposed to alight. Nonetheless, I adopted quickly in due time, but I needed a job.

I had the perception it would be easy to find a job, especially a white-collar job as I had diploma in accounting and some working experience from Ghana. But the reality was different. I was informed by colleagues from school there was no way I could get a white-collar job, and that I should focus on blue-collar jobs. Luckily, I got a job as an early morning newspaper deliverer in downtown Helsinki during the 2009 winter through my roommate.

After a week on the job combined with school activities, I questioned myself if I had made the right decision coming to Finland. Physically, I was drained and tired, but my spirit was not broken. I had a purpose for coming to Finland and that focus kept me going. With determination, I graduated successfully in my bachelor's program and proceeded to do my master's degree in Health and Business Administration from Eastern Finland University where I graduated in 2016.

LOOKING FORWARD

One of my favorite slogans is "what next" because I am often thinking on what is the next plan of action to embark on after the completion

of one journey. What am I doing next after my master's degree? What would be the best way to give back to society? All these questions and other thoughts were going through my mind and how to transform them into reality.

My interest in connecting with, and offering to assist others, led to discover that one of the best ways I could be more beneficial to any society I would find myself in is to share the knowledge and experiences gained to those interested. I enrolled in a postgraduate program in education and graduated as a qualified teacher in 2019. I believe this way; I could be of greater service to give back to society.

I had a great time doing my teaching practice at Laurea University of Applied Sciences, an experience I will never forget due to the support I received from my supervising teacher and students. As part of my development, I received a tremendous support from SIMHE (Supporting Immigrants in Higher Education in Finland) on career guidance, was invited to a matching event between companies and international talents and got paired with a highly professional as my mentor in a program called EntryPoint. The icing on the cake was when I co-authored a blog with my mentor published on Metropolia University of Applied Sciences website. The future is bright as I am looking forward to securing a job as a teacher or any related job while also having the vision to further my studies in a PhD program in the near future.

MY TIPS FOR NEWCOMERS

Finland is an open country with great opportunities for immigrants and international students. SIHME is one group to benefit from in your career guidance and more as I did. However, it is important to do your own research to get the primary information about what education program you wish to study and its employability in Finland. Learning Finnish language is critical and a gateway to be more employable, to easily communicate and to feel more integrated in the everyday Finnish life.

Finland is the safest country in the world according to the World Economic Forum 2019 index report. It is not easy moving from your country to settle in another country, but it is worth living in Finland and so you too, I believe, can succeed in Finland

Originally written in English.

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Sharmin Afrose

LIFE FROM BANGLADESH TO EUROPE

I am Sharmin Afrose, a 35-year-old woman from Bangladesh. I moved to Finland in 2013. In Bangladesh, I lived in a small town in the north. I come from a small family. I was my father's beloved girl. When I was a child, I went to comprehensive and upper secondary school in a small town called Ulipur. My father's dream was that I would become a doctor. But I wasn't interested. In our country, parents often have high aspirations for their children. That is often hard for the children as well. It was the same in my life, too. When I didn't succeed in getting to medical school, I decided to study the social services field. Luckily, I got admitted to university to study social work. I moved to a big city called Rajshah, where I studied for a total of five years. After graduation, I came to Finland.

CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

I did not have any plans to move abroad. But my husband had lived in Finland before. He came to Finland in 2007 with a student permit. When we got married, I came to Finland, too.

I still remember my first day in Finland. I came here on 13 August 2013. When I looked out from the window of the car, I wondered why there weren't that many people around, since I came from a small country with a lot of people. In Bangladesh, there is a lot more noise and people. Finland is a peaceful country.

At first, it was difficult for me to understand the Finnish culture. My husband didn't tell me anything about the Finnish culture, and maybe he didn't know that much either. His life was all about studying, working and staying at home. He did not have any Finnish friends.

At first, I only got experiences of cultural differences. For example, I went into the lift in our house as soon as I saw that there was room, but maybe I was too close. They didn't like it. But I thought it was okay. Or if I wanted to talk with our neighbours, that didn't work out either. Later I thought that perhaps I was too curious. Or is that just normal in my culture? Maybe yes or no. Now I have become used to

many things and habits. You're just supposed to say 'hei' or 'moi', and I have also learned to wait in a queue and eat rye bread.

At first, we lived in Herttoniemi, Helsinki, and now live in Pähkinärinne, Vantaa. All places are beautiful in their own way. At the moment, I am very fond of the Lammaslampi pond and the nature surrounding it.

LANGUAGE IS LEARNED BY SPEAKING

I have lived in Finland for six years. I attended a Finnish language course for nine months, after which I've been home on maternity leave. I have two children, a five-year-old and a two-year-old son. When my first son was born, I was looking for a course or a place where I could go with children and at the same time learn Finnish. I started the KOTIVA Finnish language course for stay-at-home parents. It was really nice.

After the course, I attended different kinds of Finnish language groups, such as 'Kotoklubi Kaneli', 'Luetaan yhdessä', 'Auroras-ryhmä'. The groups were of great help. By talking all the time, I learned Finnish. I also found a friend with the help of the 'Friend for an immigrant mum' activities maintained by the Mannerheim League for Child Welfare (MLL). From my new friend, I learned more about Finnish culture and history.

Finland is a wonderful country. The language was very difficult at first, but I noticed that Finns are very pleased when an immigrant tries to speak Finnish, they try to understand. This helps you to learn Finnish.

VOLUNTARY ACTIVITIES AND WORKING LIFE

I have done voluntary work at a sheltered housing facility and at the library. In both places, I read books for old people and children. I completed a work try-out at MLL and received SIMHE guidance in 2018. I filed an application with the National Supervisory Authority for Welfare and Health (Valvira) for a decision on the qualification of a social service professional (sosionomi). They accepted my studies, and after a six-month adaptation period, I can work as a social service professional and in duties in the social services sector. I am currently looking for a place for the adaptation period and, at the same time, I am pursuing Finnish studies and some studies in the field of social services at school.

Finland is a very beautiful and peaceful country. I like it here very much in the summer.

Originally written in English.

Malgorzata Szczypka-van Heeswijk

■ FINDING MY PATH IN FINLAND

My interest in Finland, its language, culture and history dates all the way back to my primary school times when I started collecting all the available pieces of information that would help me understand the culture of the country on the other side of the Baltic sea. It became one of my biggest passions and had a great impact on my future personal and professional choices.

The first opportunity to set my foot in Finland came through my involvement in BEST (Board of European Students of Technology), an international organisation uniting students from technical universities across all of Europe and beyond. This first, 4 days long trip in early December 2010 inspired me to search for other opportunities to visit Finland. Throughout the next 5 years, I kept coming back to Finland in different roles: as a representative of my local BEST Group, an Erasmus exchange student, an intern, as well as a tourist, only to finally settle down here with my partner, who at that point had already been living and working in Finland for a while. At that point, I had two degrees, a Master's in Architecture and Urban Planning and a Bachelor's in Spanish Philology and about 1,5 year of professional experience. I expected it to be enough in order to continue career development after moving up North.

SETTLING DOWN IN FINLAND: NEW ROLE, NEW RULES

Although all the knowledge collected during my previous travels and basic skills in Finnish helped a lot in making Finland my new home, I did encounter different kinds of obstacles before I could consider myself properly settled down. As I was no longer a student or a visitor, I had an entirely new set of rules and regulations to deal with. Solving problems of a bureaucratic nature was mainly a matter of time and paying numerous visits to the relevant institutions; however, finding a steady employment that would be in line with my competencies and professional interests required much more creativity and effort.

I began looking for positions in my fields of study prior to moving to Finland by sending CVs and cover letters to potential employers. Most of them remained unanswered; some of them came with a friendly feedback accompanied by information on the lack of vacancies. At that point, the overall situation of the Finnish labour market appeared very unstable.

REWORKING CAREER STRATEGY

I decided then to take matters into my own hands and search for opportunities using other channels. My new focus was on finding possibilities to talk to the employers directly by attending job fairs, workshops and networking events.

One of the most useful pieces of advice I learned during those events was about calling a potential employer prior to sending a job application. I felt uncomfortable about it at first, but reaching out to the employers this way turned out to be a worthwhile initiative. A short phone conversation was not only an excellent opportunity to learn more about the position; it also allowed me to present myself as someone who could provide my potential employers with a solution to the challenges they were facing. In my case, it resulted with several fixed-term positions in interesting projects, which required someone with a diverse set of competencies, such as foreign language skills, ability to create and maintain business relationships and learning new technologies quickly – all of these skills would be easily transferrable to future positions.

These project-based positions provided me with an invaluable insight into the Finnish working culture. However, their downside was the lack of employment stability. I decided to use the time in-between to improve my Finnish language skills at intensive courses and to consider alternative career development ideas, such as entrepreneurship.

CHANGE OF FOCUS: EMPLOYMENT STABILITY AND JOB RELEVANCE

A turning point in my career pathfinding was participation in the SIMHE Programme at Metropolia University of Applied Sciences. A professional conversation with Metropolia's expert from my field provided me with an in-depth analysis of my competencies along with an insight regarding the opportunities in the built environment sector. I found out about the differences in professional practices between Finland and

my home country and received a set of recommendations on ways of broadening my skill set based on the latest trends and challenges in the Architecture, Engineering and Construction field.

With this knowledge, I decided to pursue my interest in modern technologies in my industry, such as BIM (Building Information Modeling). I found opportunities to broaden my skills in this area at a summer school at Aalto University and at a recruitment training at Metropolia UAS, which eventually resulted in a steady, full-time position in a design office and opportunities of career progression.

IN SEARCH OF HIDDEN OPPORTUNITIES

Along with gaining professional experience, I also worked on improving my Finnish language skills to the point of making it my main working language. This process led me to a surprising conclusion: while mastering Finnish can increase the chances for a steady, relevant employment, the actual problem lies elsewhere. The vast majority of job offers remain unlisted. A confirmation of my observation can be found in Uuden työn valmiudet ja reitit työelämään publication (Sitra 2016) based on a research project performed by The Finnish Innovation Fund Sitra.

Finding out about those hidden vacancies happens mainly through developing personal and professional networks, which may be particularly challenging to the newcomers without strong personal ties to Finland. Building a professional reputation is a long-lasting process, but can be much more effective than focusing purely on learning Finnish, as more and more employers accept English as one of the working languages.

AN EXPERIENCE BEYOND PROFESSIONAL GROWTH

After having lived, worked and studied in Finland for several years, I consider my career development in Finland to be a rewarding experience which allowed me to grow not only professionally, but also on a personal level. Building a life in a new country from scratch can be sometimes a source of doubt and frustration, but it provides a fresh perspective on one's system of values and priorities. And while job searching may sometimes feel like a tedious and solitary path, I learned that it is reaching out to the others and openness to serendipity that can result in surprisingly positive outcomes.

Originally written in English.

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Samiul Sultana

JOURNEY IN FINLAND

This Mst. Samiul Sultana. I am from Bangladesh. I have three siblings, including me we are four. We are two brothers and two sisters, I am the third one among them. My father is a renowned businessman. He was awarded by the government as one of the highest tax payers in Bangladesh. The sister immediate senior to me is a teacher. My brothers are handling the business now after completing their education. Younger one of mine has completed MBA and the eldest had to lend a hand to my father in business at an early age.

When I was a student of the University of Rajshahi in Bangladesh, I was hoping to go abroad for my my master's studies. As I belong to a conservative family, it was not easy, in fact, not possible for me to go alone to pursue my dream without getting married. At last, back in 2012 on a spouse visa I flew to Finland.

DESTINATION FINLAND

Prior to the moment of my departure from Bangladesh I used to imagine about the scenic beauty of Finland. Most prominently, the severe cold of this beautiful country of the North. I used to think about the people. They would be the most significant part of the society we live in. I was a bit worried and nervous, too.

I arrived in Finland in the winter. I was really overwhelmed by the beauty of the nature over here and the snowy surrounding. So mesmerising! I forgot about the shivering cold as I got obsessed by its serenity and calmness. The people here are so gentle, helpful and hospitable at the same time. They made my way easy. And a new beginning with a new journey in my life commenced.

FINDING MY PROFESSIONAL PATH

I have completed my master's in psychology from the University of Rajshahi. This was the root of all my frantic efforts of becoming a psychologist. The seed was sowed there that inspired me for an overseas study and to pursue my career in this prestigious occupation outside

home. I had to overcome many obstacles to reach my dream. I had to come through many adverse situations.

For instance, negative responses from the majority of people made me suffer in despair on various phases through this journey. I made up my mind again and again and came back on track always with a new vibe. I always trusted in myself and I never stopped believing in what I am doing. At the beginning I started the Finnish language courses. After completing the national language certificate test (YKI), I applied for professional rights in the Supervisory Authority for Welfare and Health (Valvira).

By this time I had become a mother of two baby girls as well. Their name is Ruzaynah and Samitah, the lights of my eyes and the most precious things in my life. Then I resumed my lack study and got it done from Turku open university. I continued my study managing everything. I never let the collision happen between my personal life and my family life. At last, in the middle of this year, I achieved the permission to enroll into my profession as a psychologist. Now I am an authorised and licensed psychologist in Finland by the national supervisory authority (Valvira).

SUPPORT AND NETWORKS CRUCIAL FOR BUILDING MY LIFE

Regarding the biggest achievement of my life, with due respect, I would share the credit behind my success wholly lonely with my beloved husband, Md. Saiful Alam. Without his immense support and contribution to the family with our two little babies it could never be possible for me to reach this milestone. I cannot stop being grateful to him and I am grateful to him forever.

In the journey of long 8 years, luckily, I was accompanied by a few Finnish people who have been helping me since the very beginning. They never let me feel like an outsider and I am really grateful to them as well. Also, SIMHE-Metropolia has been serving me as their customer since 2016, supporting me in many ways to reach my goal. I am so grateful to them. There were so many things I could not understand but they helped me to solve my problems. From my point of view, this is the light of hope to foreigners. With the support of SIMHE Metropolia, with the support of my husband and with inspiration of the people of my surroundings, I have achieved the license from the national supervisory authority (Valvira). Currently I am looking forward to get a job.

Originally written in English.

Seblewongel Tariku

■ ADAPTING TO A NEW SOCIETY

In this article, I will try to address the process of fitting into a new society from my personal experience, thoughts, and career counseling I've received from SIMHE. I hope to convey the process I went through to be integrated into the Finnish society, with the advice and guidance at Metropolia University of Applied Sciences (SIMHE).

As a foreigner, I have learned that the process of integration is not the easiest thing on the planet. This is despite the Finnish government's generous efforts and people's help to immigrants and the opportunities I have had. For me, integration is both personal and community-related.

ADAPTING TO A NEW ENVIRONMENT?

When you move to a new country and attempt to live in a new society, your mind always asks very practical questions: "How can I adapt to a new environment and be productive? Will society accept me as a member of the community?" The psychological and sociocultural aspects play a great role in the achievement of personal satisfaction in the new cultural context, including the ability to deal with daily problems, particularly in the areas of life, work, and school. To make my integration easy, I have given priority to learning the language and adapting to the cultural values because intercultural communication is needed more than anything else for the immigrant.

I was born and raised in the horn of Africa in Ethiopia. The lack of democracy and freedom of speech in Ethiopia forced me to emigrate to Finland five years ago. Professionally, I am a Journalist and have been working in the field for more than twelve years. Currently, I am working as a freelance Journalist in Helsinki. While I was back home in Ethiopia, I specialized in writing and covering stories in politics there.

THE BENEFIT OF SIMHE CAREER COUNSELING AND GUIDANCE

SIMHE counseling and guidance service provided me with valuable information to pursue a career and to build a strong capacity for becoming

a productive force in society, along with my personal growth. During the career counseling period in SIMHE, I have benefited a lot to pursue my career, especially in these two crucial aspects: how to build an effective networking strategy and to identify my competencies and skills.

To create a successful networking strategy: As an immigrant, one of the most important skills I learned from SIMHE is how I can network better to succeed in my career. It is known that networking is about connecting with people, exchanging ideas, and learning about career opportunities. SIMHE changed my perspectives from focusing on the old-fashioned networking skills to using new networking skills. Besides, I learned how to develop and strengthen my professional networks, both online and during in-person encounters.

SIMHE guidance broadens my horizons and enhances my career. Also, putting my emotions on the shelf and getting to work using the concrete steps of networking have helped me to become a more effective networker. This makes me strengthen my connection with people by sharing my knowledge and experience, not only by expecting a response from them because networking works for mutual benefit.

Furthermore, I was processing this network principle in my head, determining how to apply it. I started using every opportunity to build a professional network that helps me where I am right now. I started developing my network while I was at a language course, which is part of my integration program supported by the labor office. I got a work practice at Yle; it was eye-opening. It gave me hope and encouragement. Then together, with the SIMHE career coach, we planned how to work hard on both languages and networks to use the opportunity to work in my profession in Finland.

However, I had difficulty finding a job or practice in the media industry because journalism requires language skills, though I have many years of work experience in the field. Therefore, the SIMHE career coach advised me to use other alternatives. I did an internship and volunteered in different organizations; I also got an opportunity to write an article on their website. The work experience from them allows me to acquire additional knowledge and networking, especially in the areas of multiculturalism and diversity. It's initiating me to work in my profession, bridging the gap between immigrants and the local community, which helps me with my current work.

In 2019, I took a non-degree one-year program for immigrant journalists at the Haaga-Helia University of Applied Science and received a certificate of completion. The study opens a new door for me, providing new skills, and expanding my networking in the media industry. I am currently working as a freelance journalist for a few media

organizations, mainly writing to focus on immigrant and multicultural issues and development cooperation with the global south as well as doing video production.

Competence and Skills: Another aspect from the SIMHE counseling service I learned is regarding what my competence and skills are. The SIMHE Career Coach Marianne Autero motivated me to focus on my competence and skills to be competitive in the job market. She advised me that acquiring the Degree itself is not a guarantee to finding a job in Finland but that being “competent and skilled” matters. This helps me to upgrade myself and be qualified.

Finally, SIMHE career counseling and guidance service provided me with a career coach and intercultural communication skills and changed my attitude. I gathered knowledge on how to immerse myself in the new society, especially many unspoken rules and norms that influence daily life, like rules and regulations, attitude, approach toward authority, personal space, and so on.

On top of that, I benefited from SIMHE changing my attitude towards overcoming the career challenge, particularly in the job market. Even though working as a freelancer is rewarding, not being fluent in the Finnish language is challenging. I am confident I will be proficient soon. Therefore, SIMHE has helped change my attitude and perspective moving forward, as the saying goes, “when life gives you lemons, make a lemonade.” That makes the best out of a difficult situation.

I am grateful for SIMHE counseling and guidance service; it’s a Game-Changer program for the immigrant integration process in Finland.

Originally written in English.

PART II

TOWARDS ACCESSIBLE AND EQUAL HIGHER EDUCATION

Heidi Stenberg

**RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE 'GETTING READY - A HIGHER
EDUCATION PREPARATORY PROGRAM FOR IMMIGRANTS' PROJECT
FOR THE PREPARATORY EDUCATION PROVIDED BY UNIVERSITIES OF
APPLIED SCIENCES**

Hannu Niemelä, Johanna Heimonen, Jaana Lampikoski,
Sonja Mitroshin, Leena Peniche Ferreira, Milka Toikko & Taija Udd

**ENHANCING THE IMMIGRANTS' ACADEMIC READINESS IN
THE AKVA PROJECT**

Tuija Lehtonen

**LOWERING THE BARRIERS FOR ACCESS TO HIGHER EDUCATION -
THE INTEGRA PROJECT**

Heidi Stenberg

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE 'GETTING READY - A HIGHER EDUCATION PREPARATORY PROGRAM FOR IMMIGRANTS' PROJECT FOR THE PREPARATORY EDUCATION PROVIDED BY UNIVERSITIES OF APPLIED SCIENCES

Since 2010, universities of applied sciences have provided preparatory education as a solution to address the challenges faced by people with an immigrant background when applying for admission to higher education. The experiences gained from the education and training provided, the research carried out by the Finnish Education Evaluation Centre (FINEEC), and the Supporting Immigrants in Higher Education in Finland activities launched in 2016 have raised a *need for developing preparatory education: instead of organisation-driven education and training, nationally agreed-upon models of education need to be developed.*

In this article, preparatory education means the education pursuant to section 10 of the Universities of Applied Sciences Act that is provided for immigrants free of charge with a view to providing them with language proficiency and other knowledge and skills needed for studies at a university of applied sciences. Since 2014, preparatory education has been one of the funding indicators in the funding model for universities of applied sciences in the section for open university of applied sciences, separate studies and preparatory education for immigrants ECTS credits. Preparatory studies provide an opportunity to peek into a Finnish higher education institution and prepare for a higher education entrance examination. It is important to support and strengthen access to higher education for people with immigrant backgrounds and other underrepresented groups. According to Eurostat, in 2017, the proportion of people with an immigrant background who had completed higher education in Finland was 27%, while in the resident population, the corresponding figure was 41%. (Piironen 2019, 9–10.)

In 2019, FINEEC also examined the national situation of the inclusion and participation of students with an immigrant background in higher education, the related obstacles, and the currently functioning practices. In the development recommendations, attention was paid on the identification of students with an immigrant background as a distinct group so that knowledge-based steering of activities for the growing population group which is yet underrepresented in higher education could be carried out with due consideration given to the equality aspects. (Airas et al. 2019, 5.) The objective of having half of each age group complete a higher education degree set out in the Vision for Higher Education in 2030 of the Ministry of Education and Culture will not be achieved without intensified measures in the group of those with an immigrant background. Preparatory education for immigrants will serve as one principal tool to this end. (Piiroinen 2019, 10.)

In 2016–2017, FINEEC surveyed the preparatory education for higher education studies directed at immigrants. The survey was part of the measures proposed in the publication entitled *The educational tracks and integration of immigrants. Problematic areas and proposals for procedures IIP* (Lepola 2017, 3). As a result of the survey, the need for consistent policies as to what preparatory education is, to whom is it intended and what the objectives of the education are was raised (Lepola 2017, 18).

With separate funding granted by the Ministry of Education and Culture for the development of preparatory education for higher education studies, Metropolia University of Applied Sciences, in collaboration with the South-Eastern Finland, Turku, Oulu, Lahti, Saimaa, Karelia, Laurea and Haaga-Helia Universities of Applied Sciences, addressed the needs for developing preparatory education raised in the 2017–2019 FINEEC survey. The objectives and concrete development measures defined for the ‘Getting ready – A higher education preparatory program for immigrants’ project included the preparation of national curriculum and application procedure recommendations, piloting of the national online implementation of the preparatory education, and development of a management model that supports inclusive integration. (Stenberg et al. 2019, 13.)

As part of the project, national recommendations for preparatory education in terms of both the curriculum and the application and admission procedure were prepared, in addition to which the recommendations were piloted in the online implementation of preparatory education developed in the project. In the project, the progress of the studies was supported with a guidance package in which the guidance-related roles of the different actors involved (subject teacher, tutor teacher, student tutor, study counsellor) were described. (Stenberg et al. 2019, 114.)

The recommendations prepared were presented in a collection of articles entitled *Korkeakouluvalmiuksia maahanmuuttajille – hyvät käytänteet ja suositukset valmentavaan koulutukseen*, and they were also discussed by the Education Committee of the Rectors' Conference of Finnish Universities of Applied Sciences, as well as in the closing seminar of the project held at the end of 2019.

DEVELOPED RECOMMENDATIONS AND OPERATING MODELS PARTLY IN USE

In connection with the evaluation of the results of the 'Getting ready – A higher education preparatory program for immigrants' project, we at the Metropolia University of Applied Sciences decided, after the closing of the project in 2019, to continue the implementation of the recommendations in the spring of 2020 as part of the 'SIMHE Continuation' project. The evaluation was carried out by means of a survey sent by Metropolia to the UASs involved in the 'Getting ready' project. Towards the end of the project, the Lahti UAS and Saimaa UAS had already merged into the LAB University of Applied Sciences, so we expected answers from a maximum of eight UASs.

The purpose of the survey was to determine the deployment of the models and recommendations resulting from the project:

- Will preparatory education be arranged during 2020 in the UAS involved in the project?
- How will the education be arranged?
- Have the eligibility and curriculum recommendations prepared as part of the 'Getting ready' project been deployed in the education?
- What kind of solutions the organisation had opted for regarding the admission paths and procedure to degree-awarding education following the preparatory education?

In addition to the targeted questions, the survey also provided an opportunity to describe how the results of the project were received in general by the organisations.

Of the eight universities of applied sciences involved in the project, six responded to the survey, all of whom told that they will arrange preparatory education during 2020. Of the six respondents, five told that their organisation had deployed the recommendations on the eli-

gibility and curricula drawn up in the project. The university of applied sciences that did not deploy the recommendations had decided to focus on the open path studies directed at immigrants developed in another project.

The forms in which the preparatory education was implemented were evenly divided between implementations provided entirely online, partly online and partly in classroom, and entirely in classroom. After the conduct of the survey, the corona pandemic accelerated and, for example, the Metropolia University of Applied Sciences' plan for a multiform implementation changed into implementations that are provided entirely online. Metropolia was different from the other UASs involved in the project in that preparatory education was planned to be arranged in the fields of technology, social services and healthcare and as multidisciplinary education, while the other UASs planned to only arrange one, mainly multidisciplinary preparatory education. Underlying this are the potential regional need for preparatory education and the practices already established in the organisations prior to the project period.

All the UASs involved in the project took a positive stance on the results and recommendations of the project. The recommendations were perceived as useful irrespective of whether the organisation had prior experience in organising preparatory education. The post-project joint implementation was abandoned due to the strenuousness of the coordination work. The partner UASs had no longer any financial willingness to allocate resources for post-project joint coordination. In addition to the UASs involved in the project, the results of the 'Getting ready' project have also been utilised at the Savonia University of Applied Sciences where, in addition to a 30-credit multidisciplinary preparatory education, SIMHE (Supporting Immigrants in Higher Education in Finland) counselling services were also available in 2019. The effectiveness of the recommendations drawn up in the project and the potential development needs should be re-assessed within five years.

The parties involved in the 'Getting ready' project and the Ministry of Education and Culture considered it important to develop the effectiveness of preparatory education regarding how well the preparatory education facilitates the student's admission to the degree studies offered by the UAS. In order to support admission to degree-awarding education, the 'Getting ready' project also prepared admission procedure recommendations for the separate application process concerning advancement from preparatory to degree-awarding education, making use of the 30-credit curriculum developed and piloted in the project. (Stenberg et al. 2019, 123.) At the time when the survey was conducted in the spring, the UASs involved in the project considered different solu-

tions for the admission procedures to degree-awarding education that are to be implemented after the preparatory education. Based on the answers, the practices will certainly vary, with separate application rounds being used as an admission procedure on the one hand, and limited applicant group quotas in connection with the national joint application procedure for degree-awarding education on the other.

DOES PREPARATORY EDUCATION FACILITATE THE STUDENT'S ADMISSION TO DEGREE-AWARDING EDUCATION?

According to the information received from the Ministry of Education and Culture in the summer of 2020, at the end of 2020, statistics will also be available in the national Vipunen database on how many of those who completed preparatory education were able to continue their studies in degree-awarding education at a higher education institution. The new statistics will be an excellent supplement to the statistics already available in the Vipunen database on the organisers of preparatory education for immigrants at universities of applied sciences, the participants in such education, and the number of ECTS credits earned. The statistics indicate that preparatory education arranged by universities of applied sciences is still a marginal form of education and a partially untapped resource in the pursuit of genuine equality.

| Year | Participants | ECTS credits |
|--------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| 2010 | 132 | 1784 |
| 2011 | 116 | 1500 |
| 2012 | 95 | 504 |
| 2013 | 121 | 1887 |
| 2014 | 174 | 979 |
| 2015 | 200 | 1675 |
| 2016 | 215 | 1500 |
| 2017 | 331 | 3755 |
| 2018 | 324 | 3983 |
| 2019 | 545 | 3490 |
| TOTAL | 2253 | 21057 |

Table 1. Participants in the preparatory education for immigrants arranged by universities of applied sciences and the ECTS credits earned (Vipunen).

Metropolia University of Applied Sciences has collected statistics on how many students from the preparatory education arranged by Metropolia have succeeded in getting admitted via the national joint application procedure, without any special arrangements, as a degree student in different educational fields at Metropolia.

| Year | Participants | ECTS credits | Admitted to Metropolia as a degree student |
|--------------|--------------|--------------|--|
| 2010 | 37 | 70 | 1 (2.7%) |
| 2011 | 48 | 231 | 2 (4.2%) |
| 2012 | 52 | 376 | 1 (1.9%) |
| 2013 | 74 | 308 | 2 (2.7%) |
| 2014 | 95 | 518 | 6 (6.3%) |
| 2015 | 105 | 800 | 2 (1.9%) |
| 2016 | 125 | 700 | 6 (4.8%) |
| 2017 | 135 | 1810 | 13 (9.6%) |
| 2018 | 109 | 1335 | 10 (9.2%) |
| 2019 | 134 | 1300 | 9 (10.3%) |
| TOTAL | 914 | 7448 | 52 (5.7%) |

Table 2. Participants in the preparatory education for immigrants arranged by Metropolia and the ECTS credits earned (Vipunen), and the number of those admitted to Metropolia as degree students (Metropolia's internal reporting).

At the Metropolia University of Applied Sciences, preparatory education has been arranged in 2010–2019 in the fields of culture and media, technology, and social services and healthcare. From the preparatory education arranged, the total rate of admission to degree-awarding education via the national joint application procedure is slightly below 6 per cent overall. The admission rate to degree-awarding education has varied in the range of 1.9–10.3% year-on-year. Continuation as a degree student also varies by the field of study. In the field of technology, more than 60 per cent continue their studies in degree-awarding education, whereas in the field of social services and healthcare, the corresponding figure is only 20 per cent. Regarding the culture and media programmes, the continuation of studies as a degree student appears to have been considerably rarer. However, based on the currently available statistics, no unequivocal conclusions can be drawn as to the usefulness of preparatory education for admission to degree-awarding education. The statistics do not include information on how many of all preparatory education participants have succeeded in getting admitted to a university

or UAS other than Metropolia. It should also be noted that the FINEEC survey on preparatory education arranged in 2010–2017 showed the diversity of motivations for applying to the education. 37% of the education participants sought admission to an UAS, but other motivations included improving language skills (25%) and finding employment (14%) (Lepola 2017, 12).

CONCLUSION

One of the principal objectives highlighted in the Vision for Higher Education in 2030 roadmap is to be the home country of the most competent workforce. To attain this objective, the proportion of higher education graduates will be increased by raising the target number of degrees starting from 2021 in sectors where there is both education and working life demand. The routes to higher education will be diversified. The completion rate will be improved, among other things, by means of funding model incentives. (Ministry of Education and Culture 2019.)

Preparatory education for higher education studies is an education model for continuous learning developed for the needs of immigrants. The entire educational path has been taken into account in the development of the education model, also taking into account the potential language skills obtained through integration training. Indeed, the effectiveness of the education path in terms of structure and content is essential when an immigrant pursues a place of study and a degree in Finnish-language degree programmes at higher education institutions. The ongoing development work on the admission procedure suggests that in the future, preparatory education for higher education studies will provide a good target group-oriented path to proceed to degree-awarding education.

The students who have undergone preparatory education receive counselling during their studies not only in the field-specific Finnish language studies and general study capabilities necessary for pursuing higher education studies, but also in mathematics and English. As it is, higher education institutions will receive highly motivated students with good learning capabilities from the students who have successfully completed the study module. The development of preparatory education has shown that universities of applied sciences are well equipped to implement and develop a diverse range of needs-based education in accordance with the principles of continuous learning. Indeed, this development work is one concrete example of working on the path towards attaining the Vision for Higher Education in 2030.

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Hannu Niemelä, Johanna Heimonen, Jaana Lampikoski, Sonja Mitroshin, Leena Peniche Ferreira, Milka Toikko & Taija Udd

ENHANCING THE IMMIGRANTS' ACADEMIC READINESS IN THE AKVA PROJECT

The AKVA ('Academic Readiness') programme is a pilot project funded by the Ministry of Education and Culture that is implemented in the form of preparatory education for immigrants eligible for higher education. The primary objective of the project is to integrate immigrants into the higher education system and society by recognising their prior learning and competence and by guiding them to find higher education studies that are of interest to them, thereby speeding up their access to education and employment. On the other hand, the project also seeks to improve the university's ability to serve applicants with an immigrant background. The project was implemented jointly by the University of Helsinki Centre for Continuing Education HY+, the University of Helsinki, and the University of Helsinki Open University.

Many universities of applied sciences offer preparatory education for higher education studies for immigrants (see Stenberg in this volume). The Supporting Immigrants in Higher Education in Finland (SIMHE) activities at the University of Helsinki as well as the academic complementary studies projects at HY+ have shown that there is specific need for preparatory education arranged by a university that considers the admission requirements of a science university. In the SIMHE activities of the University of Helsinki, the focus has been on the development of counselling. The AKVA project wanted to strengthen the role of guidance.

The AKVA programme is a package of 40 ESCT credits that is composed of mutually interacting modules that support the objectives of the training programme (see Table 1.)

| Module | Spring 2020 | Autumn 2020 | Spring 2021 |
|---|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Career counselling and student tutoring (5 cr) | | | |
| Finnish (3 x 5 cr) | | | |
| English (approx. 5 cr) | | | |
| Study skills (5 cr) | | | |
| Social studies (5 cr) | | | |
| Studies in the student's own field (1–2 x 5 cr) | | | |

Table 1. Modules and timing of the AKVA training programme.

The modules form a comprehensive package of skills that are necessary for the target group. The package has been constructed in such a way that it also serves as a self-motivated integration training for the students who presently need it. Of the modules included in the AKVA training programme, this article discusses in more detail guidance and the teaching of the Finnish language and study skills, of which experience has already been gained at the time when this article was written.

The project was initiated in 2019 with the planning of activities. Call for applications to the programme was opened in December 2019, and the studies commenced in March 2020. A total of 148 people applied to the AKVA programme, of whom 48 were admitted. The mother tongue, age group and work/study situation at the time of submitting the application of the students admitted to the programme is listed in Table 2. The admission criteria were general eligibility for higher education and sufficient Finnish language skills. The Finnish language skills were tested prior to the admissions by means of a written test and an interview. The applicants' motivation and plans were also surveyed in the admission interviews. Cooperation with various stakeholders, in particular the Employment and Economic Development Office, was carried out in the marketing of the training programme and in reaching suitable applicants. In August 2020, 43 students were continuing in the programme. Five students have dropped out due to full-time employment, receiving another place of study, or other reasons. The project will end in June 2021.

| | | | | | |
|--|----|---------|----|-----------------------------|----|
| Russian | 10 | 25 ≥ 30 | 13 | Attending a course/studying | 28 |
| Turkish | 8 | 30 ≥ 35 | 10 | Employed | 8 |
| Arabic | 6 | 35 ≥ 40 | 7 | Unemployed/ not studying | 7 |
| Khmer | 4 | 40 ≥ 45 | 8 | | |
| Spanish | 2 | 45 ≥ 50 | 4 | | |
| Persian / Farsi | 2 | | | | |
| Others (one representative per language) | 11 | | | | |

Table 2. AKVA students' mother tongue, age group and work/study status at the application stage.

This article focuses on reflecting on the activities under the AKVA project. Activities are mainly examined backwards from the time of writing, but the article also describes plans for future activities on a general level..

LANGUAGE AND CULTURE-AWARE GUIDANCE AS A FACILITATOR OF INTEGRATION

When guidance is provided to people who have moved to Finland from elsewhere, it is important to act in a language- and cultural-aware manner, i.e. to take into account the level of language skills and knowledge of society as well as cultural differences. Strong language skills and a clear understanding of how society operates help in planning one's own future in the new home country. Special attention is paid on these matters in AKVA's guidance activities. From the point of view of language-aware teaching, it is crucial to make university teaching more accessible language-wise also for non-native students. The adoption of language-aware operating practices benefits all students, as it supports the process of socialising in the language. (Yliopisto-opinnot osaksi kotoutumisen polkua, loppuraportti 2019, 33.)

AKVA students have lived in Finland for a relatively short time. Most of them came to Finland during 2017–2018. It would be important to provide a route to studies and meaningful placement in Finland for this target group, the well-educated and fairly young immigrants who have been in the country for a short time.

In AKVA, the goals of guidance are mostly concrete. The aim is to clarify the students' own objectives and make the path towards the objectives visible: where to apply for admission to studies and when, and if not admitted, what options are there available, where to find em-

ployment after the studies, would a work placement be useful, etc. The more abstract ancillary objectives include promotion of integration, improvement of language skills, and experience of having a good life. The students' backgrounds are considered, but they will be treated as equal members of society, for whom the new home country offers a wide range of education and employment opportunities. The guidance aims at being empowering, i.e. of the kind that makes the students feel that their life management is improving, and self-direction is increasing. The student remains an active agent in the process.

One of the most important factors in the project's students' progress towards their educational and employment objectives is a good knowledge of Finnish. In the preparatory education arranged by universities of applied sciences, insufficient language skills have also been identified as the main obstacle for access to higher education. (Airas et al. 2019, 10). The language-aware point of view also applies to guidance. In the AKVA programme, Finnish language studies and guidance proceed side by side and support one another, which increases motivation. In addition to personal guidance meetings, the Finnish language courses also examine the Finnish education system and the labour market for people with higher education from a variety of perspectives, which deepens the students' understanding of the matters and concepts brought up during the guidance and help them to reflect upon their own future education path. The Finnish language teachers of the project also serve as counsellors, so the teachers have a comprehensive view of the plans and objectives of all the students in the group.

Immigrants with a higher education background have dedicated groups in integration training, and some of the AKVA participants have studied in them. As a result, during the integration training, they have already formed a conception of what it takes to get admitted to UAS or university studies, and plans may have been made for the long term as part of the guidance. For many, the primary application target is a university of applied sciences and later, potential master's studies at a university. Vocational upper secondary qualification is also of interest as a pathway to studies in one's own field, mainly from the point of view of learning the language and basic concepts in Finnish. Indeed, it is true that even lower-level studies increase language skills, help in establishing networks and support the integration process.

Popular fields among the students include social work, teaching, healthcare, and information technology. Many of the students intend to continue their studies in the same field which they had studied before, but there are also career changers, and not quite all of them have completed prior academic studies. Some of the students have several objec-

tives between which they should be able to choose from, or at least they should be able to set the objectives in chronological order: what to study first and what perhaps later when the language skills and competence have strengthened sufficiently. Not all the students have a very clear idea and conception of studying and working in Finland, so the plans may well change during the project.

As part of the guidance, tutoring activities have been planned for the AKVA students. The purpose of tutoring is to deepen AKVA students' understanding of the everyday student life in Finland, which may be very different from what they were used to in their countries of origin. The training of tutors focuses not only on the operation and directing of a small group, but also on language awareness and cultural sensitivity. The tutors are provided with monetary compensation and an employment certificate for their efforts.

FINNISH LANGUAGE STUDIES IN AKVA

Finnish language studies are a crucial part of the AKVA training. As part of the training programme, each student completes three Finnish language modules, each worth five ECTS credits, in addition to which the rest of the AKVA training is language-aware training as well. For example, in the report published by the Finnish Education Evaluation Centre (Airas et al. 2019), higher education institutions are called to better identify the language development needs of students with an immigrant background, and for its part, the Finnish language teaching included as part of the AKVA training responds to this challenge.

Based on the language test carried out at the admission stage, the AKVA students were divided into two groups. At the lower level, the students' entry level Finnish language proficiency was at least A2.2. In the second group, the students' proficiency level was at least B1. The aim of the training is to develop the language skills of each student as much as possible, considering the points of departure and entry level of each student. The training seeks to ensure that as many students as possible attain the language skills required for higher education (B2) and that everyone is well equipped to develop their own language skills after the completion of the training. At the end of the training, the students will take the YKI test to measure how their language skills have developed.

All Finnish language teaching has been designed starting from the students' needs and tailored to suit the participants. The courses focused on developing written language skills, since most of the students still experience considerable difficulties with written language proficien-

cy, and since in entrance examinations to higher education institutions, good reading and writing skills play a crucial role. Irrespective of this emphasis, efforts have certainly been made to develop language skills in a diverse way, and the working methods used in the courses are such that oral language skills are practised even when they have not been made a priority.

A lot of authentic materials and exercises prepared by the teacher have been used in the studies. In addition, the students also had a textbook (*Suomen mestari 3 and 4*) as support for their studies. During the first course included in the training programme, the main themes included the Finnish society and education system, but also culture and various topics of current interest.

A diverse range of written and audio-visual materials has been used to provide the students with essential information about higher education studies in Finland: about the options available and how to apply for a place of study, about studying as such, and about the student's everyday life. The objective was, on the one hand, to provide information about such matters that are of importance to AKVA students and, on the other hand, to expand the students' vocabulary related to these subjects and to practise the study of abstract Finnish-language materials. The course also involved a lot of practise in talking about oneself, about one's (study) background and personal strengths. Materials and exercises were used for not only practising Finnish, but also for increasing the students' ability to recognise their strengths and make choices and plans concerning their personal lives. Finnish language teaching was thus integrated as part of the overall objectives of the project.

STUDY SKILLS AND FAMILIARISATION WITH STUDIES IN ONE'S OWN FIELD

The study skills module combines many of the objectives of the AKVA project. The purpose of the module is to strengthen the skills that are important in studies and working life. These include, on the one hand, ICT skills and, on the other hand, other essential skills in higher education, such as the ability to read abstract texts and recognise different types of texts and to compose and plan one's own text. The module also strengthens self-direction, collaboration skills and skills related to study techniques and information processing. These skills are central to the Finnish study culture, the adoption of which is important in view of making progress in one's education path (Kotoutumisen kokonaiskatsaus 2019, 91). The practising of study skills also enhances the students' Finnish language skills, as the exercises are completed in Finnish.

The study skills module is designed and implemented according to the needs of the students participating in the training. Serving as teachers are an ITC skills teacher and Finnish language teachers who, based on the Finnish language courses, have gained a comprehensive understanding of what is necessary for these students.

In addition to practising various study skills, the main purpose of the module is to help students familiarise themselves with their own field, its vocabulary, and its typical linguistic practices. In the AKVA programme, the study skills module is closely integrated with the studies in the student's own field that are included as part of the programme. The purpose of the module is to provide students with support and tools for pursuing studies in their own field in a course that is included as part of the programme and thus to provide them with capabilities for future studies after the completion of the AKVA training.

As part of the AKVA training, students complete one or two courses in their own field at the University of Helsinki Open University or another open university or open UAS of their choice. This will provide them with experience on higher education level studies, which will help them to assess their own capabilities for pursuing studies. The aim of the 'Studies in the student's own field' module is to clarify for the student what kind of training and competences they still need to attain their objective and to develop their study capabilities. The students reflect upon these matters in the field-specific small group meetings included as part of the 'Studies in the student's own field' module and independently in their learning journal prepared on the course in their own field. Learning experiences are also discussed under the teacher's direction and with the counsellor in personal guidance meetings.

STUDENT ORIENTATION AS THE BASIS FOR IMPLEMENTING THE PROGRAMME

The students' needs and starting points have been at the centre in all planning, implementation, and evaluation of the project's activities. The students' background, competences and study and career objectives were already mapped out at the application stage. After that, the students' objects of interests and study and career opportunities have been explored during the project, especially as part of career guidance, but also in connection with the teaching of Finnish and study skills. After the first semester of the training programme, feedback was collected from the students on the training provided to date. Based on this infor-

mation, the activities have been tailored to serve the students' points of departure, needs and objectives as well as possible.

The AKVA students are a considerably heterogeneous group. The participants' diverse educational backgrounds, career plans, Finnish language skills and life situations pose challenges on shaping an individual and effective learning process for each student. However, the basic pillars traversing the training – support for learning Finnish, language and cultural awareness and individual guidance – serve all AKVA students irrespective of their background and entry level.

Efforts have been made to coordinate studies and interaction between the various parties involved in the project in such a way that a consistent, meaningful, inspiring, and effective education path is set up for the students. To attain this objective, coordination, and collaboration between all those involved in the project, those responsible for the different modules, has played, and will certainly continue to play, a key role throughout the project.

According to the plans, all teaching in the initial phase of the project was to be arranged in the form of classroom teaching. As a result of the restrictions imposed due to the corona pandemic, it was decided that some of the teaching be postponed to the next semester, and the Finnish language teaching and personal guidance meetings during the spring were carried out over the Internet. Modern technology on the one hand, and the positive stance of the project participants towards its use on the other hand, enabled a smooth transition to online teaching.

Both students and teachers found distance teaching and learning effective. Most students were well prepared for distance learning and everyone's skills have improved along with the progress of their studies. The students have also supported one another in getting used to the new kind of learning environment and tools. However, due to the exceptional situation, the scope of Finnish language use narrowed for many AKVA students, as quite a few live exercise situations outside of the classroom were omitted from the everyday life.

ASSESSMENT OF THE SUCCESS AND FUTURE OF THE TRAINING PROGRAMME

AKVA is a pilot project by nature. For this reason, constant reflection of, and learning from, activities has been crucial in the project. The activities have been developed jointly in collaboration with teachers and the experts involved in the project, as well as on the basis of the feedback

collected from the students. In addition to forecasting and planning, a wide range of operating practices were tried out in the project, and any changes in the operating environment were promptly responded to. The complete online implementation of teaching and guidance due to the restrictive measures necessitated by the corona pandemic serves as a good example of this.

The students' employment and access to higher education are monitored during the project. At the end of the project, the students' career and study plans will also be mapped out. This information will be compared with the career and study objectives mapped out at the beginning of the project, which will provide information on how the students' objectives have become more clearly defined or changed and how their self-efficacy has changed as a result of the AKVA training.

As the project is currently under way, no comprehensive information is yet available on the results and impact of the activities. After the first semester, it can be concluded that the training programme seems very promising. Both the students and the teachers and other responsible persons involved in the project have found the activities inspiring, meaningful and useful. The success of the project will be primarily assessed based on the students' academic abilities, based on the improvement of their Finnish language skills. Each module has its own specific learning objectives and evaluation criteria. In addition, the model for preparatory education developed because of the project will be deployed at the University of Helsinki after the project.

Based on the experiences gained in the project so far and research evidence (e.g. Kotoutumisen kokonaiskatsaus 2019; Airas et al. 2019), there is a clear need for preparatory education for higher education studies for immigrants, such as the AKVA project. Preparatory education serves as an important channel for recognising and utilising the prior learning and competences and potential of immigrants. This benefits not only the students who participated in the training programme and the University of Helsinki, but also Finnish society, as the training will create better preconditions for the students to influence the direction of their lives and participate in the productive activities of society.

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Tuija Lehtonen

LOWERING THE BARRIERS FOR ACCESS TO HIGHER EDUCATION - THE INTEGRA PROJECT

Language, language, and once again, language, and then the academic capabilities. These requirements typically form a barrier that halts the education path of an immigrant who has completed or is eligible for higher education. The language skills obtained in integration training are not yet sufficient, and even the English language skills may be missing or limited. Insufficient or incorrect conceptions and information about degree programmes and the Finnish education system also guide or even hinder progress on one's chosen study path towards expertise in one's own field. These factors are pronounced when seeking admission to higher education studies. (Airas et al. 2019; Ministry of Education and Culture 2017; Ministry of Education and Culture 2019.)

While an immigrant who has completed or is eligible for higher education struggles with the aforementioned challenges, the Vision for Higher Education and Research in 2030 (Korkeakoulutus ja tutkimus 2030-luvulle n.d.) challenges universities to join the effort of building Finland the home of the most competent labour force. The objective is to increase the share of higher education graduates in the population, especially in the sectors where demand is high both in education and working life, by diversifying the paths to higher education and by developing the operating model and supply of continuous learning. How, then, to remove or lower the barriers for the advancement of immigrants eligible for higher education?

This article examines a few points of view on what kind of solutions could lower the barriers for the immigrants' access to higher education. Serving as an example is the 'INTEGRA – University studies as part of the integration path' project (2018–2021) coordinated by the Centre for Multilingual Academic Communication (Movi) of the University of Jyväskylä. The project develops an educational model that integrates university language and content studies for immigrants in the integration phase who have completed or are eligible for higher education and aim to continue their interrupted degree studies or complement a prior degree in compliance with Finnish qualification requirements. In addition to Movi, responsible for the implementation of the project are

the University of Jyväskylä Open University and the SIMHE guidance and counselling services provided by Admission Services. The project is funded by the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture. (See Integra n.d.)

CONTINUOUS LEARNING: WHERE DOES THE EDUCATION OF IMMIGRANTS FIT IN?

Continuous learning means the development and renewal of competence at different stages of life and career (OKM n.d.). Continuous learning should be the right of all adults, including immigrants. Their education should therefore be examined through continuous learning, shifting the perspective to an individual's competence, its mapping and development needs. The accumulation of, and training in, the academic skills needed in studies and in working life will then be seen as a personal development target for the individual concerned. This way, immigrants will be encountered as individuals who already have prior competences and education that are to be supplemented, instead of disappearing into the mass of immigrants, as is currently the case. The same educational path will usually be followed irrespective of different backgrounds, needs or objectives, and this easily results in the person concerned being referred to vocational (re-)education instead of academic education (Riitaoja 2019). It would therefore be important to start examining integration training, for example, as part of continuous learning and not as a separate island of education.

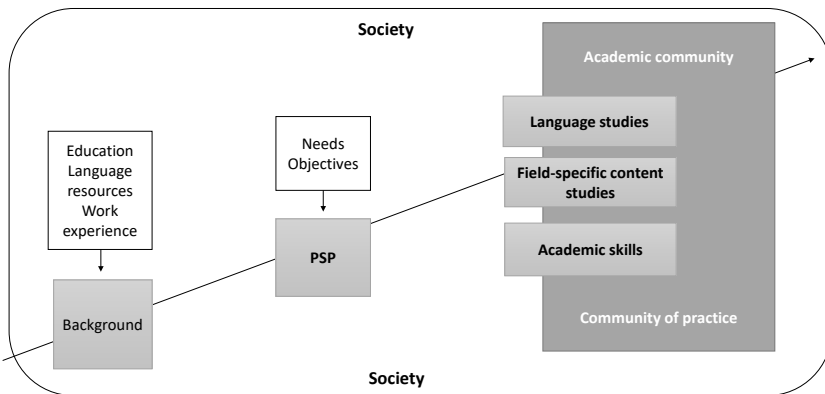


Figure 1. Continuous learning. Picture: Tuuja Lehtonen & Antti Myöhänen.

In the INTEGRA project, education and training are seen as part of the student's personal continuous learning path. The starting point for the training is the recognition of the student's prior education, language skills and work experience, based on which personal study plans are created and the student's objectives are reviewed both in terms of education and the future. At the same time, the student enters the academic environment and community in which language studies, own discipline-specific content studies and the practising of academic skills are integrated with one another. The objective is to break the years' cycle of education and to get the student on their preferred career and study path at as early a stage as possible.

GUIDANCE: INDIVIDUAL, GROUP AND PEER-TO-PEER GUIDANCE THROUGHOUT THE TRAINING

Guidance support before, during and after the training is an important resource for immigrants. Guidance makes it possible to locate oneself and one's prior learning and competence in a new life situation. The linking of studies to the previously learned field and tasks that are of interest to oneself is important and motivating for the learner. Indeed, the planning of studies should be based on a closer link between the recognition of the student's prior learning and competence and the mapping out of the student's needs, which in turn requires teachers to have solid expertise and networks across different administrative branches and institutions.

In the INTEGRA project, the guidance services were provided by the SIMHE guidance and counselling services that operate under the University of Jyväskylä Admission Services (see Autero et al. in this volume). The guidance they provide traverses the entire training, from the application stage up to the time following the completion of the training. The SIMHE guidance service is based on personal and network-based cooperation by means of which the recognition of prior learning is started, and descriptions of the students' educational profiles are prepared. The objective of the guidance is that the students can form a clear, well-founded conception of their own studies and learning that is suitable for their personal life situation. This also supports progress in academic or other studies and access to working life.

The mapping out and recognition of prior learning is used for setting up the foundation for individual's education and training. The official RPL is carried out by the faculties, the study services of which have a well-functioning interface with SIMHE. Other RPL authorities

will be consulted where applicable (e.g. the Finnish National Agency for Education for the qualification of teachers in Finland). The Employment and Economic Development Office is also a principal cooperation partner at the initial stage of the recognition of prior learning. Additionally, teachers or planners at the open university and at the departments providing discipline-specific content studies as part of the INTEGRA programme participate in the preliminary stage of the recognition of prior learning.

The provision of guidance as individual and group guidance also adds a peer-to-peer aspect to the guidance. Guidance is an integral part of the training, and it has been allocated a separate five-credit module. One part of the guidance is to ensure the financial security of those participating in the training. Here as well, close cooperation with the Employment and Economic Development Office is an important part of the support provided. For a student who has been a client of the Employment and Economic Development Office, cooperation in the guidance supports the advancement of plans that are meaningful for the student during and after the training towards the next educational or career objective.

LANGUAGE-AWARE TEACHING: INTEGRATING CONTENT STUDIES WITH LANGUAGE STUDIES

The lack of language skills is still considered one of the biggest obstacles for the advancement of immigrants (see, e.g., Airas et al. 2019). The language proficiency requirements of higher education institutions are high for the applicants. This has resulted in a situation in which an immigrant cannot apply for higher education studies until having pursued several years of language studies even if the individual concerned had already completed higher education studies. However, the prior education could be harnessed as a starting point and support for language learning.

In recent years, the development of higher education pedagogy into a multilingually aware direction has been called for (see, e.g., Pyykkö 2017). The integration of content studies – discipline, working life and social skills – with language studies is perceived as a principal means to this end. Language and content will then go side by side in teaching. Even though the conceptions of language and learning have changed in the field of research, the practices and pedagogy often continue to

keep language and communication studies separate from content, or the integration of content equals operating in the level of vocabulary.

Language studies must be integrated with the skills that are expected from adults. Studying and working in expert positions in a higher education institution require a wide range of study, digital and strategy skills. Deficiencies in these skills also make it difficult to function in society. This makes it important to emphasise the explaining and teaching of these skills in the studies as part of language studies. For example, the practices of academic writing and good scientific practice require a great deal of guidance, practise and unlearning towards an independent and ethical way of studying, learning, and producing texts. In INTEGRA, the study, digital and strategy skills are developed in parallel in all teaching: University education methods as well as the texts being studied, and the study situations combine language and academic skills at all stages of the training. Languages and discipline-specific courses are studied using standard methods of university education: language is an instrument of action and a subject of learning at the same time. The teaching also makes varied use of, for example, collaborative pedagogy (see, e.g., Dillenbourg 1999), which emphasises communality and doing things together. In this case, learners not only share their competences but also receive support from one another.

Indeed, language learning is, to a great extent, socialisation in cultural situations and text types (Duff 2011), so the other skills needed in such situations must be integrated as part of language teaching. When it comes to highly educated immigrants participating in integration measures, these skills should be taught in an integrated way right from the outset so that the learner will be provided with tools for their subsequent studies and expert work duties. Similarly, integrating the language teaching of other immigrants participating in integration measures more closely with everyday practices and the learners' needs will support language learning and expedite the path to integration and finding one's place in society.

As is well known, integration into the Finnish working life and society takes place, above all, through the local language (e.g. Saarinen et al. 2017), which is why it is a good idea to constantly monitor what and how we teach and to further develop the pedagogy of language teaching. The mastery of the Finnish language is a prerequisite for obtaining work in one's own field and, in many cases, for the immigrant's staying in the country.

AS PART OF THE COMMUNITY: SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY ENVIRONMENT

At the core of language learning is interaction with others, members of the community and the environment. It is therefore of significance where and in what environment education is provided and with whom the learner has the opportunity to interact. When the learner can interact with communities and environments that are relevant to them, as well as with the languages used and language speakers working in them, a self-sustaining circle of sorts is created: opportunities for participation and, consequently, for using the language and working in communities (in other words learning) are a natural part of the education. (For further discussion, see Lantolf 2000; van Lier 2000.)

Language learning can be enhanced by creating interaction opportunities and opportunities to participate in the activities of different communities, as language learning is known to be effective in situations where language skills are part of the social context and activities (e.g. Atkinson 2011). For reasons such as these, it is important that language learning is not physically isolated from the environments related to the learner's future studies or career. At the same time, opportunities will also be created for networking with learners other than Finnish language learners. Social networks play an important role in entering working life, and immigrants encounter difficulties in becoming part of communities and these networks.

In the INTEGRA training, the communities offering such opportunities for interaction include other language learners, students in other courses, other university students, and the physical university environment as such. The university environment provides a framework for all communities operating within it and enables the use of languages in these different communities. The key theme of teaching is the provision of timely interactive support (scaffolding, see, e.g., van Lier 2000). Efforts are made to support the learning process by making the teaching suitably challenging and supportive. The entire learning environment and community, not only teachers and peer learners, but also the entire linguistic, social, and physical environment with which learners interact, are seen as sources of support.

SUMMARY: LOWERING THE BARRIERS FOR ACCESS TO HIGHER EDUCATION AND ENHANCING THE IMMIGRANTS' CAPABILITIES FOR HIGHER EDUCATION

In summary, it can be proposed that the factors mentioned in the following paragraphs support the development of immigrants' capabilities for higher education and, at the same time, lower the barriers for accessing higher education. Some of the proposals are pedagogical, while others have more to do with structures. Now that more voluminous and accurate information has been obtained from the SIMHE activities and from the different projects targeted at immigrants who have completed or are eligible for higher education concerning their needs, the target group itself and the effectiveness of the various solutions, it is time to consider how to harmonise and jointly create permanent operating practices to successfully help this group to access higher education.

Language learning should be seen as participation in interaction and language use that is not separate from the learner's other life. This puts the different ways of using language and the different situations and needs of language use at the centre of language skills. The approach is genuinely learner-oriented and emphasises the situational nature of language use. The language learner is seen as an active actor whose learning is guided by their individual needs: what they can do with language and in what kind of situations they are capable of acting. In this case, it is important to consider which communities and which kind of language use situations are relevant to the learner and how the learner can become part of them (e.g. Kokkonen et al. 2019). Immigrants should therefore have the opportunity to study in the environments and communities which they wish to belong to or feel part of. The **learning environment** plays an important role not only as a provider of resources but also as a catalyst for motivation and opener of the horizon of opportunities. For immigrants who have completed or are eligible for higher education, studying in an academic environment is relevant, and it also speeds up and supports the learning process.

The close integration of different skills to one another right at the outset of studies provides capabilities to seize the practices needed for pursuing studies at a higher education institution. It is possible to simultaneously develop not only language skills, but also study skills and the management of discipline-specific content. A **language-aware approach** enables the simultaneous development of the skills so that the studies are naturally linked to the learner's personal needs and prior learning.

Extending guidance to span throughout the studying process – from the commencement of the studies up to the time following

the completion of studies – creates a framework that helps the learner to grasp their own study process and to respond to any changes in private life or studies that may take place along the way. The regularity and diversity of guidance will direct the learner forward and help the learned to see themselves as part of the group of other learners.

In the assessment of the immigrants' needs for education and training, in addition to language skills, more consideration should be given to the person's prior education and work experience, which could be utilised in language training to speed up language learning. The immigrant already has a considerable range of prior competences, work experience and, in many cases, knowledge of several languages. As it is, in the mapping out of the situation of an immigrant adult, the **concept of continuous learning** should be taken as the starting point, focusing on what the person concerned already knows, how they should supplement their education and what kind of language studies they need to complete in order to enter the labour market without a prolonged cycle of re-training.

INTEGRA IN A NUTSHELL

A study module of nine months and 45 ECTS credits: 24 cr of Finnish, 5 cr of English according to the student's individual proficiency level, 5–10 cr of studies in the student's own discipline at the Open University or university departments, 5 cr of guidance counselling.

- Language learning, discipline-specific studies and academic skills are integrated in university studies, in an academic setting and as part of integration training for immigrants.
- As part of the integration training for immigrants, the participants also develop the English skills needed in higher education and learn academic English.
- As part of the integration training, it is possible to complete studies at the Open University and receive credits for them.
- The participants receive regular individual and group guidance throughout the training to enable realistic future plans.
- Psychosocial support runs through the training, helping in issues such as stress management and the creation of a student identity.

More detailed information about the implementation of the project is available in the INTEGRA Recommendations and Report, both available on the project website at: <https://movi.jyu.fi/en/development/integra>

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PART III

EDUCATION MODELS PROMOTING EMPLOYABILITY

Aino Ezeonodo, Päivi Lehtinen, Mari Manninen & Päivi Rimpioja

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PATHS FOR AN IMMIGRANT NURSE TO OBTAIN PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE RIGHTS

Nurses who have completed a degree abroad encounter difficulties in obtaining a right to practice their profession in Finland (Hirard & Eskola-Kronqvist 2018). This results in the completion of an equivalent or lower degree in the social services or healthcare sector in Finland, employment in duties that do not match their education, unemployment, or exclusion from working life. The ministries have outlined that the employment of immigrants with a higher education background must be streamlined. Additionally, the social services and healthcare sector is facing a shortage of labour and, as the diversity of the population increases, the diversity and language and cultural skills of the personnel working in the sector must be strengthened accordingly to secure the high quality of the services. (Ministry of Education and Culture 2017.)

To improve and resolve the situation, several projects have been implemented and launched in Finland. This article presents two projects directed at nurses who have completed a higher education degree abroad: The 'SOHE Bridge' project, funded by the European Social Fund, and the 'Deploying Competence in Finland' project, funded by the Finnish National Agency for Education. The projects are based on the model and knowledge produced in the 'Career Path' project (see Hirard & Eskola-Kronqvist 2018).

Simplifying somewhat, nurses who have completed a higher education degree abroad can be divided into four groups (see also Figure 1):

1. Bachelor-level higher education degree completed in the EU and EEA area
2. Bachelor-level higher education degree (or the former diploma-level degree) completed in the EU and EEA area with 5 years of experience working as a nurse in the EU and EEA area and/or EU degree (new EU countries)

3. Bachelor-level higher education degree completed outside the EU and EEA area
4. Lower degree, diploma-level education according to the former system.

The process for granting professional practice rights for nurses with a higher education degree varies (see National Supervisory Authority for Welfare and Health 2020a; National Supervisory Authority for Welfare and Health 2020b). Nurses from the EU and EEA area are either referred to automatic recognition or can be assigned an adaptation period or a qualification test according to the orders given by the National Supervisory Authority for Welfare and Health if they have not worked in the EU or EEA area for five years or if they do not have an EU supplement. For nurses who have completed a higher education degree outside of the EU or EEA area, the National Supervisory Authority for Welfare and Health prescribes additional studies to be completed. Those who have completed a diploma-level degree according to the former system are advised to seek admission to undergraduate studies.

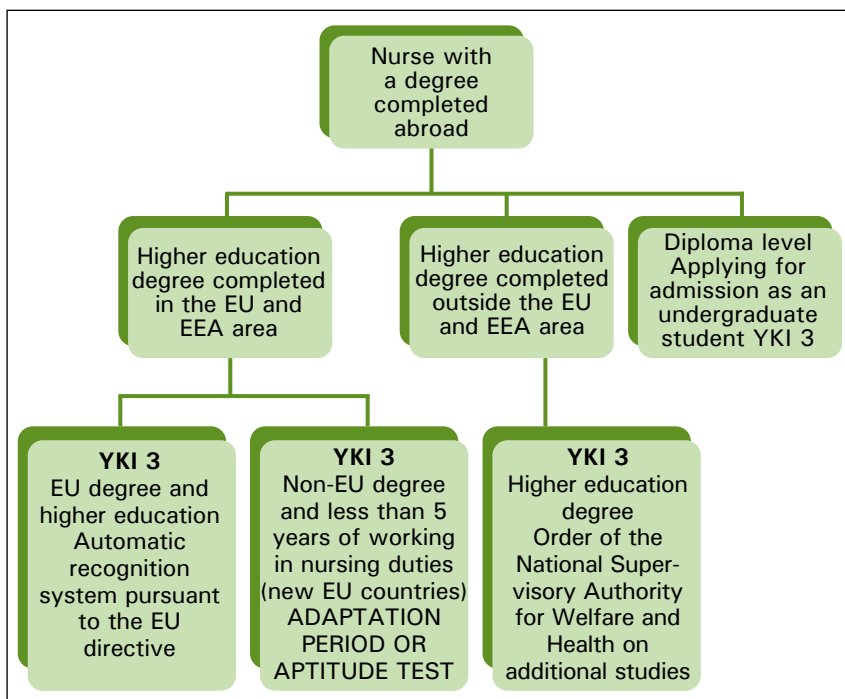


Figure 1. Nurses with a higher education degree completed abroad by group.

In addition to professional qualifications, all healthcare professionals who have graduated abroad are required to have sufficient oral and written proficiency in Finnish, which in practice means at least proficiency level 3 (B1.1) of the National Certificate of Language Proficiency test in Finnish or Swedish in order to obtain the right to practice their profession in Finland (National Supervisory Authority for Welfare and Health 2020a; National Supervisory Authority for Welfare and Health 2020b).

PROJECTS PROVIDE PATHS TO EMPLOYMENT

SOHE Bridge

The SOHE Bridge project (2018–2020) is a joint project of four universities of applied sciences (Metropolia University of Applied Sciences, Turku University of Applied Sciences, Diaconia University of Applied Sciences and Lapland University of Applied Sciences). The aim of the project is to provide supplementary education to 60 nurses and 13 other health care professionals who come to Finland from outside the EU and ETA areas. The other professional groups include physiotherapists, occupational therapists, radiographers, oral hygienists, midwives and biomedical laboratory scientists. The description of the supplementary path for social service professionals is also part the project scope. More than 120 nurses and 13 other health care professionals are currently studying in the project. (Metropolia 2020a.)

The studies are based on the provision on additional studies issued by the National Supervisory Authority for Welfare and Health (Valvira). The students have an individual study path that leads to qualification as a healthcare professional and application for a licence to practice the profession. In Finland, the professional practice rights are granted by the National Supervisory Authority for Welfare and Health. The project's supplementary education model is an efficient web-based model that a student can start flexibly. The fastest students supplement their nursing degree to meet the Finnish requirements in as soon as 3 to 6 months. The extent of the additional studies is also determined by the number of theoretical studies and practical training prescribed in the statement issued by the National Supervisory Authority for Welfare and Health (18 to 40 ECTS credits).

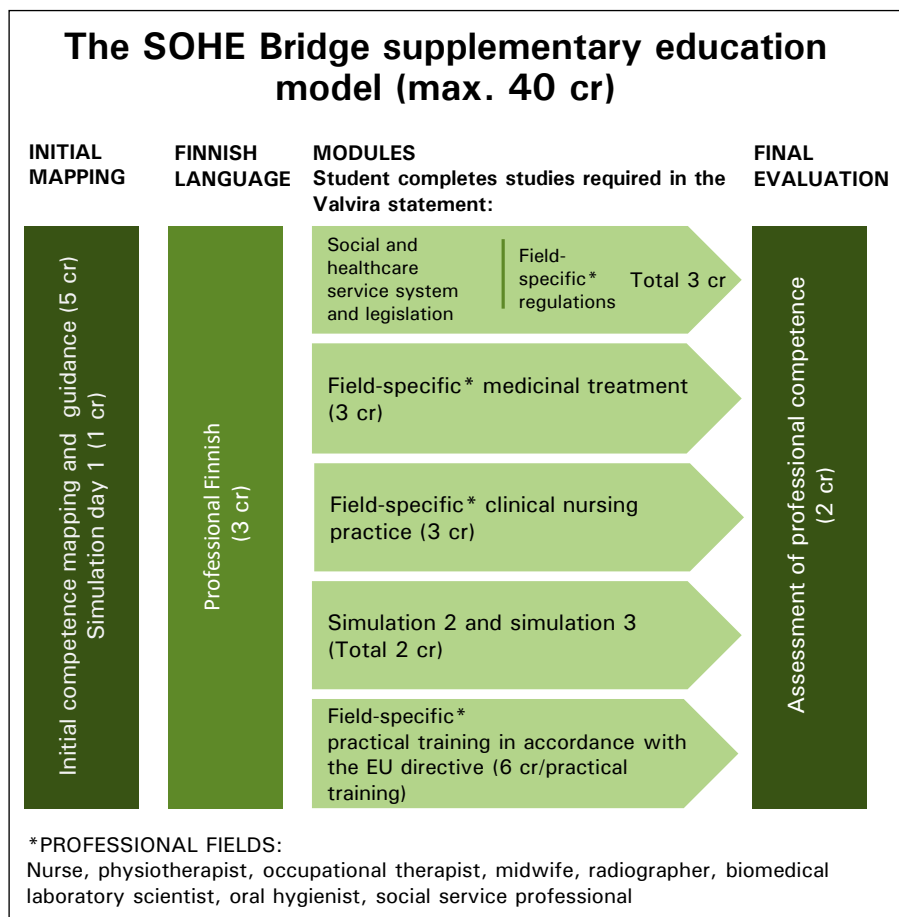


Figure 2. The SOHE Bridge supplementary education model.

All those who participate in the SOHE Bridge project complete the ‘Social and healthcare service system and legislation’ module and the medicinal treatment module, which serve as a basis for good patient safety, among other things. The ‘Clinical nursing practice’ module is also included as an essential part in the supplementary education model. Clinical skills are tested in the simulation day and in clinical practical training. Theoretical skills are recapitulated, and the national treatment recommendations and operating practices are discussed, mainly online. The students’ Finnish language skills are developed towards the YKI 4 proficiency level during the entire course of the education and training.

Theoretical studies are followed by clinical practical training, which is completed in accordance with the additional studies prescribed by the National Supervisory Authority for Welfare and Health in both primary health care and specialised medical care settings. The profes-

sional competence required from nurses in Finland is strengthened in authentic nursing environments. Good cooperation has been carried out under the SOHE Bridge project all over Finland. Cooperation with the City of Helsinki has been very fruitful, as many of the students studying in the project have been allowed to complete their clinical practical training in the hospitals of the City of Helsinki in collaboration with professionals and under the guidance of a specialist lecturer and a Finnish language lecturer.

By the beginning of September 2020, a total of 30 nurses had completed their supplementary education under the SOHE Bridge project. Two biomedical laboratory scientists, one midwife and one physiotherapist have also completed their studies. All of them have found employment after receiving the licence to practice the profession.

Nurse Liza's qualification path in the SOHE Bridge project

Nurse Liza's description of her studies:

I come from the Philippines, where I graduated as a nurse in 2013. In the Philippines, there is a considerable oversupply of nurses, which makes it difficult to get a job and, unfortunately, people mostly succeed in securing employment through a relationship. In that same year, I got professional practice rights in my home country, which allowed me to register for the recruitment of nursing assistants in Finland. I arrived in Finland on 15 December 2015 and served first as a nursing assistant and later, through apprenticeship training, graduated as a practical nurse on 11 October 2017. A Filipino colleague of mine time studied at the Metropolia University of Applied Sciences at that time and heard about a qualification path to supplement nursing studies completed outside of the EU. She encouraged me to participate in the project.

I decided that I won't lose anything if I tried to register and will make my decision based on the outcome. During the orientation day, we were told that Valvira will receive my school certificates from my home country for assessment, and that a simulation day will be held to assess professional skills, clinical competence, and Finnish language skills. The duration of practical training and number of additional studies to be completed will be determined according to Valvira's decision and the simulation day. All the studies will be completed in Finnish, which encouraged me to participate in the project. I thought that if I had to study nursing again, then I'd at least be doing that in Finnish, as

that would make it easier to adapt to the workplace. Furthermore, like I said, nursing work is similar everywhere but differs from country to country regarding legislation and working practices. When I got the idea of how the whole project can be successfully completed, I realised that this was what I wanted. The education I had completed in my home country is recognised and will be supplemented according to the principles of Finnish nursing practice, which is reasonable as such.

I completed the additional studies prescribed to me via Moodle, so I was working 100% during the time I participated in the SOHE Bridge project. The materials proved to be handy during the practical training. In addition to the studies completed in Moodle, I attended a workshop in which the basic medical supplies that are normally used in hospitals as well as basic treatment procedures were reviewed. I found them very useful. I was ordered a 12-week practical training since I had no work experience from a hospital setting. In the middle of the project, I was about to give up because of a personal crisis, but I had a persistent and supportive teacher, who made me stay in the project until the end. I completed my practical training successfully on a paid basis during the summer of this year. When I had completed all the studies and the practical training prescribed to me, I sent to Valvira clarifications on the successfully completed additional studies and practical training periods, and I am now waiting for their decision. I am happy, and I consider myself fortunate to be a part of this continuing education. I hope that this path will continue in the future as well. This will make it possible to utilise the competence of nurses who have completed nursing studies outside of the EU while supplementing it with the principles of Finnish nursing practice. In addition, the government need not waste resources on re-training nurses who have already completed nursing studies outside of the EU and want to work as a nurse in Finland. (Alawas 2020.)

Deploying Competence in Finland project, the path for nurses

The supplementary training for nurses, included as part of the Deploying Competence in Finland project (2019–2020), was intended for nurses who had graduated from EU and EEA countries but had not found employment in Finland prior to their participation in the project. The aim of the project was to develop an education partnership model in

collaboration with the cities in the Helsinki Metropolitan Area to enable employability. During the project, the students enter into an employment relationship with an employer to complete vocational language training or the adaptation period prescribed by the National Supervisory Authority for Welfare and Health. (Metropolia 2020b.)

A total of 12 nurses participated in the project. Some of them had graduated a longer time ago, and their work histories in their home country varied as well. Some of the students had the process of obtaining the professional practice rights in progress because of a missing language certificate. The project also included nurses who had graduated from an English-language programme in Finland and felt that their Finnish-language skills were inadequate in terms of employability.

The scope of the studies was 30 ECTS credits, and they comprised the following modules: orientation, Finnish language, the Finnish healthcare service system and legislation, medicinal care, clinical nursing practice, mental health and substance abuse work, and practical training. The studies progressed according to an individual schedule. In addition to the Moodle learning environment, the students participated actively in the classroom teaching sessions that were arranged approximately once a month. In spring 2020, the teaching was carried out over a remote connection due to the corona pandemic. Participation in teaching was lower during that time, and some students did not attend at all.

When the vocational language training unit was chosen, the student's existing language skills, objects of interest, nursing competence and the need for labour were considered. Some of the students wished to complete their practical training in a unit that was not included in the cooperation organisations, or in an environment that was too demanding as far as the required language skills were concerned. Nearly all students were highly motivated to commit to the vocational language training or adaptation period employment relationship.

At the end of the project, three students had completed the supplementary education in full. Some of the students failed to complete the theoretical studies included in the supplementary education ($n= 5$). Of the 12 nurses who participated in the project, 7 dropped out. 7 of the students found employment in nursing duties during or after the project in Finland.

ENTRY INTO THE LANGUAGE OF HEALTHCARE

The Finnish language proficiency of the students in the project varied considerably. Some had acquired general Finnish language skills as part of the integration training and now needed to translate their own professional competence into the Finnish language, while others already had a long working experience from the healthcare sector in Finland. Quite a few completed proficiency level 3 of the National Certificate of Language Proficiency (YKI). The studies in the project clearly motivated to take the YKI test.

In the teaching of the projects, the Finnish language was integrated as part of the other teaching, and the combined teaching of nursing and Finnish was utilised. The principles of language awareness (see Andersen & Ruohotie-Lyhty 2020) were applied in all teaching, so the learning of vocabulary was supported, and special attention was paid in the typical nursing expressions.

Some of the Finnish language assignments were functional, combining the nursing substance, situation, and structures. The written or oral texts produced by the students were used as the starting point to a considerable extent. For this reason, the students received a lot of personal corrective feedback (see Örn 2020, 162), based on which the students were able to correct their texts in the next round. When feedback was given, the typical features of the language of nursing, such as interactivity, precision and the expressions used in the profession, as well as the command of different registers, were kept in mind. The frequent expressions of the language of nursing were also emphasised. However, communication in nursing can be smooth even if the language is not perfect (Kela & Komppa 2013, 175). The teaching also included the teaching of attitudes, as according to the observations made by Ruffi (2017, 75–76), for example, Finnish-speaking colleagues consider it important that foreign colleagues are open and dare to ask in situations where they do not fully understand.

Five ECTS credits worth of language studies will not, as such, improve language skills all that much if the entry level is low. For this reason, the other assignments and practical training included in the project were also important for the development of language skills.

LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE PROJECTS

In the projects presented in this article, it was possible to start studies flexibly, and the studies could be completed at an individual pace. Some of the students studied full-time, while others worked alongside their studies. The teaching was mainly arranged in the Moodle learning environment in the form of online studies. Some of the teaching was also carried out in the form of classroom teaching, where it was possible to simulate treatment situations, practise the nursing practices, and practise different guidance and treatment situations in Finnish. Some of the enrolled students did not start their studies at all or dropped out. The reasons were highly individual.

In the projects, some of the students needed and received a lot of guidance for studying independently online. Students reported several ICT difficulties related to problems with the use of the Moodle online learning environment, and not everyone had prior experience of independent, online-based learning. Some of the students found planning the progress of their own studies and reconciling work, family life and studies difficult, and this slowed the progress of their studies. Difficulties in obtaining the required documents from the country of origin also slowed down the progress of some students and complicated the process of obtaining a statement from the National Supervisory Authority for Welfare and Health. Students also encountered problems in the utilisation of different sources of information and in the editing of the read material into their own text or speech. Direct copying from the source materials was very common. The students said that the completion of the assignments was difficult and slow also due to language problems. They said that the completion of the assignments became easier along with the development of their language skills.

Authentic working environments are of pronounced significance in supporting the learning of nurses with an immigrant background in that it would be important to have access to professional working environment as soon as possible, for example, in the role of a 'shadower' to observe and hear the language. With some of the students, the language skills were also improved when they started working in a health care unit during the project (Hirard & Eskola-Kronqvist 2018). The practising of treatment situations was more challenging linguistically for those who had not seen how nurses work in the Finnish healthcare setting and what kinds of language proficiency requirements are imposed on nurses. The cultural factors involved with Finnish nursing practice may also have been very different compared to those of the student's home country, for example.

The arrangement of students' livelihood, especially during the practical training period, proved difficult in both projects. Some students succeeded in getting admitted to paid traineeships, which helped them to complete their studies. The studies of those completing their integration period were mainly supported through the Employment and Economic Development Office. The other students did not have the opportunity to receive financial support for completing unpaid practical training. The average duration of the practical training is 8 to 12 weeks. One solution to the subsistence problems in the current shortage of health care workers could be that the students would, for a certain period, first work in assistive duties of some kind, while at the same time becoming familiar with the Finnish nursing culture and language of nursing. This would make it easier to start enhancing one's language skills to meet the level of one's degree and thus find employment in a field corresponding to one's education. The path from assistant to nurse must be very clearly defined so that progress will be planned individually, and the student also knows that they can make progress in that path. This motivates to study Finnish. To maintain motivation, students must see themselves as working in Finnish and feel that the required language skills can be attained (Virtanen 2013, 421; Virtanen 2017, 77).

The objective is to have permanent operating models in place in Finland for the qualification of nurses who have completed their degree abroad. Several projects have been implemented and launched in Finland to improve and resolve the situation, but in the absence of a permanent operating model, many nurses who have completed a degree abroad do not work in duties matching their education. The centralisation of operations and expertise would lead to more coherent, streamlined, and cost-effective operations from the point of view of the individual and society alike.

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Riina Johansson, Annu Brotherus, Marja-Terttu Lounavaara,
Rebekka Nylund & Verna Pelkonen

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION TEACHER'S QUALIFICATION TRAINING MODEL FOR IMMIGRANTS

As part of the 'Deploying Competence in Finland' project, the University of Helsinki, and the University of Helsinki Centre for Continuing Education HY+, in collaboration with the cities of Espoo, Helsinki and Vantaa, have actively developed qualification training for early childhood education teachers who have completed their degree abroad. Early childhood education in the Helsinki Metropolitan Area involves many kinds of challenges, one of the most significant of which is severe shortage of qualified early childhood education teachers (Rinta-Aho et al. 2020; European Commission 2019, 5). More than half of Finland's population with an immigrant background lives in the Helsinki Metropolitan Area (Joupperi 2019), and one of the objectives of the project was to increase the number of personnel with an immigrant background in cities to better reflect the diversity of the cities' residents. This article describes the implementation of the project, its successes, the challenges encountered during the project, and the lessons learned from them.

APPLICATION PROCESS AND STUDENT ADMISSIONS

In the marketing of the project, the visual outlook offered by the entire project as well as joint marketing with the other education paths (see Ezeonodo et al.; Lemettinen, Jäppinen, Pitkäpaasi, Pääskyvuori, Saarikko & Säteri in this volume) were utilised via, e.g., social media and networks. The cities used their internal channels and surveyed their day care centre networks. The Finnish National Agency for Education sent

¹ Recognition decision or recognition of qualifications refers to a decision on the eligibility that foreign qualifications provide when applying for a job or study place.

a message to all those 80 people who had received a recognition decision in 2008. Despite active influencing, only 48 people applied for the training.

An info session was arranged during the application period, attracting 13 people interested in the training. At the info session, the admission criteria were presented and general information about the training was provided. Present at the session to answer questions were the Finnish teachers assigned to the project, the lecturer in charge of the training, an early childhood education teacher with an immigrant background who had previously completed the training, representatives of the cities of the Helsinki Metropolitan Area (Espoo, Vantaa, and Helsinki), application counsellor from Admission Services, education planners from HY+, and the project manager assigned to the project. The majority of those interested in the training who were present at the info session applied for the training, whereas for some it became evident that their educational background was not suitable. The info session was thus an effective way to disseminate information about the training.

The admission criteria for the education path required that the applicant had a decision of the Finnish National Agency for Education on the recognition of education for early childhood education teacher's studies and YKI 4 proficiency level language skills.² The University of Helsinki required early childhood education teachers to have YKI 5 proficiency level. The requirement for language proficiency was high because, due to the short duration of the training, it was thought that there would not be time for any considerable improvement in language proficiency. For the same reason, the maximum number of missing studies could not exceed 30 credits according to the recognition decision.

During the first application round, there were a total of 37 applicants. 28 of all the applicants had a degree from a higher education institution, 19 of whom in the field of education. 12 of the applicants had an early childhood education teacher's higher education degree, in addition to which the applicants had higher education or lower degrees from other fields. Three of the applicants were admitted directly to the training and four on a conditional basis. The applicants with conditional admission were given the opportunity to complete the YKI 4 language proficiency test prior to the commencement of pedagogical studies, but none of them passed the test. As a result, they did not get the right to complete pedagogical studies but could continue their Finnish studies.

A decision was made to continue the call for applications so that more students could be admitted. In the second application round, there

² The National Certificate of Language Proficiency, or YKI test, is a language proficiency examination for adults.

were 11 applicants, four of whom had an early childhood education teacher's degree. The degree of one of the applicants was as such equivalent to a Finnish early childhood education teacher's degree, and the person concerned was admitted to the training to strengthen her professional Finnish language skills. One of the applicants failed to appear at the entrance examination despite a reminder. One of the two candidates invited to the entrance examination was directly admitted to the training, and the other on a conditional basis to take the language proficiency test first. In other words, one suitable participant more was obtained on the second round. All the applicants of the two application rounds were born in 18 different countries. Around one-third (29%) of the applicants were born in Russia and around one-fourth (23%) in Estonia. 78% of the applicants lived in the Helsinki Metropolitan Area.

The entrance examinations were similar on both occasions. They tested the applicants' reading comprehension, their ability to produce text based on what they had read, and their oral proficiency. In the written part of the test, the applicants were asked questions based on articles in the field of education, and in the oral part, education teachers discussed the topics with the applicants. A total of four students were admitted to the training.

TEACHING PRACTICE AS PART OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION TEACHER'S QUALIFICATION TRAINING

In the decisions on the recognition of early childhood education teacher's degree issued by the Finnish National Agency for Education, each student had been ordered to complete teaching practice. In the recognition decisions, the extent of the teaching practice varied from 5 to 15 ECTS credits according to the content of the applicant's degree. The teaching practice was carried out in the field daycare centres of early childhood education teacher training, mostly under the guidance of qualified tutors. The teaching practice was carried out in compliance with the content set out for the practical training of undergraduate students, with due consideration given to the students' degree obtained in their home country and potential prior work experience in the field of early childhood education. According to the early childhood education teacher's curriculum currently in force, the extent of the practical training is 8 ECTS credits worth of integrated and 7 ECTS credits worth of advanced teaching practice (for further details, see University of Helsinki 2015).

The duration of undergraduate students' practical training in field daycare centres is five weeks. If a student studying in qualification training worked in a daycare centre, they could complete part of the tasks in their own daycare centre. In this case, the duration of their teaching practice was three weeks, the first part of which was completed in the form of an 'orientation week' and the last two parts as independent teaching practice under the guidance of the tutor teacher at the daycare centre. The lecturer in charge of the training came in once during the teaching practice to monitor, guide and evaluate the student's work.

Advanced teaching practice was carried out in pre-primary education groups because, as early childhood education teachers, the students were also qualified as pre-primary education teachers. If the prescribed extent of the teaching practice was more than 8 ECTS credits in the student's recognition decision, the student completed both the integrated and the advanced practice. In this case, the integrated practice was completed in the groups of children under 3 years or 3 to 5 years of age.

The purpose of integrated practice is that the student gets practise in the planning, implementation and evaluation of education and teaching activities with early childhood education plans, a group of children and an individual child as their starting point. The purpose of advanced practice, on the other hand, is that the student has comprehensive responsibility for children's pedagogical activities and that the student gains experience on pedagogical team leadership. The student becomes familiar with the administration and cooperation networks of early childhood education. The student's overall conception of pre-primary and early childhood education and of themselves as an early childhood education teacher as part of the Finnish education system deepens.

Based on the feedback received from the students participating in the early childhood education teacher's qualification training, teaching practice was perceived as the most rewarding part of the studies. During teaching practice, the Finnish education system has become more easily conceivable for the students, understanding of the importance of curricula as a driver of education and teaching has increased, the principle of continuity of the child's learning path has become clearer, and multi-professional cooperation skills have deepened. The feedback received from the tutor teachers has also been positive without exception: cultural interaction was perceived as a rewarding factor that enhances one's own professional skills.

FINNISH LANGUAGE AT THE CENTRE OF THE EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Early childhood educators are required to have excellent command of Finnish in working life. The proficiency level targeted with this training was proficiency level C1–C2 of the European framework, i.e. proficiency level 5–6 of the National Certificate of Language Proficiency (YKI). In order to attain this goal, instead of just filling out an exercise book, multidisciplinary and versatile practise in speaking, speech comprehension, writing and comprehension of a diverse range of texts is needed. These skills will not be learned in a year, or even two, without hard work and dedication.

The entry level required for the training, the YKI 4 (B2) proficiency level, means that the student should master the grammar and have the capabilities for reporting and writing letters, listening to, and summarising lectures, and communicating with all kinds of Finnish speakers without additional effort by either party. In reality, the level of competence varies, because such skills are achieved not only in courses but also alongside studies by studying and using the language. Most of the students had been isolated in their own language environment, and many had no native contacts with whom to practice their developing language skills.

With a few exceptions, the students usually needed a thorough refresher session in grammar. The students wanted an infinite range of different oral communication assignments, from discussion to debate, and practice in listening comprehension. Professional jargons, slangs, and dialects, as well as our ordinary spoken language, differ from the written language. Many texts, documents and opinions of societal importance require special practise. Argumentation is required in the YKI proficiency test as well, but its mastery is even more important in professional practice. Written assignments also have their own process to master. Special effort is required when scientific text and text that adheres to specific conventions is written in another language.

Students also needed support from the Finnish language teacher in their writing. In many countries, it is not desirable to express one's personal opinions in assignments or theses, let alone in the public domain, so even that had to be practiced, both in writing and orally. Listening to and summarising lectures in the Finnish way, i.e. expressing one's own view and experience when presenting the content of the lectures, was also something new for many students. The independence of Finnish teachers and early childhood educators in their work surprised and delighted the students. Insufficient language skills do not pose a barrier.

er for innovativeness and competence of early childhood educators in their profession.

Success in studies and attainment of the highest proficiency level in Finnish during such a short period of training require constant effort and strong motivation from the student. The attainment of the highest proficiency level in the YKI test is not, as such, a sufficient challenge. Interesting content is also needed for the studies. Examples of good material included topical articles relevant to the profession, blogs, opinion pieces, TV programmes, movies, short stories, and poems, which are read by other socially aware professionals as well. They also challenge the early childhood educator to take a stand and argue their point by way of reference to their personal life history and work experience. Another good motivator was a low-threshold WhatsApp group, in which the teacher was also involved as a participant.

Participation in the Finnish language teaching was voluntary, and language skills could also be developed elsewhere if the students so wished. No ECTS credits or grades were earned with the language studies. For the future, Finnish language teaching could, at least in part, be made a compulsory part of the training. Intensive teaching, in which the personal objectives of each student regarding Finnish would be reviewed, could already take place at the beginning of the training. In this way, students would immediately get an idea of what is required of them as far as their language skills are concerned, so that they would succeed as well as possible in their studies and in the National Certificate of Language Proficiency examination. Partly compulsory Finnish language studies will help both the student and the teacher to keep up with the student's progress.

ATTAINMENT OF OBJECTIVES

The objective of the project was to provide early childhood education teachers with an immigrant background who had completed their education abroad with an opportunity to be qualified for equivalent tasks in Finland. An additional objective was to increase the diversity of the personnel in the cities' employ to better reflect the diversity of municipal residents. Additionally, the aim was to create an education and training partnership and recruitment model with the University of Helsinki and the municipalities of the Helsinki Metropolitan Area (Espoo, Helsinki, and Vantaa).

Overall, the participants were highly satisfied with the training. The teachers were found friendly and professionally competent, and the

gratuitousness of the training was appreciated. Employers' support for the students was manifest as a positive attitude, examples of which included work shift planning that made it possible to attend the lectures. Practical training was considered one of the best parts of the studies, but livelihood during unpaid practical training was a cause of concern. The students were also worried about how their employer succeeded in finding a substitute for the duration of their practical training.

The number of students remained considerably smaller than expected, which clearly hampered the development of the education and training partnership and recruitment model. The cities ended up tailoring the forms of support separately for each student, instead of being able to put systematic operating procedures in place. However, an active discussion network was established between the cities, the other higher education institutions involved in the project and other operators. Experiences were exchanged on a regular basis in the project team meetings coordinated by the Metropolia University of Applied Sciences. The cities' representatives also had opportunities to compare each other's practices regarding supplementary training for people with an immigrant background, and for other groups as well.

A significant part of the population and personnel in Espoo, Helsinki and Vantaa have an immigrant background. Cities develop their services and recruitment practices on a constant basis, examples of which include anonymous recruitment, support in language learning for workers with an immigrant background, and opportunities for paid supplementary education alongside work. The 'Deploying Competence in Finland' project provided the cities with a forum for informing one another of the experiments they had carried out.

In August 2020, the University of Helsinki arranged, over remote connections, a workshop for the project partners on the future of qualification training. In the presentations, due account was taken of the wishes of the cities to be better informed on practical training periods, field day care centres, training for practical training tutors, and induction of tutors. People were especially interested in receiving a student with an immigrant background undergoing the qualification training in a day-care centre. The workshop also discussed the language proficiency criteria for early childhood education teachers and was aware of the child's right to a preschool teacher with excellent proficiency in Finnish and/or Swedish and, on the other hand, of the possibility for teachers with an immigrant background to support foreign-language families in their own language. Support for multilingual children is recommended to be provided in their own mother tongue alongside Finnish (Yli-Jokipii et al.

2020). Special attention should be paid in this matter in daycare centres in the Helsinki Metropolitan Area, where there is an increasing large number of children speaking different mother tongues.

The workshop succeeded in sharing information and opening discussions on challenging themes related to the qualification training of people with an immigrant background. The development of an education and training partnership model regarding support for practical training, the students' Finnish language learning and combination work and studies will still require further joint development efforts.

DEVELOPMENT SUGGESTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- Arranging an info session during the application period will enable applicants to gain better understanding of the training objectives and methods. The info session will eliminate those applicants for whom the training is not suitable and who do not meet the admission criteria. The persons interested in the training will have the opportunity to meet the cities' HR specialists or future employers.
- The sharing of experiences from previously completed training at the info and orientation sessions will enable applicants and students to ask questions from those who qualify as experts by experience.
- The admission criteria are to be set in such a way that the objectives of the training can be attained by the students. Learning the language will take time even from a highly motivated learner.
- Training should be made available either on a continuous basis or at least at regular intervals so that potential applicants can be informed in a timely manner about the next opportunity.
- The development of education and training would also be easier if the training programmes were not project-based but part of the university's regular educational offerings.
- The participants in qualification training often have a family and many of them go to work. Arranging the training in the evenings and flexibly will make it easier for them to participate.

- The recognition decisions of the Finnish National Agency for Education do not take any stand on language proficiency, so checking the language skills is up to the employer. This may give the false impression that Finnish language proficiency is not an important part of the professional skills of an early childhood education teacher. There is severe shortage of qualified early childhood education teachers in the Helsinki Metropolitan Area, so language skills below the level of excellent proficiency required by law are sufficient for finding employment. Opportunities should also be provided for developing language skills alongside work.
- Part of the Finnish language studies could be made compulsory to improve their significance and appreciation.
- After group formation, it would be worthwhile to consider which studies can and should be arranged in the form of distance studies.
- In the Deploying Competence in Finland project, students with an immigrant background studied with each other. In the future, some of the studies could be pursued together with undergraduate and continuing education students who speak Finnish as their mother tongue.
- It is worthwhile to put special effort in committing different operators and in improving the flow of information at different stages of the project.
- Cooperation with other operators and education paths has been useful. Although the training programmes have been different, it has been possible to pick up good practices for one's own operations.

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EDUCATION MODELS DEVELOPING COMPETENCE IN THE SALES, SERVICE AND CONSTRUCTION SECTORS

Many highly educated immigrants fail to find employment in Finland in duties that match their competence. At the same time, as the dependency ratio of the population deteriorates, a problem of mismatch between supply and demand of labour is already discernible, which is hoped to be alleviated especially with highly educated immigrants. In other words, valuable competence is wasted when international talents fail to find employment that matches their education. (See, e.g., Confederation of Finnish Industries 2019; Ministry of Education and Culture 2019; Laakso 2019.) As in the rest of Finland, the employment situation of the foreign population in Uusimaa is worse than that of the resident population (Helsinki-Uusimaa Regional Council 2015, 12). Unemployment is common when moving to a new country if the cause of immigration was other than work-based, and employment is often seen as a sign of integration. Language skills pose their own limitations as to how soon and in what kind of duties an immigrant has an opportunity to find employment (Nieminen et al. 2015, 122).

The challenges involved with directing to appropriate education and career paths have also been recognised in the SIMHE activities carried out at Metropolia. This especially pertains to immigrants who have completed a higher education degree and who would benefit most from short training paths that supplement their prior learning and competence. There have also been shortcomings in the provision of suitable further and supplementary education and training. There has been a clear need for the SIMHE activities as a developer of education and employment opportunities so as to have all the available competences put to use to the benefit of the Finnish society (Stenberg & Autero 2018, 7).

The education and training partnership model developed in the 'Deploying Competence in Finland' project has sought to address, with the help of an extensive network of operators, the Government's immigration policy programme and the needs raised in the reports of different ministries. Perceived as important have been measures such as the recognition of prior learning and the dissemination of education models. The project encompassed five education paths directed at highly educated immigrants. Haaga-Helia arranged education in sales work, Laurea education in tourism and catering, and Metropolia education in the real estate and construction sector. This article describes the implementation of these education paths. Furthermore, Metropolia was responsible for arranging education for nurses and the University of Helsinki for arranging education for early childhood education teachers (see Ezeonodo et al.; Johansson et al. in this volume).

The objective of the education paths was to help highly educated immigrants to qualify for and find employment in expert duties in Finland that match their education. The current employment opportunities and shortage of labour were taken into account when the fields of the education paths were defined. Additionally, the idea was to make use of the extensive educational offerings of the participating universities of applied sciences. Often, insufficient Finnish language skills are a hindrance to the immigrant's employability, so all the education paths in the project were only offered in Finnish, and the studies also included Finnish language studies. Understanding of the Finnish work culture is also important from the employability point of view, so the students of all education paths also had the opportunity to become acquainted with the Finnish working life and companies. Accompanying the student along every path were the subject teacher responsible for content teaching and a Finnish language teacher.

Of the operators involved in the project, the Uusimaa Employment and Economic Development Services played a significant role not only in the recognition of the client group for the training programmes, but also in their planning and marketing. Immigration Manager Tuija Soininen of the Uusimaa Employment and Economic Development Services commented the education and training models developed in the projects as follows:

The 'Deploying Competence in Finland' project created and developed long-awaited-for further and supplementary education paths for highly educated immigrant clients. The lack of suitable education and training offerings has been a challenge in the guidance of highly educated immigrant clients. So, the direction

of the development is right. We still have a lot to do regarding strengthening the clients' Finnish language proficiency to a sufficient level prior to and during these further and supplementary training courses. At present, some clients apply for tasks that do not correspond to their education, because the education path to a level that corresponds to their competence can be perceived as being too long and strenuous.

Partly for these reasons, the programmes described in the present article were opted for.

MARKETING OF THE TRAINING PROGRAMMES

The purpose of the marketing carried out in the project was to reach highly educated immigrants with sufficient language skills for studying in Finnish and a university degree suitable for supplementary education. Separate brochures were prepared for all the education paths included in the project, as well as one common (3AMK) brochure by Haaga-Helia, Laurea and Metropolia. Information about all the training programmes complete with registration forms was collected on the project website. Additionally, the programmes were marketed through several different channels, such as the employment and economic development services, social media and the websites of educational institutions and cities. The programmes were also marketed by making direct contact with the educational institutions providing integration training and associations and organisations operating in the Helsinki Metropolitan Area. In addition, an info session was arranged on the 3AMK education path at Haaga-Helia.

Tuija Soininen of the Uusimaa Employment and Economic Development Services commented the challenges encountered in the marketing of the programmes as follows:

The education and training offerings are partly project-related, which means that there is no continuity, and the programmes cannot be easily found. This poses challenges to guidance, communications, and dissemination of information. Information does not reach the clients who are suitable for the training programme easily and in a timely manner. Especially clients who are already in working life are difficult to reach.

The challenges mentioned by Soinen were noticed in this project as well. Despite the numerous information channels, the marketing of the education paths failed to yield the desired number of applicants. In future, different channels, especially low-threshold services such as the Employment Corner (n.d.) info webinar, as well as students who have completed a similar programme, should be utilised in a versatile manner in the marketing of the educational paths. The participants recommended that this type of training should also be marketed on Facebook through the employment and economic development services.

EMPLOYMENT THROUGH SALES COMPETENCE

Employment and economic development offices carry out assessments of the labour market prospects of different professions on a regular basis. According to them, there is a shortage of sales representatives throughout the country (Occupational Barometer 2020). Sales are at the strategic centre of the Haaga-Helia University of Applied Sciences. The educational institution has more than 12 years of experience in degree-awarding education in sales work, and it has more than 500 Bachelors of Business Administration graduates specialised in sales work, who have found employment extremely well.

A total of 15 students applied for the training in sales work and were invited to the entrance examination. The entrance examination consisted of an interview and a short writing assignment, the purpose of which was to ensure that the applicant had sufficient knowledge of Finnish and motivation to study sales work. All the applicants were accepted, and 11 of them confirmed that they will accept the place of study. Ten students started their studies. One of them was quickly employed and therefore dropped out of the programme, and the studies of one student were halted in collaboration with the Employment and Economic Development Office. The programme was completed by eight students.

An essential part of the training was cooperation with sales organisations. At the planning stage of the programme, the teachers contacted companies that were already familiar with such cooperation with Haaga-Helia's training in sales work and emphasised the bearing of social responsibility in their values. Many of these companies employ workers with immigrant backgrounds. When the programme was started, eight partner companies chose to take part.

Content of the studies

The duration of the programme was 16 weeks, and it corresponded to one semester worth of studies at a higher education institution (30 ECTS credits). The programme was implemented in the autumn of 2019, and it consisted of six courses:

- Sales and communications competence, 12 cr
- Work placement in a company, 9 cr
- ICT skills, 3 cr
- Introduction to economic thinking, 2 cr
- Introduction to customer insight in service design, 2 cr
- Career planning, 2 cr.

The teaching was mainly arranged in the form of classroom teaching. During the seven-week company work placement, the students spent three days of the week in a company and two days in the education institution. The purpose of the company work placement was to familiarise the students with the operations and business culture of a Finnish sales organisation and to showcase the wide range of employment opportunities brought up by sales competence.

The ‘Sales and communications competence’ course included both the teaching of sales work and the development of the Finnish language skills. Oral proficiency, which is truly necessary in sales work, was practised as an integral part of teaching discussions and practise of sales encounters. In the practising and in the competence demonstration assignments, the students used the Haaga-Helia SalesLab facility, where conversations can be easily videotaped and recorded.

In addition to the content described above, the programme sought to ensure that the students possess sufficient ICT skills and to strengthen their understanding of service design and profitable business. A career planning module was arranged to support employability, which continued after the completion of the programme.

Experiences gained and successes achieved

Owing to the small number of applicants, all the applicants were accepted, which resulted in a highly heterogeneous group of students. Furthermore, the selection procedure did not adequately measure the Finnish language skills needed for pursuing the studies or the motivation to study sales work. In the training, the negative effect of prolonged un-

employment and the Finnish support system on the self-confidence, initiative and motivation was apparent with regard to some of the students.

Integrated teaching of sales work and Finnish was considered the best way to learn professional language skills in a versatile manner. The training was based on the functional language concept, i.e. the functionality of the language, its communal nature and situational variation were emphasis in the learning process (see, e.g., Saarinen et al. 2019). Based on the student feedback, some of the students expected more conventional, separate language teaching, which they had been accustomed to in their previous studies.

Attracting partner companies was more challenging than in the case of degree-awarding education of Finnish students. The language background of the trainees raised concerns among the companies as to how the students would cope at work and how much working time would have to be spent in their guidance. A decision to accept a trainee with an immigrant background called for discussion and approval within the workplace and from the executive management. On the other hand, four of the employers who accepted trainees noted in their feedback that they were very satisfied with the practical training period. They appreciated the perseverance shown by the students and were able to utilise the students' versatile competences and language skills: not only Finnish, but also English, Spanish and Russian, for example.

During the programme, most of the students had for the first time the opportunity to work in a Finnish expert organisation, which was a valuable experience for them and an addition to their CV. One of the participants found employment immediately upon completion of the programme.

EMPLOYMENT THROUGH SERVICE COMPETENCE

Laurea has educated professionals in the tourism and catering sector since the 1990s, so it was natural that the responsibility for planning and piloting the education path in the tourism and catering sector be vested with Laurea. The studies chosen for the programme were planned to produce the kind of new competence that working life expects and, on the other hand, to enable students to update their competence.

The number of applicants at the first application stage was 11. Two of them were admitted, one of whom completed the programme. The others could not be admitted due to insufficient Finnish language skills, lack of a degree from a relevant field or lack of work experience. Due to the low number of applicants, a new call for applications was

opened for spring 2020 and, further on, for autumn 2020. Both calls yielded one inquiry, but neither of them resulted in admission due to a missing degree from a relevant field.

Content of the studies

- Finnish language studies, 5 cr
- Catering services, 5 cr
- Service innovations, 10 cr
- Practical training, 10 cr
- Hygiene and alcohol passports

That is, the programme comprised a total of 30 credits, and the studies were completed on a full-time basis during one semester. The student admitted to the programme completed their studies by attending undergraduate students' courses, and Finnish language studies were integrated as part of all study activities, as Hirard and Sandberg (2019, 28) recommend. The 'Catering services' course was completed in the restaurant and café environment of the educational institution concerned, where the student had the opportunity to familiarise themselves with the different processes of a restaurant and café and to serve customers in Finnish. The studies also included practical training in the conference service section of a hotel. The student participated in a wide range of events and their practical arrangements and was able to practise their customer service skills.

At the beginning of the studies, the student got acquainted with the vocabulary of the field. Throughout the course of the training, the student kept a learning journal in Finnish and collected new vocabulary for themselves. During the 'Service innovations' course, the student engaged in teamwork with Finnish students, which enabled them to learn a lot of spoken-language expressions. The student completed the hygiene and alcohol passport exams, which proved to be very demanding for a non-Finnish examinee. The student was provided with a lot of personal support for completing them.

Experiences gained and successes achieved

Experiences were gathered by interviewing all those who worked with the student and the students themselves. Based on the interviews, speaking, understanding, and writing the Finnish language proved to be the biggest challenges for the student.

Spoken language expressions might be difficult to understand, but the studies were supported by the teachers' clear and sufficiently slow manner of speech. Both English and Finnish language learning materials were used in the studies. It is advisable to give the material to the student well in advance and to reserve sufficient time to read and translate it.

The student's experiences in the placement company were positive. What was challenging in the practical training was getting used to the Finnish work culture and changing situations. The student's experiences at the Laurea student restaurant and café were positive as well. The student learned to work in a restaurant and café setting and had a first-hand experience on the Finnish work culture and ways of working. The student learned a lot of new professional vocabulary while discharging practical duties. The chosen courses supported the student's familiarisation with Finnish work culture and practices.

Customer service and teamworking skills developed in practical situations at the educational institution and at the hotel, and during the 'Service innovations' course, the student learned the service innovation process and new innovation and development methods. The practical training improved the knowledge of Finnish as regards both oral and written proficiency: the vocabulary increased and the understanding of spoken language improved. The student gained confidence in their own expertise and courage to seek new jobs.

Experience has shown that at the beginning of their studies, a student need guidance in orientation to studies, in the use of learning platforms and programs, and in the practices and rules of the educational institution. Similar observations have also been made by Stenberg and Hirard (2019, 117). Additionally, it is advisable to familiarise the student with the Finnish student culture and point out that higher education students are expected to be self-directed, but also capable of working in a group.

Guidance at the beginning of studies or during courses is not alone sufficient; guidance is needed throughout the study process. A student also needs special support and guidance in speaking and writing Finnish and in finding a practical training place. Furthermore, support from a student tutor, for example, or another similar person could be useful. Familiarisation with the Finnish work culture is facilitated by discussion with others and by the student's self-reflection of practical situations and encounters. It is also advisable to provide support in career planning and jobseeking.

DEPLOYING COMPETENCE IN THE REAL ESTATE AND CONSTRUCTION SECTOR

According to the estimate of the EDUFI National Forum for Skills Anticipation (Finnish National Agency for Education 2020), more than 20,000 professionals who have completed an UAS degree will be needed in the real estate and construction sector in 2017–2035. The competence of highly educated immigrants will also be needed in the sector. The demand is greatest in the Helsinki Metropolitan Area, and as Finland's largest educator of real estate and construction engineers and master builders, Metropolia has a major responsibility in this regard.

A total of 12 students applied for the construction sector training programme, and all of them were invited for an interview. In the interview, the applicants' Finnish language skills, prior educational background, and work experience as well as the objects of interest were sorted out. In connection with the meeting, the certificate of a higher education degree was also checked. Ten of the applicants were admitted, and eight of them confirmed that they will accept the place of study. Six students eventually started their studies. Five students have made progress in the programme according to plan. Two of them have found employment in duties in the real estate and construction sector that match their education, and one of them is setting up an enterprise in the sector.

Content of the studies

The duration of the studies was two semesters, and their scope was equivalent to 35 ECTS credits worth of studies at a higher education institution. The studies consisted of the following courses:

- Finnish as a second language: Finnish in higher education studies 1, 5 cr
- Finnish as a second language: Finnish in higher education studies 2, 5 cr
- Real estate legislation and regulatory guidance in Finland, 5 cr
- Basics of the built-up environment, 10 cr
- Basics of the building information modelling of concrete structures (Tekla Structures), 5 cr
- BIM basics, 5 cr.

At the beginning of the studies, the focus was on familiarisation with the Finnish operating environment and legislation since the need for that was shared by all the students. The Finnish language was studied both in dedicated courses and with the support of a professional subject teacher. The studies of spring 2020 focused on building information modelling, as there is great demand in the sector for expertise in that area.

The students had the opportunity to attend the courses offered for degree students in accordance with the personal study plan prepared for them. In addition, weekly workshops provided coaching in the improvement of Finnish language skills. The teaching was mainly arranged in the form of classroom teaching on 1–2 days a week, making use of the Moodle online learning environment.

Experiences gained and successes achieved

The recruitment of students was surprisingly challenging. According to preliminary data, there are hundreds of professionals belonging to the target group in Finland, but the number of applicants was still low. At the recruitment stage, only those who did not have a prior higher education degree were eliminated. However, the students who started their studies were highly motivated and made good progress in their studies.

The responsibility for finding an on-the-job learning place rested with the students themselves. However, the students were supported in finding an on-the-job learning place in a variety of ways. A number of operators in the sector were contacted directly. Additionally, the students attended the recruitment events arranged at Metropolia: for example, in December 2019, nearly 50 companies offered practical training and summer job opportunities in the KiRa-rekry recruitment event for the real estate and construction sector.

The students had major difficulties in finding an on-the-job learning place, and only two succeeded in obtaining a place. Both found employment during the project. The boom in the industry sector kept operators busy, and there was no sufficient time available for the guidance of the on-the-job learners. Arranging classroom teaching days during the practical training period seemed difficult as well. The employers' greatest fear concerned the trainees' command of the Finnish language, from daily communication to the preparation of reports. This fear was recurring irrespective of whether the company had prior experience of a foreign-language worker. The situation may be complicated by the fact that recruiters are not accustomed to encountering applicants with an immigrant background. Company visits or 'periods of work experience'

similar to those used in comprehensive school might help to alleviate this problem.

The students were satisfied with the teaching they had received and felt that their working life skills had improved. The experiences of both the students and the companies providing them with on-the-job learning opportunities were positive. Both the students and the employers had a lot to learn, and it has been a pleasure to witness successes.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The project has made it possible for highly educated immigrants to access work duties that match their education while at the same time seeking to respond to labour needs and shortage of talents in the Helsinki Metropolitan Area in particular. The project has strengthened the inclusion and equality of the multicultural population by promoting their employment and integration in society as active actors. Many highly educated immigrants who took part in the education paths have already found a suitable path to working life. This was achieved in cooperation with many different operators.

For the evaluation of the project, feedback was extensively collected from all the parties involved, and the free-form answers to the electronic feedback questionnaires provided good additional information. The feedback reinforced the teachers' experience of the importance of reaching the right target groups for the success of the training.

The involvement of the Employment and Economic Development Office in the project was very important for securing the livelihood of students during their studies. A development proposal from the project is that the Employment and Economic Development Office should have a dedicated official to streamline the liaisons with students and the Employment and Economic Development Office's decision-making and subsidy-granting process. It is also important to consider the applicants' physical, mental, cognitive, and social functional capacity in their referral to education and training and during the admission procedure (see Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare 2019). The different life situations of immigrants affected their access to education, completion of studies and employability.

Tuija Soininen of the Employment and Economic Development Services comments the integration of highly educated immigrants and the development of services as follows:

In the Uusimaa region, integration training has been reformed to a more customer-oriented direction to better account for the clients' background situations. A separate path has been provided for highly educated immigrants. If higher education institutions can offer additional and supplementary education and training over a longer cycle throughout the year and the education and training can ensure that the Finnish language skills develop alongside professional qualification, I believe that the guidance paths and, consequently, education paths can already be made more effective in our area during the integration period.

The deployment of the competence of highly education immigrants is important for Finland. The education and training provided in the project make up a significant and proven step towards reaching this objective. Soininen concludes::

The reform and development of structures always takes time, and special efforts, both mental and economic, are needed to incorporate the good work done under the projects into the existing structures. The Deploying Competence in Finland project has done excellent work in a wide-ranging cooperation network. During the project, issues have been identified that still require further work to be done, but the foundation for a good model of supplementary education and training, guidance and cooperation has been created. It has been a pleasure to be involved in the project and jointly create solutions for the benefit of both Finnish society and, above all, our clients.

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EDUCATIONAL PATHS TO SUPPLEMENT EXPERTISE IN BUSINESS AND ICT

The ‘SIMHE Path – From Recognising and Supplementing Competences to Employment’ project developed education paths for immigrants with higher education in the fields of business and technology (ICT in particular) to expedite their access to working life. Of the higher education institutions responsible for the SIMHE activities, Oulu University of Applied Sciences Ltd (Oulu UAS), Karelia University of Applied Sciences Ltd (Karelia) and Metropolia University of Applied Sciences Ltd (Metropolia) contributed to the development work.

The project utilised the previously developed process for mapping out prior learning and competences. The mapping of prior learning and competences has already been offered for those who have completed a degree in a higher education institution outside of Finland since 2016 (Autero 2018, 67–87). The processes for recognising prior learning and competences were refined and developed into a more working-life oriented direction during the SIMHE Path project. The starting point was to help ICT or business professionals to recognise and verbalise their competences and to provide the participants with appropriate education and training, chosen from the current course offerings of higher education institutions, to supplement their competences.

The aim of the project was to make the competences of the target group visible, to address the regional competence deficit in the industry sectors concerned, and to identify and eliminate the bottlenecks that hinder the process of obtaining professional qualifications or finding employment by means of agile and modular supplementary education. At the same time, business networks were built, and the competence needs of recruiting growth companies were mapped out in the project. These formed a basis for an education and training model that comprises individual guidance, recognition of prior learning, job seeking coaching, an on-the-job learning period, and professional studies according to the applicant’s individual needs.

The effectiveness of the education and training models were tested in the three different implementations of the project. The measures were targeted at complementing the competences aiming at employment. The regional labour market has demand for technology, ICT and business talents, so the pilots were set up to address the needs of these specific sectors. Highly educated immigrants often lack understanding of the regional labour market and the necessary networks, which makes job seeking more difficult. Therefore, an important part of the model is job seeking coaching and the construction of business networks. In order to gain access to working life, a highly educated international talent often needs help in networking and in creating business contacts. Furthermore, it may be necessary to update competences to meet the requirements of the Finnish working life.

The development of the education and training models was based on specific regional needs. In the Helsinki Metropolitan Area and in Oulu, technology is traditionally a very strong sector, but over the recent years, the automation, ICT and gaming sectors have also clearly grown in the Joensuu region, and new companies are set up in these regions, targeting the international market and in need of competent personnel. Additionally, the existing companies are growing and strengthening their market area in all three regions. According to the report published by the Chambers of Commerce (Finland Chamber of Commerce 2020), despite the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in the spring of 2020, more than 50 per cent of the companies who responded to the survey believed that their recruitment needs will increase in the next few years.

MAPPING OUT OF COMPETENCES AND BUSINESS COOPERATION AT THE CENTRE OF METROPOLIA'S EDUCATION AND TRAINING MODEL

In the development of the SIMHE Path model of the Metropolia University of Applied Sciences to supplement prior education and competences, due consideration was given to the special feature of the Helsinki Metropolitan Area of having many work duties and jobs available in English. For this reason, Metropolia's education and training model decided to put more emphasis on the recognition of prior learning and competences and business cooperation rather than offering studies in the Finnish language.

In the SIMHE Path, the principal objective of the process was to support opportunities for finding employment in one's own field by means of competence mapping and studies that supplement existing

competence. Education supplementing competence in the field of ICT was provided out of the 'Non-stop Virtual Studies' courses offering independent of time and place provided by the Metropolia University of Applied Sciences. Some of the participants pursuing studies in the field of business administration also completed ICT courses to supplement their competences (Metropolia University of Applied Sciences n.d.).

Studies in the field of business administration were more difficult to implement at Metropolia University of Applied Sciences according to the SIMHE Path timetable because their timing was tied to the courses offering of the degree programmes. Furthermore, the teaching provided in Finnish also posed challenges, as the Finnish language skills of those who took part in the SIMHE Path were not sufficient to complete studies at the higher education level. However, since the English language proficiency of nearly all the participants was at a sufficient level, they were offered courses from the English-language degree programmes. All in all, finding suitable studies from the course offerings in the field of business administration was more challenging compared to the flexible virtual offerings in the field of ICT. (Autero 2018, 67–87.)

The SIMHE path was implemented twice in 2019 and once in the spring of 2020. Metropolia's implementation had a total of 42 participants. In 2019, the SIMHE Path was offered to business and ICT talents, but in spring 2020 only graduates from the field of ICT were admitted to the path. The reasons for this were the aforementioned challenges in the provision of supplementary studies in the field of business administration and the need for ICT talents in Finland.

The reconciliation of the competence needs of recruiting companies in the ICT sector and the competences of the programme participants was already commenced at the beginning of the process, as those applying for the spring 2020 SIMHE path assessed their own competences in the field of ICT using the same criteria as the companies for assessing their talent needs in recruitment. The sought-for competences were determined as software development, online solutions, and the Internet of Things, under which were listed the companies' competence needs and the participants' level of competence in programming languages, for example, or in data communications and server solutions. The companies found the SIMHE Path concept interesting, and a total of nine companies in the ICT sector who were interested in recruiting international talents via the SIMHE Path concept eventually joined the project. (Deseille & Lemettinen 2020.) Figure 1 illustrates Metropolia's SIMHE Path process.

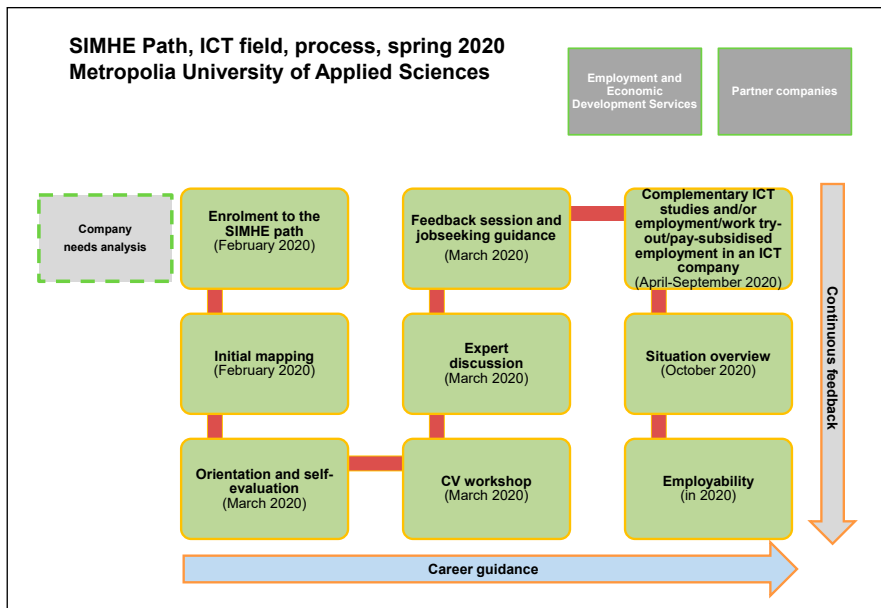


Figure 1. The SIMHE Path model of the Metropolia University of Applied Sciences.

Additionally, career counselling played a key role in the SIMHE Path of the Metropolia University of Applied Sciences, and the process of mapping out competences strengthened the participant's ability verbalise their competences and improved their job seeking skills. Furthermore, the process also included CV workshops, and in May 2020, sparring in job seeking skills in the form of various kinds of workshops was arranged for all those who participated in the SIMHE Path in 2019–2020. The Participants could, at any stage, book an appointment for personal discussions with a SIMHE-Metropolia career counsellor, and they made use of this opportunity up until the end of the project. In 2020, an opportunity to have another appointment with the expert who carried out the mapping of competences was also offered.

At Metropolia, no business networks serving the target group of this project were already in place, so they had to be created during the project, and the corona pandemic posed a plenty of additional challenges in this regard. There were several recruitment events available in the Helsinki Metropolitan Area. The most important of them was the Get-Together event, where an opportunity for 'Career speed dating' with company representatives was offered to all SIMHE Path participants.

In addition of providing networking opportunities, practical training was implemented in collaboration with the City of Vantaa ser-

vices for business under which the SIMHE Path participants had the opportunity to utilise their marketing and event production competence (Björn & Deseille in this volume). The video shot with the City of Vantaa illustrates well the cooperation with employers carried out in the project. The video can also be used in the future to make the potential of international talents more visible to employers.

MENTORING AND COMPANY MAPPING AS PART OF THE SIMHE PATH EDUCATION AND TRAINING MODEL OF THE KARELIA UNIVERSITY OF APPLIED SCIENCES

In the development of the SIMHE Path model of the Karelia University of Applied Sciences to supplement prior education and competences, due consideration was given to the special needs of the Eastern Finland region. From the point of view of the vitality of the region, it is important that international talents find work that matches their competence and see the region as one viable option for settling in. (Juvonen & Saaris-
to 2019.)

Karelia's SIMHE guidance laid the foundation for the supplementary education provided by the UAS and was essential support for the smooth progress of students' studies. The education model included courses from the business administration, technology and ICT degree programmes of the UAS. The participants were offered Finnish as a second language support for studies, Finnish language café activities, and workshops preparing for job seeking, the themes of which included the recognition and marketing of one's competence, CV and writing a job application, as well as video CV. In addition, the participants received guidance on finding a practical training place and completing practical training in a company in the region. The activities will remain part of the structures of the Karelia University of Applied Sciences after the project.

A call for applications to the SIMHE Path programme at the Karelia University of Applied Sciences was arranged twice during the project. A total of 41 applications were received. The project team and the study counsellor of the field concerned interviewed the applicants, of whom a total of 28 people were admitted to the supplementary education model. Following the admission decision, personal study plans were created for the participants in collaboration with the applicant, the study counsellors of the fields concerned, and the SIMHE team. The

discussions focused on previous studies, work experience, motivation, employment, and the needs of companies in the region. As it is, the participants' study plans varied considerably in terms of their scope and duration.

The number of applicants was highest to the courses of the International Business degree programme, where English is used as the language of study. The popularity of the courses offered in English was due to the fact that many of the applicants did not have sufficient Finnish language skills to complete higher education studies in Finnish. On the other hand, the courses offering of the UAS did not include the necessary courses in English in certain respects, and this also had an impact on the number of participants.

During the SIMHE Path programme, recruitment and networking events in the region were marketed to the participants, and a business visit was arranged in the region. Due to the spring 2020 coronavirus pandemic, some of the planned business visits had to be cancelled, which also affected the planning of the practical training periods.

A highly educated immigrant employed in the region served as a mentor for the participants during the supplementary education. The mentor provided the participants with an opportunity to have personal discussions and told the groups about his own employment in the region and his experiences of the Finnish work culture and networking. The mentoring raised a number of themes and challenges faced by highly educated immigrants. The challenges related to integration and networking. In particular, the lack of business contacts was perceived as a concern. Entrepreneurship was perceived as a clear alternative for employment; the participants either had ideas for setting up a business or considered it as the only alternative for employment. All the mentees had concerns related to language skills, and they felt that they had an impact not only on their employment prospects, but also on their human relationships, integration and feeling of loneliness. The other topics brought up in the discussions included proving one's own competence in job seeking, choosing a new field of study, and practical life in Finland. The discussions often extended far beyond career issues. The purpose of the mentoring was to encourage the mentees and inspire them to pursue their dreams. (Juvonen et al. 2020.) Figure 2 illustrates Karelia's SIMHE Path process.

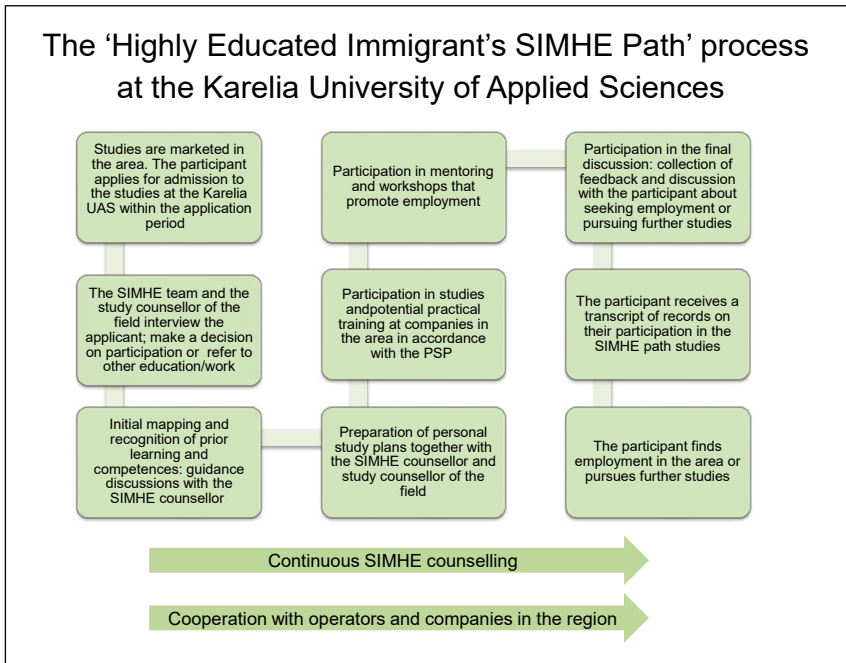


Figure 2. The SIMHE Path model of the Karelia University of Applied Sciences.

As part of the implementation of the SIMHE Path project, the Karelia University of Applied Sciences ordered a company survey targeting companies in the fields of technology, business administration and ICT in the Eastern Finland region. The survey was conducted by Propellerhat Management Oy. The purpose of the survey was to examine, among other things, what kind of competence companies in the Eastern Finland region expect from highly educated immigrants and whether the companies have prior experience in the recruitment of immigrants. For the interviews, a total 126 potential companies in the region were surveyed. A total of 15 free-form interviews were conducted during autumn 2019. Small and medium-sized enterprises in different sectors that produce products, provide services, or carry out assignments aimed at international markets were selected for the interviews.

According to the survey, all the interviewed companies in the region are looking for additional labour and are interested in finding competent international workforce. From the interviews, business profiles were compiled that can be used in the networking of highly educated immigrants and their referral to the labour market. The company profiles compiled were typically those of start-up companies, research-oriented spin-off companies or export-oriented growth companies. In addition

to the company profiles, the interviews highlighted the importance of communal workspaces from the networking and employment point of view. (Pitkänen et al. 2019.) In addition to the company survey, the Karelia University of Applied Sciences utilised in its own implementation the good experience from business cooperation gained by the Metropolis University of Applied Sciences (see Deseille & Björn in this volume).

FLEXIBLE SUPPLEMENTARY EDUCATION MODEL AND EMPLOYMENT SUPPORT MEASURES DEVELOPED BY THE OULU UNIVERSITY OF APPLIED SCIENCES

In the SIMHE Path experiment of the Oulu University of Applied Sciences, a flexible and supported supplementary education path in business administration and technology was created in which 5 to 20 credits worth of studies could be completed. In the overall educational offering of the Oulu UAS, the purpose of the programme was to diversify the paths to working life (Oulu University of Applied Sciences 2020a). Owing to the different backgrounds of the applicants, the Oulu UAS chose to use personal implementation plans. There is a lot of demand for ICT talents in the Oulu region (Oulu Chamber of Commerce 2018 and 2020), in response to which the supplementary training in the ICT sector arranged at the Oulu UAS under the H2C project (Oulu University of Applied Sciences 2020b) also provided a pathway for immigrants, so all fields of technology were eventually included in the SIMHE path.

A non-stop application procedure also provided added flexibility to the programme. The personal study plans were mainly drawn up for six months, allowing the students to study for a short period of time with labour market support. The studies were pursued completing the same courses as Oulu UAS degree students, and studies were also selected from the nationwide Campusonline.fi digital courses offering portal of the Finnish universities of applied sciences. The studies were offered in Finnish or English, depending on the applicant's language skills and competence needs.

Figure 3 (below) illustrates the Oulu UAS SIMHE Path process. The objective of the initial mapping of competences was to recognise the applicant's strongest areas of competence that were to be updated with short-term supplementary training. Personal and small group guidance and support in the Finnish language were offered in connection with the training. At the same time, the process of verbalising competences and job seeking coaching, as well as the search for a suitable target company, were started. Workshops and group meetings were

arranged to support job seeking. Workshops in the Finnish language were also used to refine the job seeking process, recognise and verbalise the student's competences, and to practise working life communication. Additionally, companies and work communities were offered a webinar aimed at developing the diversity of working life.

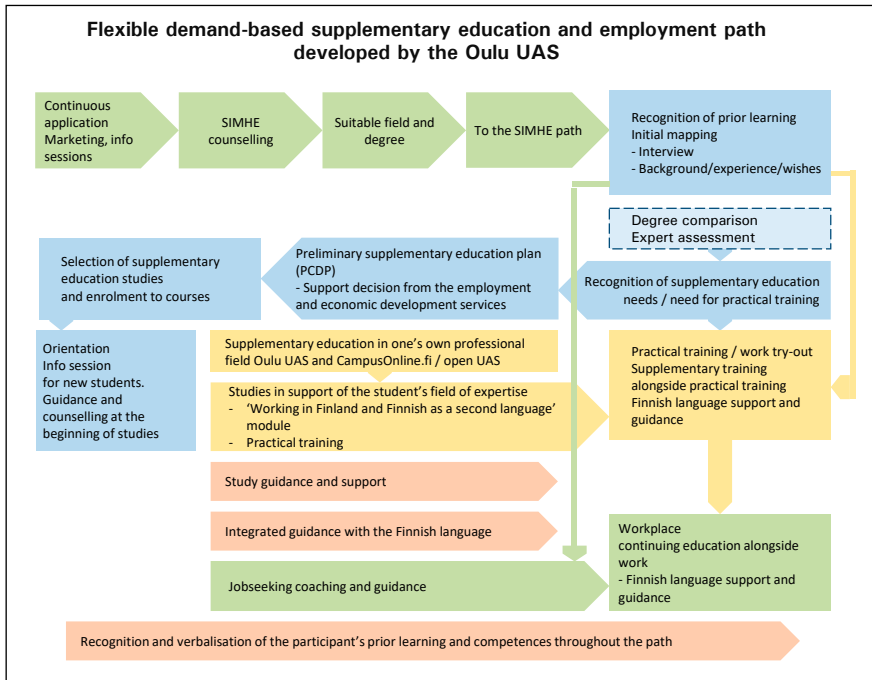


Figure 3. The flexible supplementary education and employment path developed by the Oulu UAS.

In the Oulu UAS implementation (Oulu University of Applied Sciences 2020a), the 'Working in Finland and Finnish as a second language' module was included in the path to support studies in one's professional field and employment, containing three optional courses: Verbalisation of professional competence and the job seeking process (3 cr), Finnish as a second language – communication skills in working life (3–5 cr) and Operating environment and practices of the professional field (3 cr). Finnish language learning and guidance was integrated as part of the studies in one's professional field and as part of the job seeking process.

The integration of language learning is based on the theories of experiential learning (Kolb 2015) and on the Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) concept (Coyle et al. 2010). Integrated and proactive Finnish language guidance yielded good results in the Oulu UAS experiment. It provided added quality and depth to the learning

process. Higher education studies in one's own field could already be completed with good results at the A2/B1 proficiency level alongside integration training. This proves that language proficiency is not the only determining factor of success in higher education studies. It is also affected by motivation, encouragement, and experiences of success (Coyle 2011) as well as the time available and, especially with regard to those with a higher education background, the student's prior education and work experience in the field.

A total of 34 highly educated immigrants were involved in the activities of the Oulu UAS. In the future, studies in one's professional field and the optional modules supporting them can be offered in the form of open studies for highly educated students who want to supplement the competences they have acquired abroad, but they are also suitable for undergraduates with Finnish their second language as support for the success of their studies.

HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE FEEDBACK AND EXPERIMENTS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

I got the idea that my education and work experience are of value and that they meet the requirement of the Finnish working life.

The best thing is that I get personal guidance in the Finnish language and job seeking. I wasn't left alone with my questions, I got advices that help me to move forward.

In their feedback, the SIMHE Path participants said that they had received a lot of up-to-date information about working and jobs. The SIMHE Path provided an opportunity to study the content of one's own professional field and familiarise oneself with the practices of the sector. Maintaining a connection to one's own professional field was felt important. It was also important to have the opportunity exchange experiences with others. The studies could be selected according to one's personal objects of interest, and support for developing one's Finnish language proficiency was also available at the same time. The SIMHE Path provided an opportunity to seek contacts that will help in finding a job. The participants appreciated a networked operating model in which information on events was distributed across organisational boundaries.

The SIMHE Path project offered companies a low threshold to get acquainted with international talents, who, for their part, were provided with much-needed concrete information about the needs of

the labour market in their professional field in Finland and, as a result, a more precise conception of how their competences match with the Finnish labour market. The significance of personal references is pronounced in today's job seeking. The SIMHE Path job seeking counsellors lent a helping hand between the jobseeker and the company.

The principal difference between the education models intended to supplement prior learning and competence and those intended to support employment was the provision of Finnish language guidance. Metropolia's model did not include language studies and guidance, but based on the feedback received from companies, it was decided that Karelia's language café activities should be offered to all. Based on the experiments, it is recommended that the education model includes both support for Finnish and career counselling. The integration of Finnish language studies yielded good results and should therefore be further developed. A good maximum scope for short-term studies could be 30 ECTS credits, which means that the module can also be completed in six months by studying on a full-time basis. Additionally, based on the feedback received from the SIMHE Path participants, peer mentoring was a good addition to the education model.

The SIMHE path offered highly educated immigrants one step forward towards employment in duties that match their education. There were 104 participants on the SIMHE path, of whom 46 were ICT and technology professionals and 58 business professionals. They represented a total of 44 different nationalities. 47% of them were men and 53% women, and 79% of them were aged more than 30 years. During the implementation, the participants succeeded in finding employment and practical training places, but the real effects on career paths will only be seen in the future. However, the receptiveness of the labour market is a crucial factor for the employability of immigrants (Kotouttaminen.fi blog 2020), so efforts should be made to develop cooperation with, and the diversity of, companies in the future.

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PART IV

COMPETENCE AND CLIENT FOCUS AT THE CORE OF GUIDANCE AND COUNSELLING

Marianne Autero, Marita Häkkinen & Seppo Piiparinen

**SIMHE GUIDANCE AND COUNSELLING SUPPORTING DIVERSE
EDUCATIONAL AND CAREER PATHS**

Marika Antikainen, Emilia Deseille &
Eevamajja Iso-Heiniemi

**GETTING EMPLOYED IN FINLAND: CAREER COUNSELLING AND
FINNISH LANGUAGE FOR INTERNATIONAL DEGREE STUDENTS**

SIMHE GUIDANCE AND COUNSELLING SUPPORTING DIVERSE EDUCATIONAL AND CAREER PATHS

The SIMHE guidance and counselling services, offered by several higher education institutions in close co-operation, support the integration into Finnish society of highly educated immigrants and immigrants who are eligible for higher education through studies and employment. The SIMHE guidance and counselling is provided nationwide; in other words, guidance and counselling is made available to immigrants living in different parts of Finland regardless of which higher education institution they are applying for (Ministry of Education and Culture 2016, 25). The higher education institutions' own expertise in the relevant fields of study and in guidance and counselling is applied in guidance and counselling, but the networks also cover various higher education institutions and authorities, such as the Finnish National Agency for Education and the National Supervisory Authority for Welfare and Health. In addition, the operations include advocacy and increasing the awareness of the services on the national level. At the same time, best practices accumulated in the operations and the competence accrued by the guidance counsellors are made available to parties working with immigrants.

Each SIMHE higher education institution provides the services primarily based on the needs of the immigrant clients while also taking their own region and partner networks into consideration. For example, in Northern and Eastern Finland, the long geographical distances create challenges in the operations, whereas the high number of clients seeking guidance and counselling services can be challenging in the Helsinki metropolitan area. This has, for its part, resulted in the establishment of different kinds of networks and forms of co-operation between various actors in the regions. (Autero 2018, 9–10.)

¹The higher education institutions that have provided SIMHE services in 2016–2020: University of Helsinki, University of Jyväskylä, Karelia University of Applied Sciences, Metropolia University of Applied Sciences, Oulu University of Applied Sciences, Savonia University of Applied Sciences, Tampere university community and University of Turku.

The current focus on continuous learning adds weight to SIMHE guidance and counselling, the central goals of which are to develop and update the competence of people who pursue higher education or have a higher education degree and have moved to Finland as an adult, as well as to support their employability. The services have reached guidance and counselling clients well in recent years, and the awareness of SIMHE has increased through the establishment and expansion of the operations (see Finnish National Agency for Education n.d.a). According to statistical data collected by the SIMHE higher education institutions, more than 4,300 clients used the services in 2016–2019. New higher education institutions have also joined in to provide and develop the services and to strengthen highly educated immigrants' integration into society regionally.

CHARACTERISTICS OF SIMHE GUIDANCE AND COUNSELLING

The SIMHE guidance and counselling services are run based on the strategic funding provided by the higher education institutions and based on each institution's defined emphases and resources as well as the pedagogical and substance expertise of the personnel in charge of implementing the services. For example, the guidance and counselling services are implemented by the admission services or by a separate SIMHE unit. Although the organisation of the guidance and counselling services varies, personal guidance is the most central and most common guidance and counselling method in all of the SIMHE higher education institutions.

Key competence areas in the SIMHE guidance and counselling operations include interaction skills and operating environment competence. As is the case in guidance and counselling work in general, a personalised approach that focuses on the client's situation is an important element of guidance and counselling provided to immigrants and supporting the client's active agency is key. (Autero 2018, 22–26.) Interaction is a particularly important part of the guidance and counselling discussion. Vehviläinen (2015), for example, discusses three orientations of guidance: supportive, explorative, and problem-solving. The key aspects of supportive orientation include the counsellor's presence and listening skills as well as their ability to be compassionate and receptive to emotions that may sometimes be difficult to deal with. This creates a foundation for trust-based interaction, which helps the participants progress towards the exploratory and solution-oriented orientations that

will provide the guidance and counselling client with tools and methods to plan their life.

A figure presented by Häkkinen (2019) depicts the SIMHE guidance and counselling discussion as an entity consisting of the dimensions of orientation, encountering, asking questions, and developing. The interactive guidance and counselling make it possible to encounter the client and their questions in the very situation in which the person finds themselves in the new society and environment. The questions asked in the guidance and counselling discussion often stem from one's own competence, educational and work background, and objectives. The interaction offers a way to explore and expand the available options and map tangible steps forward to support the client. Allowing space and time for questions and discussion helps share understanding and knowledge. Thus, interaction functions as a tool to develop not only guidance and counselling but also administrative practices, such as selection criteria and application guidelines.

Most of the guidance and counselling clients already have a higher education degree or degrees earned abroad, and usually they are not degree students in Finnish higher education institutions. In addition, the SIMHE guidance and counselling is characterised by issues related to language skills and the guidelines and requirements concerning applying for studies in Finland.

The key objective of guidance and counselling is to help the client find alternatives and solutions in terms of studies that support employability and in terms of their career. For some, it is a balancing act between the occupation they have earned previously and a new career. This may be due to the mismatch between the previously earned degree and competence and working life in Finland, a highly regulated sector (such as education and social welfare and health care), language proficiency requirements, or the goal of finding a new direction for one's life. The counsellor's expertise and networks are an asset in the discussions concerning the client's goals and plans.

SIMHE operations have disseminated information and shared best practices in guidance and counselling networks in Finland and internationally right from the beginning. This topic has also been examined in the Maamot project, which created a website to collect information and concrete examples to support the guidance and counselling of immigrants (Haapakorpi 2018; HY+ 2019)

CONTENT OF GUIDANCE AND COUNSELLING IMPACTED BY THE FIELD OF EDUCATION

The discussion on guidance and counselling includes a review of the client's personal background, wishes and goals in terms of education and employability as well as studies that supplement their competence. The aim is to help the client understand and verbalise their competence and together examine how their previously accumulated competence aligns with the education and working life requirements in Finland. Some of the clients seeking guidance and counselling services are already aware of jobs in their own field and the requirements concerning employability. They also know what elements of their competence need to be developed to find a job. With some clients, guidance and counselling needs to begin from the very basics. This may include looking at an overview of the Finnish educational system or language proficiency requirements. The framework and competence requirements set for guidance and counselling by different occupations and fields of education are also different. The following covers factors that impact guidance and counselling in several different fields of education where the requirements of professional qualification differ in terms of the higher education degree, language proficiency and supplementing one's studies, for example.

Technology

Many individuals seeking SIMHE guidance and counselling have a higher education degree in technology. This is most often a bachelor's degree. The career progress of those who have completed a technology degree varies based on their educational background and competence. The technology sector is not regulated, except for the qualifications required in the electrical engineering sector (Finnish Safety and Chemicals Agency n.d). Key factors emphasised in the job search include the job-seeker's own competence in relation to the competence required for the job, their need to supplement one's competence, and language proficiency. Knowledge of Finnish is highlighted in sectors where Finnish is a requirement for understanding the regulations and laws governing the sector. Alongside professional competence, Finnish language skills may play a key role in employability in the electrical engineering and construction sectors, for example. (Autero 2018; Metropolia 2019) Depending on the duties and the organisation, the importance of Finnish language may be lower in the ICT sector, for example, where good command of English combined with substance competence may be sufficient to qualify someone for a job.

However, a guidance and counselling client often lacks information about where they could complete supplementary higher education studies in their field of technology or what other opportunities there may be for continuing education. If that is the case, the objective of guidance and counselling is to support the client in applying for suitable studies, and guidance and counselling can focus on preparing the documents needed in the job search and finding jobs through networks. Occasionally the client's technology competence and the language skills required in the field are not at all aligned with the Finnish requirement level and bringing them up to date would require considerable investments in terms of both time and money. A career change and finding ways to apply one's previous education and employment experience in the new profession may then become relevant.

Psychologists and teachers

In Finland, some professions are regulated and require a licensing decision by the relevant authority. According to law or decrees, specific education or a certain degree is required in these professions. If a person has completed a degree in social welfare or health care, they should apply for licensing with the National Supervisory Authority for Welfare and Health Valvira (National Supervisory Authority for Welfare and Health n.d.). The decision concerning the suitability of a foreign teacher's degree is made by the Finnish National Agency for Education (Finnish National Agency for Education n.d.b).

Official processes are in place for the regulated professions regarding the submission, processing, and decision-making processes of applications. However, the decisions often raise questions concerning where and how the required supplementary studies can be taken and what the decision qualifies the person to do once they have completed the required studies. When a regulated profession and the recognition of foreign qualifications come up in guidance and counselling, the client's goals and prior studies should be discussed with them and matters concerning the preconditions for the recognition of a prior degree should also be covered. The counsellor should also ensure that the client understands which authorities they should contact at any given time.

Being qualified as a psychologist in Finland does not follow a similarly clear-cut process as does the qualification of a physician or a dentist, for example. They proceed along a distinct path of study, placement, and examination (Tampere University 2020). The following is an example of the challenges encountered in becoming qualified as a psychologist:

NN graduated from a foreign psychologist education programme. They have a decision by the Finnish National Agency for Education, in which their degree is equated to a master's degree. A statement issued by the National Supervisory Authority for Welfare and Health requires that the person supplements their studies as follows: an extended (5 months) supervised placement period and studies on the ethical foundation of and legislation concerning practicing a psychologist profession. NN has been living in Finland for approximately five years, their language proficiency level is Good, and they have also obtained additional training while investigating their opportunities to qualify as a psychologist – among other things, they have completed a Finnish-language upper secondary vocational qualification. They are currently employed as a youth worker. However, they are highly motivated to receive a psychologist's qualification even though their current duties already enable them to apply their psychology competence. They also have secured a work placement spot that would enable them to complete the placement requirement. However, according to the current practice, the work placement requires one to be a university student.

A person with a foreign educational background cannot complete the qualification training without applying in the joint application procedure of the higher education institutions and become a degree student in psychology through an entrance examination. Even though they may have competence in psychology, their Finnish language skills may not be strong enough for the demanding entrance examination. Thus, becoming a degree student may not happen. A question often heard in guidance and counselling discussions concerns potential routes or more open ways to apply for a right to study that would enable people to complete the qualification studies. This question is justified and valid, considering how low the credit requirement is in relation to the scope of the degree and considering that there may be a shortage of competent psychologists in the region.

Apart from psychologists, another key group that uses SIMHE guidance and counselling is teachers who have earned their degree abroad. Unlike with psychologists, supplementary studies in teacher training are mostly possible through a non-degree right to study and, sometimes, also through open university studies. For subject teachers, the possibility to complete supplementary studies in their specific subject is fairly good, especially if their language skills allow them to study in Finnish at a university. The studies required for qualification as a

class teacher often include multidisciplinary education and school subject studies (so called 'POM' studies), which generally are not available through the non-degree right to study or open university studies.

Many academic universities and universities of applied sciences offer pedagogical studies for teachers. The pedagogical studies aimed at immigrants are provided in project form, which is why the continuity of the studies is difficult to forecast. This makes it difficult to prepare a curriculum over a longer time span. In addition, the language proficiency requirements in teacher education are high, which makes it more difficult to qualify as a teacher.

IMPORTANCE OF GUIDANCE AND COUNSELLING IN CONTINUOUS LEARNING

The SIMHE guidance and counselling is linked to the topical reform of continuous learning. The experience gained in guidance and counselling work over a longer period indicates that there are more and more people in Finland and arriving from abroad to Finland who have completed a higher education degree in their home country and who are also motivated to update their education and competence to meet the needs and requirements of Finnish society. Thus, guidance and counselling provided for and the studying and learning by highly educated immigrants and immigrants eligible for higher education should be part of continuous education and a right to obtain such education.

The SIMHE guidance and counselling has demonstrated that identifying prior learning in a higher education institution streamlines the access to the path to higher education and qualifying for a profession in Finland. From an individual's perspective, this will help them find their own place as an adult member of society and make it possible for a person who often possesses diverse international and cultural competence to contribute to the institutions and functions of society.

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GETTING EMPLOYED IN FINLAND: CAREER COUNSELLING AND FINNISH LANGUAGE FOR INTERNATIONAL DEGREE STUDENTS

Recently, international degree students have been a hot topic in the labour market discussion in Finland. As the population ages and birth rate declines, the shortage of talent in Finland cannot be solved without labour immigration and education-based immigration (Confederation of Finnish Industries 2019, 11; Ministry of Education and Culture 2019, 11; Finland's Government Programme 2019, 137–138; Lindeman & Piironen in this volume). However, Finnish society still has challenges in integrating international students into the everyday life and workplace communities. This is demonstrated, among other things, by international students' poorer employability compared to their Finnish counterparts (Vipunen 2020), their experiences of language being a barrier and feelings of a lack of inclusion (Suomalainen et al. 2019, 32–39). A critical question that our society should answer is whether we can afford to leave this pool of talent untapped (Sitra 2020, 62).

Finland's population structure is challenging, which is why we must be able to make better use of the talent potential of highly motivated international students. Opportunities abound: towards the end of their studies, 50% of the students want to stay in Finland after graduating and 40% is undecided about their future, which means that a properly targeted support could help up to 90% of the students stay in Finland to work (Saari et al. 2020, 92–93). They are already familiar with the Finnish operating environment and, to supplement their personal competence, their education is easily recognisable in our labour market. They also possess international competence and knowledge of the market area of their respective home regions, which is crucial for Finland that is dependent on export. International talents also create

added value for the innovativeness of organisations: a diverse labour force brings added creativity to companies. (Cf. Helsinki Region Chamber of Commerce 2018a, 2, 9–10; see also Lahtinen & Salonen in this volume.) Our higher education institutions must join forces to develop their operations so that they meet the future needs of Finland. In addition to that, commitment by society as a whole and working life as well as shared efforts are needed.

The SIMHE Continuation project (2019–2021) of Metropolia University of Applied Sciences, funded by the Ministry of Education and Culture, seeks solutions that will improve the employability of international degree students in Finland. The project's objective is to develop a comprehensive model for career counselling and Finnish language teaching that extends throughout the studies. This article discusses the results of the project to date and observations and experiences gained when developing career counselling and Finnish language teaching.

INCLUSION, LANGUAGE SKILLS AND EMPLOYABILITY – CAUSE AND EFFECT

The model developed in the project is an intricate blend of Finnish language competence, sense of inclusion, and employability – in other words, it is a holistic view of the student's experience in Finland. Difficulties with employability and integration are international students' greatest obstacles to their staying in Finland (Ministry of Education and Culture 2019, 34; Suomalainen et al. 2019, 33–36; Shumilova et al. 2012, 64–66). International students' employability is 40% poorer than that of their Finnish counterparts among graduates of both universities of applied sciences or academic universities (Vipunen 2020, with nationality used as a benchmark). The greatest obstacles to employability are insufficient Finnish language competence as well as the lack of networks and workplace connections (Ministry of Education and Culture 2019, 34; Suomalainen et al. 2019, 34–39; Shumilova et al. 2012, 70). Other factors that may get in the way of becoming employed also include a non-Finnish name (Ahmad 2019) or other discrimination (Suomalainen et al. 2019, 34–36). These challenges are in line with the situation of other groups with international backgrounds in Finland (cf., for example, Taloustutkimus Oy 2020).

The integration of students into Finland during their studies is essential for their employability. If a student does not feel included in local communities, they may not necessarily be motivated to stay in Finland. The language barrier is also a significant factor contributing to the feel-

ing of not being included. (Suomalainen et al. 2019, 34–39.) Even rudimentary language skills increase the feeling of being in control of one's job and job satisfaction and help the student feel more connected to the higher education community. Learning the language is also a question of an individual's right to participate in society, social life, and the labour market. (Lehtimaja 2017, 3–4.) However, the student often does not understand the importance of learning the language in the beginning of their studies or think that they will stay in Finland, which is why studying the language is low on their list of priorities. The opportunities to learn the language may also be insufficient. (Shumilova et al. 2012, 65–66.)

By contrast, factors that motivate students to stay in Finland include positive experiences of the study period and a good quality of life. Thus, 91% of international students are satisfied or very satisfied with their studies in Finland. (Finnish National Agency for Education 2018.) A satisfying daily life and the relationships they have established motivate students to stay in Finland (Suomalainen et al. 2019, 32–33). For a student to have a comprehensively successful and satisfying experience, the service path offered by higher education institutions and society must also be smooth and take the student's individual needs into consideration (see, for example, Antikainen 2020). In light of the statistics, the likelihood of a student staying in Finland is affected by factors such as the type of their degree, their field of education, the location of the higher education institution, working part-time and, in particular, family reasons (Mathies & Karhunen 2019, 72–73). Some, but not all, of these factors are within the sphere of influence of the higher education institution. When developing employability, the most essential factor is to take into consideration the student's experience as a whole and to reinforce the right attracting and retaining factors as well as, on the other hand, to find solutions to issues that are critical.

TOWARDS A FUNCTIONING MODEL AND SYNERGY: CO-OPERATION AND CO-CREATION

In the long term, the employability of international students is linked to several factors and involves several actors. Therefore, both the higher education institution's internal stakeholders and a broader, regional, and national network must be taken into consideration in the development work (see Figure 1). A wealth of services is already available and may be incorporated in the processes. Since the issues are shared, impact, visibility, more effective resources and, above all, high-quality services will also be created through shared solutions.

The SIMHE Continuation project has utilised national and regional co-operation in a diverse manner. Several national reports have been used as sources of development measures (see, for example, Antikainen 2019). In addition, the strategic framework, coordination, and networking support provided by the Talent Boost programme (Business Finland n.d.) have been used. Action models and projects from several Talent Boost actors and higher education institutions were benchmarked in the project both nationally and internationally. Regional needs and networks were also linked to the development work through the International Talents Accelerating Growth project, funded by the AIKO operations, under the Talent Boost programme in the Helsinki metropolitan area. The Talent Boost project applies a multi-actor approach to develop measures to attract international talents and assist them in settling-in, integration and employability (see Antikainen, Haapalehto, Malo & Nurmi; Björn & Deseille; Lahtinen & Salonen in this volume). In addition, together with its strategic 3AMK partners of Haaga-Helia and Laurea Universities of Applied Sciences, Metropolia has created co-operation models, such as shared workshops and information for international degree students. The needs of employers have been taken into consideration by applying existing studies and by means of continuous interaction with partners.

An important phase in the development work is to identify and involve the key co-operation partners within the higher education institution itself and to clarify internal processes and communication. The division of responsibilities is different at each higher education institution, which is why enough time should be reserved for this phase. The SIMHE Continuation project started by engaging these core stakeholders in the mapping of the status, best practices and development needs of career counselling and Finnish language teaching.

The obvious core of the development work includes degree programmes and students. The project model was developed in five workshops together with the English-language degrees. Students were involved in the beginning of the project by mapping their needs and with student projects. As the project progressed, they requested feedback on the piloted measures. The project also recruited two paid interns for the project, one of whom was an international degree student. Other stakeholders with an important contribution include the student union, the well-being services, placement coordinators, Finnish language teachers, and experts of commissioned education and marketing experts. As the phase for students arriving in Finland was planned, the expertise and good practices of the international services were also harnessed.

This development work was the basis for a jointly prepared shared model that offered sufficient flexibility, took the special characteristics

of degrees into consideration, and incorporated the services provided by different actors. During the 2020–2021 academic year, measures were selected from the model for piloting and further development of the model. However, the COVID-19 pandemic has forced the project to adapt the piloting plan continuously.

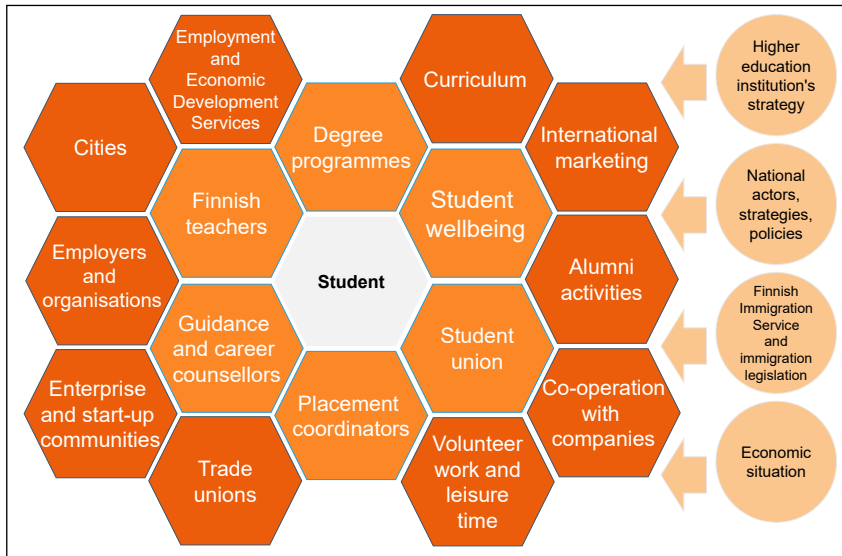


Figure 1. The stakeholders and actors involved in the SIMHE Continuation project and the factors affecting the development work.

THE FINNISH LANGUAGE MODEL: CONTINUITY AND WORKPLACE ORIENTATION IN LANGUAGE STUDIES

I think it is very important to learn the language of the country where we live in. I believe that studying Finnish here at Metropolia is as important as all the technical skills. So, please, please offer us Finnish courses throughout all our studies, kiitos :-). (Ensimmäisen vuoden AMK-tutkinnon opiskelija)

The issue of Finnish language proficiency is a recurring topic in the discussion concerning the employability and integration of international students. In terms of learning the language and teaching, the situation is challenging. Specialist positions often require good or even excellent language proficiency at the B2–C1 level (see, for example, Komppa et al. 2014, 14; Helsinki Region Chamber of Commerce 2018b).

However, the current offering of Finnish language studies and the degree structures in higher education institutions are not conducive

to acquiring language skills that are sufficient in working life. Typically, students who start from the basics achieve the basic level language proficiency (A2), at the most, during their studies (see, for example, Shumilova et al. 2012, 35). Therefore, higher education institutions have been challenged to improve the availability and flexibility of language instruction that meets the needs and to develop consistent study paths (Ministry of Education and Culture 2019, 34–37). At Metropolia, one solution to this social challenge is a grant model based on learning the Finnish language and the National certificate of language proficiency (YKI) for degree students who are required to pay a tuition fee. The grant model implemented on 1 December 2018 is expected to increase the goal-orientation and motivation of learning the language right from the beginning of the studies. At the same time, the national certificates of language proficiency recognised by employers also promote seeking employment in Finland.

Diverse support for learning Finnish caters to the needs of not only workplaces but also the students themselves (Suomalainen et al. 2019, 35–36; Shumilova et al. 2012, 52). A needs survey conducted among students in the project highlighted their desire to receive continuous and intensive support for learning the language. The students would also like to see teaching focused more on the development of interactive skills, colloquial language use and practical language skills. It is obvious that teaching focused primarily on grammar does not sufficiently prepare students for workplace situations (Suomalainen et al. 2019, 35–36).

The SIMHE Continuation project aims to address these varied challenges. The objective of the developed model is to enable a bachelor's degree student starting from the basics to complete the basic and intermediate levels of national certificates of language proficiency (YKI) during their studies and to achieve a minimum of intermediate-level (B1) language proficiency (see Figure 2). This is sufficient for them to complete their work placement, for example, in most companies (Helsinki Region Chamber of Commerce 2018b) and supports them in job interviews and various workplace interactions. The goal is for the student to achieve a basic language proficiency (A1–A2) by the autumn of the second year, while the intermediate level is achieved on average in the spring semester of the third year. However, the language model must concurrently allow for flexibility in accordance with individual and degree-specific needs. Factors that impact the progress of studying the language include the student's preparedness to learn the language, their prior learning and mobility periods.

| | 1ST YEAR A1–A2.1 | | 2ND YEAR A2.1–A2.2+ | | 3RD YEAR A2.2–B1 | | 4TH YEAR B1–B2 | | |
|-------------------------------------|---|---|--|--|--|---|--------------------------------------|--|--------------------------------------|
| SUPPORTED SELF-STUDY BEFORE ARRIVAL | COURSES | Finnish 1 (5 cr) Intensive support for the National certificate of language proficiency (YKI) 1 (2 cr) | Finnish 2 (5 cr) Intensive support for the National certificate of language proficiency (YKI) 2 (2 cr) | Finnish 3 (5 cr) Intensive support for the National certificate of language proficiency (YKI) 3 (2 cr) | Finnish 4 (5 cr) Intensive support for the National certificate of language proficiency (YKI) 4 (2 cr) | Let's speak Finnish (3 cr) Intensive support for the National certificate of language proficiency (YKI) 5 (2 cr) | Finnish for specialist work 1 (5 cr) | Finnish for specialist work 2 (5 cr) | Finnish for specialist work 3 (5 cr) |
| | SUPPORT FOR USING FINNISH IN STUDIES | | | Placement with language support | | Placement with language support | | Finnish-language / language-integrated studies | |
| | SUPPORT FOR USING FINNISH IN LEISURE TIME | Use of Finnish in extracurricular activities, career counselling and in leisure time – supported by an online package | | | | | | | |

Figure 2. A language model for the four-year bachelor's degree for a student who starts learning Finnish as a new subject.

Courses

The Finnish language model offers an opportunity to receive supervised and intensive instruction of Finnish (provided 1–2 times per week) throughout the studies. The model complements and harmonises the existing study offering as efficiently as possible, as the existing amount of Finnish language studies included in Metropolia's degrees varies (0–20 credits). However, all bachelor's degrees in technology and business administration should include, at a minimum, Finnish 1–4 courses. In addition, the development of practical language skills is supported through optional short courses that prepare the student for the national certificate for language proficiency test and through more advanced-level applied studies.

In the Nursing and Social Services degree programmes, for which the baseline requirement is level B1, upgrading language proficiency to a minimum level of B2 required by job duties can be supported by adjusting the offering and by increasing the opportunities to use Finnish in studies, in work placement and otherwise. In practice, a student completing their master's degree participates in the first two years of the instruction provided in the model.

The goal is to incorporate the studies in the degree through the optional studies, as much as each degree allows. The most essential aspect is to improve the students' interactive skills in various language use scenarios (see also Kivivuori & Sandberg 2018, 15–22). In addition, the

development of this model has highlighted the need to further improve teaching of expert communication suitable for level B2 and higher for students with a foreign background studying for a degree in Finnish.

Online implementations have proven to be useful in increasing the flexibility and needs-based provision of studies. All courses piloted in the project in 2020 were implemented remotely, partly due to the emergency caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Results of the online implementations in the spring were good (see Iso-Heiniemi 2020). It looks like there will be a need for remote Finnish studies in higher education institutions in the future as well. In addition to the basic level courses, other courses in the model will also be piloted. Experiences are gathered, not only of the online implementations but also on the model as a whole.

Support for the use and application of Finnish

In the Finnish language model, language learning is supported with course offerings and by other means. The key aspect is that the student receives information on learning opportunities at the very beginning of their studies and understands how important language skills are in terms of employability (Kielimuurin yli 2013, 6). It is also of utmost importance to have the opportunity to speak Finnish in everyday situations, aligned with the language proficiency achieved by the student thus far (see, for example, Komppa et al. 2017).

The SIMHE Continuation project has piloted the following in support of the use of Finnish:

- **Work placement with language support** has been piloted in the Social Services degree (see Korpela 2020) and in the SIMHE services. Work placement is a true opportunity to learn Finnish in real setting, provided that guidance and support are available. .
- **The integration of Finnish into the study content** is being developed for later stages in the studies. The course supporting workplace competence, developed in the project, includes opportunities to speak Finnish and to practice job interviews in Finnish, for example. Moreover, various opportunities for study groups are being investigated where equivalent parallel courses are available in the Finnish degree. There are also opportunities to provide project-like studies which integrate the Finnish with the content. Combining the study content with language instruction particularly in the later stages of the studies offers students simulated authentic workplace situations. One solution is to offer teaching in Finnish while allowing the students to prepare the written as-

signments in English. (Komppa et al. 2014, 15.) However, this requires that students have a sufficient language proficiency (level B) and that the English and the Finnish degrees are coordinated.

- **An online package** includes language proficiency level specific tips and links related to learning Finnish in settings that extend beyond the courses and the educational institution. The package includes information ranging from various applications to language cafés, language pair activities, volunteer work opportunities, and social networking. This will encourage students to seek ways to learn Finnish and to find networks that suit them best.

A solid professional language proficiency cannot be obtained simply by attending the courses. The proficiency is specific to a workplace and a job position and is acquired through authentic interaction in work communities. In addition, language instruction needs to encourage the learner to apply what they have learned in their daily life. The provision, support and flexibility of Finnish language studies and their motivational appeal should be continuously developed. The same applies to the awareness in the entire higher education community regarding the language learning needs of international students. Allocating resources to learning Finnish in higher education institutions and, increasingly, in co-operation between different institutions is a worthwhile investment. What's more, employers should also commit to supporting language learning as students enter working life.

From the perspective of employability, key aspects of language learning are

The continuity of Finnish language studies and support for language learning throughout higher education

Focusing Finnish language studies on the development of interaction skills and practical language skills.

Support for and opportunities to practice the language from the beginning of the studies (in accordance with the student's skills and needs) in everyday situations, as part of the studies and in work placement.

CAREER COUNSELLING TO BOOST NETWORKING AND IDENTIFYING AND MARKETING ONE'S COMPETENCE

Do I wish to stay in Finland? Definitely yes! I have my family here and to me, it makes sense to stay together rather than me exploring job opportunities elsewhere. As per few published reports, I also understand Finland actually needs talent to support the growing need. I believe with my vast experience, a Master's degree, willingness to work and commitment, I can bring along best practices to companies that are in need and help them grow. (A master's degree student)

Understanding the need for comprehensive guidance and counselling is important when developing career counselling for international degree students (cf., for example, Ministry of Education and Culture 2019, 34). For a student who moves to Finland from another country, the four years of studying for a bachelor's degree, for example, are about not only building their workplace competence, professional profile, and networks but also their entire life in Finland. Their choices related to working life are also life choices: what kind of a country does the student want to live in, where do they have family ties, what kind of everyday life do they want to have (see, for example, Suomalainen et al. 2019, 32–33, 37–39)? In other words, the development of employability must take into consideration not only career counselling and language proficiency needs but also, more extensively, the perspectives of networking, inclusion, agency and adjustment to living in Finland.

The career counselling model in the SIMHE Continuation project consolidates all these dimensions, the proven best practices and services, as well as the identified development needs (see Figure 3). An essential aspect of the development work has been to identify, at the level of educational institutions, the measures that should be taken in degrees and that can be taken in a centralised manner and in networks. The model complements and consolidates the often sector-specific career counselling already being offered in degrees, as well as the services offered in various units and organisations. In practice, each degree in a multidisciplinary educational institution applies the model in accordance with their own study content, schedules and needs. For example, different bachelor's degrees schedule work placement, an important transition to employment, in different ways.

| BECOMING MOTIVATED AT THE ADMISSION STAGE TO FIND EMPLOYMENT IN FINLAND | | 1ST YEAR | 2ND YEAR | 3RD YEAR | 4TH YEAR | |
|---|---|---|---|--|--|--|
| | | | "I am part of Metropolia and know my rights, duties and opportunities" | "I am building my networks and professional path and growing to understand the culture" | "I am focusing on my professionalism and becoming active" | "I am branding my personal professional profile" |
| | | INTEGRATION INTO EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTION AND COMMUNITY | Orientation to the educational institution Intercultural communication Designated contact person in the degree Tutoring | Active collection of feedback Becoming active in the student union Peer mentor | Tutoring/mentoring, organising activities Representing student organisations Representing the educational institution | Participating in the orientation for 1st year students Active collection of feedback before graduation Graduation ceremony and sharing success stories Joining the alumni register |
| | | INTEGRATION INTO FINLAND | 'Welcome to Finland' orientation 'Finnish culture & society' course Tutoring, startup camps, excursions, friendship programme Part-time jobs | Informal alumni encounters Excursions, friendship activities Becoming active in leisure time activities | Workplace/social project, sense of inclusion Using Finnish (studies, leisure time) | Alumni encounters Using Finnish (studies, leisure time) |
| | | CAREER COUNSELLING | Career paths and study planning Orientation: alumni, trade unions, Finnish language and employability, networks Professional communication skills Identification of prior learning and CV* | Guidance concerning the personal study plan: professional profiling, study choices Placement guidance and language-awareness Career skills: where to find information, job search, sector and future competences* Working culture in Finland* Networking events Labour market, legislation and salaries in Finland* | Guidance concerning the personal study plan: professional profiling, increasing the use of Finnish Becoming active as a professional communicator/influencer* Placement guidance and language-awareness Learning gained during a potential mobility period Networking events Practicing job search in Finnish (interview, video CV)* Mentoring programme | Thesis work as a demonstration of expertise Becoming involved in the alumni activities Identification of competence, branding oneself, job search* Entrepreneurship* Planning the future: employment services, Finnish Immigration Service, post-graduate education Opportunity to receive career counselling for one year after graduation |
| THROUGHOUT THE STUDIES | An online package to support career counselling and integration into Finland Personal career counselling (sector-specific and centralised) Sector-specific employer visits and events integrated with the studies Services provided by the student union and well-being providers Language-aware communication and diverse groups | | | | | |

Figure 3. The career counselling model for a bachelor's degree student.

*) Alternatively, as part of the course coaching for working life (5 cr) or a series of workshops.

Career counselling throughout the studies

The career counselling model starts with the identification of prior learning and the setting of objectives for the student's career path and ends in the graduation stage with honing the competence strengthened during the studies as well as with supporting the student's job search/employment. The measures to be piloted are under the umbrella of the optional course supporting workplace competence, launched in the autumn of 2020. It is available to the international students of all the English-language bachelor's and master's degree programmes. The course includes workshops, assignments that support learning and professional reflection, as well as employer co-operation. In order to ensure flexibility and take individual needs into consideration, students could participate in workshops and attend company visits without having to complete the course. In addition to the series of workshops and the course, links and tips supporting and complementing the themes have been collected in an online package to ensure that information applicable to each student's own situation is available at just the right time.

One of the guiding principles in the career counselling model is to promote networking, which is of utmost importance to the employability and more extensive integration of an international talent into Finland (Ministry of Education and Culture 2019, 34; Suomalainen et al. 2019, 34). Therefore, it is essential to make possible low-threshold encounters between international talent and potential employers. To that effect, a Metropolia Match recruitment event, provided fully in English and targeting international Business Administration students, was piloted in March 2020. The participating companies were satisfied with the specific focus of the event and the motivation of the participants, indicating that employers also have a need for similar events (see also Björn & Deseille in this volume).

In addition, students have been able to learn about Finnish employers through sector-specific company visits and the sparring provided by companies' HR experts to improve the students' workplace skills, such as preparing a CV or improving their professional communication. Informal contacts with employers in one's own field will help students to identify competence needs in their respective fields and to mirror their competence profile against working life expectations. Thus, workplace co-operation in its various forms should be made more systematic and an established part of the operations of higher education institutions. The importance of Finnish language skills brought up by employers will also increase the motivation towards language studies.

Ever since they arrive in Finland and during the workshops, the participants have been guided to see networking as a theme that spans their entire sphere of life, ranging from voluntary work to hobbies and student life activities. Their preparedness to network has been supported, among other things, in an elevator pitch workshop where students could practice providing a compact verbal description of their own competence profiles. In addition, the continuing increase in the importance of social media, particularly LinkedIn, in recruitment (Duunitori 2020) has been emphasised by guiding students to actively work on their specialist roles in social media as part of the job search strategies. Tips on networking and the available mentoring programmes, among other things, have also been collected to the online package.

Sufficient self-knowledge and the ability to identify, assess and develop one's own competence are among the prerequisites of searching for jobs in practice and developing one's specialist profile. Continuous learning and generic workplace skills are factors that are likely to be further emphasised in the future (Dufva et al. 2016). These topics, other future competence needs and themes of sustainable development will thus play an important role in the contents of the career counselling model. As entrepreneurial-type specialist work becomes increasingly common and the role of the Helsinki metropolitan area grows as an internationally important start-up ecosystem, entrepreneurship has also been highlighted as one of the areas of improvement in students' competence (Dufva et al. 2016; Business Finland 2020). To stay abreast of the constantly changing working life, it is essential that students are guided to reflect on their expertise over a longer timespan than a sprint that culminates in graduation and becoming employed.

Comprehensive integration and inclusion as part of the support for employability

The experiences of inclusion and comprehensive integration have been brought to the core of the model alongside the tools offered by career counselling. Important first steps towards becoming integrated into Finland include the settling-in services, integration into the study community (a crucial aspect of the first year of studies) and the launch of networking. Opportunities to meet alumni must also be provided over the course of the studies. In addition to networking, this illustrates the various career paths as well as, more broadly, finding one's own place in Finland. Collecting feedback per target group is also important in terms of targeting services appropriately regarding both studies and acculturation. Moreover, social networking and becoming active in leisure

time activities should be taken into consideration when developing the support. The further their studies progress, the more students should be encouraged to become active in organising activities, as part of the student union, for example. This strengthens their experience of agency. (See, for example, Antikainen 2020; Suomalainen et al. 2019, 37–38.)

Some measures included in the model have been piloted during the project, although the COVID-19 pandemic hit piloting in this area particularly hard.

- **Services for arrival in and integration into Finland were developed.** The project developed websites and approval materials and produced a welcome video to support the students' connection to Finland when the studies had to be started online due to the travel restrictions. A Welcome to Finland orientation was developed to cater to the needs of international students. In addition to practical arrangements, the orientation also covered the themes of employability, networking, and language learning. Due to the exceptional situation caused by the pandemic, the orientation was split into several smaller online events.
- **An online package** was compiled with tips and links on social networking, settling in Finland as well as finding hobbies and other leisure time activities.
- **Tutoring and mentoring concepts**, including the peer mentoring concept that links to working life, will be developed in co-operation with the student union as the project progresses. This will promote the networking of different classes with each other and help continue to build a diverse support network after the beginning of the studies as well. Encounters between local and international students who are in different stages of their studies are essential from the perspective of building a sense of community and networking.

Central aspects of career counselling from the perspective of employability include:

Promoting networking from the viewpoint of employability, career planning and, more broadly, integration into Finland

Low-threshold, regular and diverse opportunities incorporated in the studies to familiarise oneself with the job market and employers in one's field

Tools for identifying, verbalising and developing one's competence in a successful manner, while taking into consideration the constant changes taking place in the labour market and the current and future competence needs

Taking into consideration the Finnish work environment and potential career paths in a diverse manner

CONCLUSION

International degree students offer an enormous potential for Finnish working life. In Finland, there are already more than 20,000 international degree students, and the number is growing (Ministry of Education and Culture 2020, 20). Students are attracted to Finland by the country's reputation as a provider of high-quality education, a good daily life as well as a functioning and competent society. For up to half of them, the desire to work in Finland is the most important motive to apply for studies at our educational institutions (Saari et al. 2020, 91–92). Despite the students wanting to stay, employability and integration into Finland create obstacles to them staying here after graduation.

Resolving this conflict requires career counselling and language instruction inputs and, more broadly, taking the students' specific needs into consideration. Higher education institutions and work communities alike should show support for comprehensive language learning: Are we able to see international talent as language learners? Will we allow them the opportunity to learn the language even if their communication in Finnish was slower and had more errors in the beginning? On the other hand, networks, practical co-operation opportunities with workplaces and identifying one's strengths will help build their professional competence. We should be able to increase the number of international students as well as to enable them to enjoy their time studying here and create professional networks in Finland. This requires participation and commitment on all fronts – in higher education institutions, working life, government and, more broadly, in society.

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PART V

IMPROVED SERVICE QUALITY THROUGH NETWORKS

Niina Tapanainen, Marita Häkkinen, Hanna Jokela, Heli Kamppari,
Katri Kosonen, Sonja Mitroshin, Hannele Niskanen & Seppo Piiparinen

CHARACTERISTICS OF NETWORKING AT SIMHE HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

Marika Antikainen, Teemu Haapalehto, Tanja Malo & Elina Nurmi
**HELSINKI METROPOLITAN AREA SUPPORTS EMPLOYABILITY IN
MULTI-ACTOR CO-OPERATION**

Lotta Björn & Emilia Deseille
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Markku Lahtinen & Satu Salonen
**TOOLS FOR BUILDING CONNECTIONS AND NETWORKS BETWEEN
INTERNATIONAL TALENT AND EMPLOYERS**

Niina Tapanainen, Marita Häkkinen, Hanna Jokela, Heli Kamppari, Katri Kosonen, Sonja Mitroshin, Hannele Niskanen & Seppo Piiparinen

CHARACTERISTICS OF NETWORKING AT SIMHE HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

A networked way of working and a broad co-creation have a key role in planning, developing, and implementing various services. This is also the case in the operations of the SIMHE higher education institutions (Supporting Immigrants in Higher Education in Finland). In the spring of 2016, Metropolia University of Applied Sciences, and the University of Jyväskylä launched a pilot in the identification of the competence of highly educated immigrants and immigrants eligible for higher education living in Finland. The pilot also aimed to establish operating models and guidance and counselling that directs such immigrants to suitable educational and career paths. Both higher education institutions began building a variety of networks and co-operation models with different actors both regionally and nationally, as well as internationally. (Ministry of Education and Culture 2016; Ministry of Education and Culture 2017, 13.)

Co-operation has also been tight from the outset between the two higher education institutions in the design of the guidance and counselling services concept, although regional differences influenced the method of building the services, for example. The culmination of the first year of operation in terms of networking was the seminar organised by the University of Jyväskylä SIMHE services in December 2016. The seminar was an excellent example of the importance of building various kinds of networks when planning and developing services for highly educated immigrants. (See Käyhkö et al. 2017.)

In 2017, the group of SIMHE member institutions was expanded with the University of Helsinki, Karelia University of Applied Sciences, Oulu University of Applied Sciences, as well as the University of Turku for the 2017–2020 strategy period. The new member institutions were able to apply the practices and services modelled during the pilot year, but they still have the freedom to implement the operations based on their own requirements and the regional needs. In 2020, the number of SIMHE member institutions continued to grow (Finnish National

Agency for Education 2020). The number of guidance and counselling personnel varied (Autero 2018, 9) and continues to vary in the SIMHE member institutions: SIMHE guidance is usually provided by 1 to 3 persons either part-time as part of their other duties or on a full-time basis.

SIMHE COUNSELLOR NETWORK SHARES INFORMATION AND EXPERTISE

The integration of immigrants requires a high volume of multidisciplinary information and extensive network co-operation (Stenberg 2018), which indicates that the network of SIMHE counsellors launched in the autumn of 2017 is needed. The meetings are organised in accordance with an official meeting protocol, but a key aspect of the meetings is interaction. Each higher education institution shares their latest news and information about various projects, and guidance-related themes are also discussed in the meetings on a general level. The chairperson and secretary roles rotate in the network meetings, which is why a meeting memo is always prepared and sent to all the members of the SIMHE guidance and counselling network as well as to the steering group of Supporting Immigrants in Higher Education in Finland (Ministry of Education and Culture 2016, 13). This has been known as the co-operation network since the spring of 2020. In addition to the SIMHE member institutions, the co-operation network also includes the Finnish National Agency for Education, the Ministry of Education and Culture, the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment, University of Applied Sciences Students in Finland – SAMOK, the National Union of University Students in Finland, and the Rectors' Conference of Finnish Universities of Applied Sciences Arene.

The national co-operation partners, such as the Finnish National Agency for Education, the National Supervisory Authority for Welfare and Health, the Finnish Red Cross, the co-ordination of the reception centres, as well as AKAVA, in particular, of the labour market organisations, were important with regard to networking during the year the SIMHE operations were launched: they helped disseminate and provide information about the guidance and counselling services for immigrants and refugees quickly to where the need for this information was considerable, such as the reception centres. Co-operation has continued with some of the national stakeholders as the SIMHE operations have developed. The MAAMOT project coordinated by HY+ also applied the expertise of seasoned SIMHE counsellors as the content was being produced by Metropolia and the University of Jyväskylä (see HY+ n.d.).

Continuous interaction with the national stakeholders is important in SIMHE guidance and counselling and its development. This ensures that essential information related to the services is forwarded through the counsellors to clients and, on the other hand, that the needs of the clients are communicated to the national actors.

CLIENTS' NEEDS GUIDE THE DEVELOPMENT OF SIMHE-METROPOLIA'S SERVICES

Regional networking has played a central role in the development of the services at SIMHE-Metropolia. Most of our clients live in the Uusimaa region which is also where we are most active. It has been essential in the development of the services to identify the networks with which the target groups of the services are linked and the networks which promote the quality of the service from the client's perspective.

In addition to individual and group guidance and counselling, SIMHE-Metropolia has been offering Guidance Generalia lectures since the start of the operation in 2016. Among others, teachers of the integration training in the Helsinki metropolitan area have informed their students of these lectures and occasionally also attended lectures with their students. Service development and project co-operation has been tight with the higher education institutions in the Helsinki metropolitan area and, more broadly, in Finland as a whole, as well as with the cities of Helsinki, Espoo and Vantaa. Other partners in the services also include the Uusimaa Employment and Economic Development services, the centres of expertise and Ohjaamo services in the Helsinki metropolitan area, International House Helsinki, and Helsinki Marketing. (SIMHE-Metropolia 2020.)

Co-operation with employer organisations is necessary when supporting paths to employability. Such co-operation has been pursued with the Helsinki Region Chamber of Commerce, Helsinki Business Hub, trade unions and other working life organisations, as well as directly with employers. In recent years, we have organised recruitment events, webinars, and other kind of sparring for international talent together with enterprises of different sizes and with recruitment companies for both SIMHE-Metropolia's clients and students of Metropolia University of Applied Sciences. Students have had the opportunity to visit companies and participate in recruitment processes in the projects. In addition, we have also worked together with NewCo Helsinki's Business Advisory and Startup services, among others, regarding entrepreneurship. (See also Björn & Deseille in this volume.)

Internal influencing and co-operation are also important aspects of SIMHE-Metropolia's operations. In terms of the number of students, Metropolia is Finland's largest university of applied sciences, which means that extensive development activities, such as SIMHE, require diverse internal networking. Our objective has been to instill good service models and best practices in our established operations. To achieve this, co-operation with areas of expertise, degree programmes and various service units is of utmost importance. For example, Metropolia has been developing preparatory programmes for various fields of education since 2010, most recently in the Getting Ready project in a network of nine higher education institutions (see Stenberg in this volume). We have also regularly provided some of our clients with services for the identification of prior learning with business administration and technology specialists. We also co-operate with the student union and student organisations.

SIMHE-Metropolia's registered clients receive a newsletter from us at least once a month. It includes information on events offered by various actors in the Helsinki metropolitan area. These events are often related to study or career opportunities. Our co-operation has also extended to several associations operating in the Helsinki metropolitan area and included participation in recruitment events. In addition, we have received invitations to speak at several national and international events, where we have presented our operations and met with potential clients and stakeholders.

KARELIA UNIVERSITY OF APPLIED SCIENCES ACTIVE IN REGIONAL CO-OPERATION WITH HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

The operations of SIMHE-Karelia were launched at the Karelia UAS in the beginning of 2017. This also marked the beginning of networking with actors and stakeholders in Eastern Finland. SIMHE-Karelia's operations were new, which is why in the first year of operations, the most important task was to secure the visibility of the operations. Networking with other actors working with immigrants is the prerequisite of the operations.

In Joensuu, SIMHE-Karelia's most important partners include, among others, the North Karelia Employment and Economic Development Office, the employment services of the City of Joensuu, North Karelian Society for Social Security and the JoMoni association for multiculturalism in Joensuu. The guidance service of SIMHE-Karelia

included weekly pop-up guidance and counselling in the community space of North Karelian Society for Social Security. Since September 2019, SIMHE-Karelia's guidance service has also been providing weekly guidance and counselling on the premises of the Luotsi project run by the City of Joensuu employment services. Corresponding co-operation is also under way with the employment services of Joensuu's adjacent municipalities of Liperi, Polvijärvi, Kontiolahti and Outokumpu. SIMHE-Karelia has also regularly reached out to integration training programmes to talk about higher education opportunities and guidance support. Co-operation with these actors has been close and improved the accessibility of the guidance and counselling service.

From the start, SIMHE-Karelia's network co-operation has been characterised by its outreach to entire Eastern Finland; in other words, the services are available outside of Northern Karelia if required. During our first year of operation, we visited nearly all actors (the municipalities, associations, and organisations in Savonlinna, Mikkeli, Lappeenranta, Kuopio and Joensuu) involved in immigrant work in Eastern Finland to initiate co-operation. We also met with the representatives of all higher education institutions (University of Eastern Finland, LUT, XAMK, current LAB UAS, Savonia UAS). A contact person was designated in each higher education institution for matters concerning clients in need of guidance and counselling. An example of our outreach beyond the Northern Karelia region is our regular provision of guidance and counselling to clients in need of guidance in the Lappeenranta immigrant services. We have also provided guidance and counselling at Kuopio Settlementti Puijola and to students participating in integration training in Savonlinna and Mikkeli. Guidance and counselling are also provided via remote connections. We have also provided expert assistance to actors in different parts of Eastern Finland in matters concerning highly educated immigrant clients.

Co-operation has expanded to cover immigration-related development work in the region as well. SIMHE-Karelia's operations have been developed further through various projects with co-operation partners. A SIMHE-Karelia representative is also a member of the committee for immigrant matters in the Northern Karelia Centre for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment. We are also active participants in the Move network of third sector actors.

NETWORKING OVER VAST DISTANCES AT OULU UNIVERSITY OF APPLIED SCIENCES

The first steps in matters related to higher education for immigrants were taken in the Oulu University of Applied Sciences (Oamk) in the autumn of 2016 with the launch of the ESF-funded SIIMA project to integrate immigrants into university of applied sciences and university level studies. The experts' enthusiasm and drive for development provided an excellent foundation for breaking new ground. Since the spring of 2017, development work in higher education for immigrants has been carried out under the umbrella of SIMHE-Oamk. To support this work, a SIMHE team was established at Oamk, consisting of teachers of immigrants and project specialists in the subject area. The goal is to disseminate information on topical issues concerning immigration and to create a harmonised policy for regional immigration work.

For the measures to promote higher education and employability among immigrants to succeed long-term, controlled, and organised implementation as well as extensive networking between various educational organisations and stakeholders are needed. The work highlights the importance of regional network co-operation, one of the stronger benefits in the Oulu region. SIMHE-Oamk regularly keeps in touch with various actors, such as higher education institutions and upper secondary education organisations, the Employment and Economic Development Office and the City of Oulu. In addition, a representative of SIMHE-Oamk has been appointed to the committee of immigration matters in the Northern Ostrobothnia Centre for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment. Some forms of co-operation have become established practices, such as the briefings provided for integration training or the Welcome to Oulu event. This event is organised for new immigrants by the City of Oulu. The important forms of co-operation also include contacting people working for various projects, project seminars and other meetings to share topical information and to network with various immigration work experts. A good example of such co-operation is the Majakka project in the Oulu South Region, which reached out to us in a matter concerning the guidance and counselling need of a client interested in higher education. The shared objective – providing further guidance to a highly educated immigrant – put in motion a broader form of co-operation, which has been under way for a few years now.

In recent years, SIMHE-Oamk has reached out to the functions of Oulu and the adjacent municipalities in which highly educated immigrants or immigrants interested in higher education can be encountered.

This has resulted in regular requests to talk about the further education and guidance and counselling opportunities available to highly educated immigrants. The vast geographical area of Northern Finland is a factor that should be taken into consideration in network co-operation and in the establishment of the operations. For example, SIMHE-Oamk's southernmost guidance participants have come from Ylivieska, which is a 1.5-hour drive from Oulu. The northernmost guidance participant lived in Ivalo, 500 kilometres from Oulu. With such long distances, remote guidance is deployed. However, the nature of the guidance discussion and the preparation of further plans depends on the availability of the required services in the home municipality of the individual being served.

UNIVERSITY OF JYVÄSKYLÄ'S SIMHE NETWORK FOCUSES ON CROSS-SECTOR CO-OPERATION

Right from the beginning of the SIMHE operations in April 2016, the services at the University of Jyväskylä focused on guidance and counselling, identification of prior learning, networking with stakeholders nationally and regionally, as well as the mapping of research activities concerning highly educated immigrants. Networking with the local authorities, such as the Employment and Economic Development Office, Centre for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment, the City's integration services, as well as other higher education institutions and educational institutions, and with various project-funded stakeholders, including immigration projects, has been an important cornerstone for the SIMHE operations at the University of Jyväskylä. Local and regional stakeholders have served as channels for reaching the target group in the region and helped launch co-operation measures, such as group guidance and education planning in co-operation with the INTEGRA project starting in the autumn of 2017 (see Lehtonen in this volume).

With the expansion of the SIMHE network since 2017, the tasks of the University of Jyväskylä have focused on regional co-operation in addition to the national guidance and counselling work. Co-operation has been carried out with the Employment and Economic Development Office among those clients who are seeking to study at a higher education institution or wish to have their own academic profession recognised. Best practices in education planning were also shared in the UOMA project of universities of applied sciences (HAMK n.d.). In 2020, a joint pilot was launched with the City of Jyväskylä employment

services that focuses on degree students who need support for integration and employability. This work also demonstrates the application of expertise developed in the SIMHE operations to an expanding target group; both degree students and graduates require tailored support measures to be able to start and continue their career paths and to stay in Finland.

In addition to the national and regional levels, the University of Jyväskylä SIMHE operations have been participating in the activities of the European higher education arena and co-operation projects since 2016. The focus of these activities has often been on matters concerning the higher education of refugees, such as in the inHERE project coordinated by the European University Association and the GREET project funded by the Horizon 2020 programme. The networking carried out during the projects, the conference presentations and the participation in publications produced in the projects ensure that the University of Jyväskylä SIMHE operations are also visible in Europe and internationally and support the continuation of co-operation amid the changing situation concerning immigration and refugeeism.

INTERNAL NETWORKING IS KEY AT THE UNIVERSITY OF HELSINKI

The SIMHE operations at the University of Helsinki began in the spring of 2017 through familiarisation with the public services in the Helsinki metropolitan area. These were particularly essential to SIMHE's clients. Our goal was to find the places where immigrants could seek guidance concerning their options and which could direct them to SIMHE guidance and counselling. Valuable contacts were also established with colleagues engaged in the SIMHE operations at other higher education institutions.

Networking within our own extensive organisation has traditionally been important at the University of Helsinki. An internal SIMHE network was established within the University of Helsinki with personnel from both administration and teaching staff at the beginning of the operations. The network also included the University of Helsinki Open University and the University of Helsinki Centre for Continuing Education HY+.

Networking also expanded to Europe via participation in the Staff Training weeks and conferences. The networking events were aimed at learning from the good experiences of higher education institutions in other countries in terms of the integration of immigrants into the high-

er education system and at finding ways to apply these experiences in our country. Unfortunately, these events often focused solely on refugees and the special needs of people who had immigrated for other reasons were overlooked.

Several projects tangential to SIMHE have also been launched at the University of Helsinki. All of them highlight co-operation with parties who pursue promoting the employability of immigrants in jobs matching their competence and their strong integration into society.

UNIVERSITY OF TURKU APPLIES THE REGION'S EXISTING BEST PRACTICES OF GUIDANCE AND COUNSELLING IN ITS SIMHE NETWORKING OPERATIONS

The SIMHE operations launched at the University of Turku in 2017 are based on the earlier guidance and counselling work and networking carried out for nearly a decade by the Opin Ovi education guidance and career counselling service at the Employment and Economic Development Office. The Opin Ovi service desk is open to anyone in need of study and career counselling. The services are provided by both the Employment and Economic Development Office personnel and study counsellors from educational institutions (Southwest Finland Employment and Economic Development Office n.d.).

Opin Ovi and its proven practices were incorporated in the planning of the SIMHE services in Turku right from the beginning. An existing network and its guidance competence should not be left untapped! The Opin Ovi approaches of personalisation of studies, individualised study paths and a client-oriented service model have offered a functioning concept for work with immigrants as well. From the client's perspective, the benefit provided by the network is the quick access to guidance and counselling and education that is relevant in their individual situation. The main thing is that the person contacts one of the services which is then able to guide him/her forward.

Also, essential in networking is having contacts within the university with the study counsellors of different faculties, the teaching staff and project personnel who encounter immigrant students in their work. SIMHE operations received a considerable boost from the volunteering work for asylum seekers and new residents of Turku. This work was carried out by higher education institutions in Turku. The support of this network of university teachers and researchers is still accessible to SIMHE counsellors.

In Turku, the SIMHE operation is supported by the KOROKE project, launched in the spring of 2019. The project is funded by the Ministry of Education and Culture and it offers job search training, Finnish language courses and individual guidance and counselling (University of Turku 2020). A significant partner in the implementation of the project's education and career counselling services is the Maahanmuuttajien Osaamiskeskus centre for immigrants, located in the centre of Turku.

It has been great to see that the Opin Ovi network has worked fine with SIMHE, too. The KOROKE project has helped expand the network further. A new form of activity is co-operation with the integration networks of the Centres for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment of Southwest Finland and Satakunta. In the spring of 2020, a counsellor from the project provided actors in the Pori and Loimaa regions with training on the guidance and counselling of highly educated immigrants. For instance, the guidance focused on the recognition of prior degrees and on qualification opportunities.

THE POWER OF THE SIMHE NETWORK

The SIMHE member institutions have found well-functioning models in network co-operation for the integration of highly educated immigrants who live in Finland and for supporting their education and career paths. Examples of such models are also included in this publication (see, among others, Lemettinen, Kukkohovi, Saaristo & Autero; Stenberg et al. in this volume). In order to maintain and benefit from the networks and best practices built over the course of the years, the operations must have permanent and secure funding. This continuity reduces personnel turnover and ensures that tacit knowledge gets passed on to new counsellors. The SIMHE operations and the networks created through them are, hopefully, becoming part of the permanent operations of all higher education institutions.

The future looks cautiously promising: although in an ideal situation the funding for the operations would already be in place, at least the projects related to the theme have their funding. In the spring of 2019, the Ministry of Education and Culture granted discretionary subsidies in the amount of approximately EUR 2.5 million to eight higher education institutions for the organisation of language education and guidance and counselling for highly educated immigrants and immigrants who are seeking higher education and for the development of counselling services (five of these projects are described in Jokela 2020).

In June 2020, the Ministry of Education and Culture allocated nearly EUR 31 million for continuous learning. The recipients of this funding also included several immigrant-related projects (Ministry of Education and Culture 2020), such as the establishment of the centre of expertise service concept that promotes the employability of highly educated immigrants (Metropolia UAS 2020).

In order to safeguard its population structure and competitiveness, Finland needs international talent. The competence and expertise provided by the talent will help us develop and renew Finnish enterprises and organisations (MEAE n.d). This will make the SIMHE operations particularly important.

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HELSINKI METROPOLITAN AREA SUPPORTS EMPLOYABILITY IN MULTI-ACTOR CO-OPERATION

The integration, inclusion and employability of international talent became a part of social discourse in the 2010s due to Finland's labour shortage. Employer organisations, various government actors, cities and municipalities, higher education institutions, associations, and organisations as well as the talent itself have identified the problem areas. Measures to promote employability are being actively developed. All the parties are intent and have set ambitious objectives. Nevertheless, the service path and engagement in working life for an international talent is a complex process consisting of several phases. The various processes require attention to not only the essential factor of employability but also, more broadly, to other aspects of integration, such as adjustment on the levels of individuals and families, well-being, and the experience of inclusion in Finnish society (Saukkonen 2020, 9–10; Kazi et al. 2019, 6). This challenges various actors to engage in closer co-operation.

The cross-administrative Talent Boost programme aims to find solutions to these challenges. The programme was launched in 2017, with the cross-cutting objectives in the actor network including attracting international talents, facilitating their settling-in and integration as well as tapping into their competence. The Talent Boost programme provides a framework for the tight network that operates as an ecosystem and guides the actors in a coordinated manner towards the shared objectives. Thus, the programme calls for seamless and long-term co-operation between the government, cities, educational institutions, enterprises, and other actors. The programme provides a clear framework for developing our operations: the employability of international talent and, subsequently, the well-being and innovativeness of Finland are promoted in close interaction – otherwise, we will not be able to reach our objectives. (MEAE 2020, see also Lindeman & Piironen in this volume.)

Naturally, a smooth and client-driven service path is also meaningful for the international talent themselves, regardless of whether they

are an international degree student or a talent who already has a degree. Finland is known for its functioning, agile and equal society. This is what the country's brand has also been built on (see, for example, Alasoini et al. 2016). A successful experience in the immigration, settling-in and employability processes is of utmost importance not only for delivering on the country brand but also for building a positive and long-term interactive relationship between talents and the local communities and actors. On the other hand, becoming marginalised regarding various services and processes may generate obstacles to employability (Könönen & Himanen 2019). For example, for international degree students living in the Helsinki metropolitan area, factors contributing to a good and functioning daily life constitute a powerful retaining factor. On the other hand, obstacles to staying in Finland include employability issues and a lack of employability-related co-operation and coordination between higher education institutions, employers, and legislation, among others (Suomalainen et al. 2019, 31–39). The service experience is also challenged by the diversity of the needs of the target group and the service promises of the actor network (see, for example, Kanniainen & Nylund 2019).

EMPLOYABILITY OF INTERNATIONAL TALENT: CITIES AND HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS PROMOTING CO-OPERATION

Increasing labour immigration and supporting the settling-in and employability of international talent requires co-operation that transcends organisational and sector boundaries. Cities aim to actively promote this co-operation and the implementation of the Talent Boost programme.

Helsinki is rapidly becoming more international. Immigration is forming a solid basis for the city's vitality and population growth. According to the Helsinki City Strategy 2017–2021 (City of Helsinki 2019), deliberate measures to internationalise the city are required to increase Helsinki's appeal. Labour immigration and its share of total immigration will be increased, and measures will be taken to make the competence of immigrants available to the market as effectively as possible.

The objective set in the Espoo City Strategy 2017–2021, or the Espoo Story (City of Espoo 2017), is to help skilled people and enterprises to establish themselves in the city. Espoo envisions itself as a nationally and internationally attractive bilingual city with services also accessible in English. Key actors in the city's international innovation en-

vironment include Aalto University and VTT Technical Research Centre of Finland. In accordance with the integration programme approved by the city council, the city will promote the access of immigrants to positions matching their competence in the labour market. This is important in terms of not only the equality and non-discrimination of the labour market but also of not wasting competence. When it comes to foreign degree students graduating from Finnish educational institutions and higher education institutions, the return on the investment Finland makes in their education is also important.

Promoting the employability of international talent as part of the Talent Boost network is also strategically directed in the higher education institutions and closely linked to their education mission. Building a sustainable society, internationalisation, employability, and networked co-operation are cross-cutting objectives in the higher education and research vision 2030 (Ministry of Education and Culture 2017) and in the Government Programme of Prime Minister Sanna Marin's Government (Finnish Government 2019). These steer the operations of higher education institutions. For example, international degree programmes and RDI activities can have considerable impacts on the diversity of the Finnish labour force and innovation activities. These objectives are visibly incorporated in the higher education institutions' own strategies. For example, the 2021–2030 strategy of Metropolia University of Applied Sciences (Metropolia 2020b) aims to make a stronger impact for the benefit of society, by putting people first. Measures to achieve this include boldly renewing competence and building a sustainable future responsibly, openly and in broad co-operation, across borders. Moreover, as a SIMHE higher education institution Metropolia also has a special responsibility for guiding highly educated immigrants to appropriate education and career paths (Finnish National Agency for Education 2020).

EXPERIENCE GAINED IN MULTI-ACTOR CO-OPERATION IMPROVE SERVICE AND GENERATE NEW SERVICE CONCEPTS

Co-operation to promote the employability and integration of international talent has been carried out for many years. The Talent Boost programme has further clarified the objectives of the operations. Shared projects and service pilots have helped us develop new forms of co-operation, improve the flow of information, and learn more about the services provided by different actors (see, for example Stenberg; Ezeonodo et al.; Johansson et al.; Lemettinen, Jäppinen, Pitkäpaasi, Pääskylvuori,

Saarikko & Säteri in this volume). However, the fragmented nature of the field of actors and the incidental and project-driven co-operation continue to pose challenges (see, for example, Kanniainen & Nylund 2019). For the service to be better and employability more efficient, project-driven activities must be transformed towards more permanent co-operation structures and genuinely shared solutions. By sharing competence, we can not only bring down obstacles to employability but also build innovative service concepts.

New shared co-operation models have already been generated based on the multi-actor co-operation in the Helsinki metropolitan area. In 2017, the International House Helsinki (IHH) service was launched to provide, under the same roof, most of the initial guidance and official services that immigrants need. In addition, IHH provides guidance to companies and employers in matters related to foreign labour and recruiting it. The co-operation participants are the cities of Helsinki, Espoo, and Vantaa, the Digital and Population Data Services Agency (formerly Southern Finland Registry Office), the Tax Administration, the Social Insurance Institution Kela, the Finnish Immigration Service, the Uusimaa Employment and Economic Development Office, the Finnish Centre for Pensions, Helsinki Region Chamber of Commerce, and the Central Organisation of Finnish Trade Unions SAK. In addition, a programme aimed at the spouses of international talents was launched jointly by the cities of the Helsinki metropolitan area, the Employment and Economic Development Office and area companies. The objective is to promote the integration and settling-in of the spouses and families of the international talents who have moved to the Helsinki metropolitan area. The programme supports the spouses and other family members in settling in their new hometown and offers concrete assistance and sparring in finding a job or a place of study (the first one in particular). The programme for the spouses is part of the Talent Boost programme funded by the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment.

Multi-actor co-operation in service development improves client services and customer experience and increases the cost-effectiveness of the activities. In service models such as International House Helsinki, the services provided by different organisations supplement each other and overlapping activities can be eliminated through better co-ordination and the co-creation of services.

CENTRE OF EXPERTISE FOR HIGHLY EDUCATED IMMIGRANTS TO DEEPEN REGIONAL CO-OPERATION

In early 2020, the cities of the Helsinki metropolitan area and Metropolia started planning centre of expertise activities for highly educated, unemployed immigrants to support them in accessing supplementary education provided by higher education institutions that would be relevant in terms of their employability (Metropolia 2020a). The objective is to improve highly educated immigrants' opportunities to find jobs that match their education and prevent wasting their competence.

The centre of expertise activities for this target group are scheduled to begin at the beginning of 2021. Concurrently, Helsinki, Espoo, Vantaa and Kerava will launch the municipal employment trials, in which the responsibility for arranging services for the majority of the unemployed, including foreign-language unemployed persons, will be transferred from the Employment and Economic Development Office to the respective participating municipalities. This will make it possible to develop new, client-driven services that enable the high client volumes in the municipal employment trial benefit from the services built in the SIMHE development work. At the end of 2019, before the unemployment peak caused by the coronavirus pandemic, the number of the highly educated foreign-language unemployed in the cities of the Helsinki metropolitan area was approximately 7,800, according to the statistics obtained from the Uusimaa Centre for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment on 10 February 2020.

In recent years, in addition to the SIMHE development work, the planning of the centre of expertise activities has drawn inspiration from the centre of expertise services established in vocational education and training. This aims to provide immigrants with a full package of services that support employability, including vocational education and training, stronger basic skills, language instruction, job search support, and better workplace connections. In spring 2020, the Ministry of Education and Culture granted discretionary subsidies for developing continuous learning and competence. The funding supports the efforts of Metropolia and the cities to develop client-driven centre of expertise activities for highly educated immigrants. At the same time, the activities also improve the opportunities of the region's higher education institutions to provide the highly educated immigrant clients of the municipal employment trials with relevant short-term training that supplements their competence. The guidance provided in the centre of expertise service aims to ensure that the education offering, and the needs of unemployed immigrants are aligned in a way that serves employability.

SHARED SERVICE MODELS SUPPORTING THE EMPLOYABILITY OF INTERNATIONAL DEGREE STUDENTS

The employability challenges of international degree students in the Helsinki metropolitan area have been addressed in close co-operation as part of the International Talents Accelerating Growth project since the autumn of 2019. The objective is to create more extensive and stronger networks between business life, higher education institutions, cities, and international talents in the Helsinki metropolitan area. The project facilitates the engagement in the labour market of the area's existing international degree students by increasing their workplace contacts and work placement periods. In addition, the project provides a compilation of the international competence offered by the higher education institutions in the Helsinki metropolitan area and seeks to establish a sustainable operating model for co-operation between higher education institutions and companies. It also actively supports the internationalisation of companies. In addition to promoting the employability of international degree students, the project aims to attract foreign experts specifically for sectors that suffer from shortage of labour in the Helsinki metropolitan area and to streamline the settling-in of foreign employees and their family members in the area, as well as to support their integration into Finnish society.

The project involves an extensive network of actors. The City of Helsinki is responsible for the project implementation. The other project participants are the City of Vantaa, the City of Espoo, the Helsinki Region Chamber of Commerce, Helsinki Marketing, and Helsinki Business Hub. The participating higher education institutions are Aalto University, Hanken School of Economics, the University of Helsinki, Haaga-Helia University of Applied Sciences, Laurea University of Applied Sciences and Metropolia University of Applied Sciences.

The project has generated genuine and extensive co-operation as well as new service models in the Helsinki metropolitan area. The activities carried out during the operating period include a mentoring programme and networking events for international talents (see Lahtinen & Salonen in this volume) and building models for employer co-operation between the higher education institutions, cities, and Helsinki Region Chamber of Commerce (see Björn & Deseille in this volume). In addition, two new service concepts have been developed and piloted. The International Talent programme, developed by Hanken School of Economics to integrate company co-operation and mentoring in the studies, has been deployed at the universities. In the operating model, an

international Master's level student is paired up with a mentor company for co-operation that continues for a minimum of one semester and includes individual or group mentoring and joint projects, for example. The universities have jointly developed and assessed the programme and its various applications, and its results and best practices are also being shared nationwide.

Another new model of co-operation created in the Helsinki metropolitan area is the JobTeaser service, which is a talent pool and career portal for international degree students. JobTeaser is a service selected jointly by the project actors. It provides a shared portal for employers interested in employing international talent and for international degree students. The service addresses the companies' need for closer co-operation with higher education institutions and for more efficient results in their competence profile searches. The shared portal offers a streamlined route for both searching for jobs and offering them, work placement opportunities, project and thesis positions as well as talent profiles. This makes it possible to establish extensive and effective workplace co-operation throughout the Helsinki metropolitan area that serves the needs of students, employers, and higher education institutions alike.

The project operations have also provided considerable added value in the local ecosystem. In particular, the project has enabled closer co-operation between higher education institutions and cities among international degree students. The cities' business coordinators and the representatives of the higher education institutions genuinely interact with each other, identify interesting synergy opportunities, organise joint events and extensively apply each other's competence, tools, and networks. Similarly, communication has become more active, benchmarking has increased, and new co-operation models have been generated between the higher education institutions. Competence has been shared, among others, through the best practices of supporting the employability of international degree students, shared and jointly organised workshops and events, as well as through models of employer co-operation. Moreover, the participating Haaga-Helia, Laurea and Metropolia Universities of Applied Sciences have jointly planned a service path that will cover the students' entire degree to support employability.

TOWARDS SHARED SOLUTIONS AND STREAMLINED SERVICE PATHS

The benefits offered by multi-actor co-operation are considerable: it improves the service experience, quality of service, flow of information and efficiency of the operations. The Finnish society cannot afford to not reap the benefits of the extensive co-operation. We must pursue more in-depth and integrated service operations while taking into consideration the varied needs of our residents and our current and future professional talent. Seamless service packages built together and high-quality service experiences will enable us to attract an increasing number of talent to Finland and to support their settling-in, integration and employability in our country. This will help us achieve a more diverse and more innovative society, in which well-being stems from the competence of all of us.

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PRACTICAL OBSERVATIONS OF EMPLOYER CO-OPERATION OF NETWORKS

In a globally networked world, the ability to create and use functioning networks is a decisive factor in terms of actors' competitiveness and success. Networks enable higher education institutions, municipalities, companies, and research institutions to obtain the competence they need, benefit from mutual synergy and create new innovations. This will help them thrive in an operating environment where competition takes place increasingly between entire networks, instead of individual actors. Actors who are a part of a well-functioning network are the ones who can best handle situations where the environment suddenly changes and where learning requires quick action. (Sitra 2020; Prime Minister's Office 2019.) Networks are also the most effective way to address the changing needs of the labour market.

The emigration of highly educated talent and the difficulties faced by companies in finding skilled employees demonstrate current challenges that could be addressed by workplace co-operation through networks. The mismatch between talent and the labour market would seem to be the single most important factor behind the shortage of skilled employees. In particular, foreign background brings considerable difficulties in employability. International degree students are a group whose competence and potential are underutilised. More than a third of them leave Finland within one year of graduation, and even those who stay find it difficult to find a job (Finnish National Agency for Education 2020a; Antikainen, Deseille & Iso-Heiniemi).

However, the shortage of talent in companies affects, to a large extent, specialist positions that require higher education. According to estimates, these positions will also generate the highest number of new jobs in the future, especially in the Uusimaa region (Laakso 2019, 39). Despite this, companies find it difficult to recruit international talent that match their needs (Ministry of Education and Culture 2019). Higher education institutions are an important recruitment channel for com-

panies, but at the same time, companies feel that they lack sufficient understanding of companies' competence needs (Jääskö et al. 2019). Therefore, more efficient networks and communication channels are needed to ensure that the needs of all parties are effectively met.

The national Talent Boost programme has taken on this challenge. The Talent Boost activities are being implemented through the national programme and a network managed by the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment. Its objective is to improve the utilisation of international competence in Finnish companies. (Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment 2020a; Lindeman & Piironen in this volume.) In the Helsinki metropolitan area, the programme is being implemented through a joint project named International Talents Accelerating Growth, launched in 2019 (Antikainen, Haapalehto, Malo & Nurmi in this volume). The project has helped to effectively organise a local network, and this has already increased co-operation between actors and provided concrete results within a short period of time. The outcomes of co-operation in the project include recruitment events, workshops, contacts with companies and communication about services related to international talent.

The next section describes in greater detail the observations made in and lessons learned on workplace co-operation. Another goal of ours is to share tips for successful workplace and company co-operation.

TIPS FOR LAUNCHING AND INTENSIFYING WORKPLACE CO-OPERATION

1. Identify the company's current situation and needs

In terms of establishing and continuing the co-operation, it is important to map out initial contacts with the company the companies' competence needs and the criteria that their operating environment sets for suitable talent. Based on this mapping, the companies can be offered concrete solutions, such as profiles of suitable international talent. For example, a report prepared by the Finnish National Agency for Education a few years ago identified primarily four types of small and medium-sized companies that are motivated to hire international talent:

1. companies targeting the export market or already operating in the international market,
2. international companies in which the talent's background makes no difference,

3. internationalising companies in Finland which, for example, want to strengthen their competence in the provision of services to their immigrant clients, and
4. companies that emphasise social responsibility while aiming, for example, to develop their personnel's language skills and cultural awareness or to strengthen their image with their clients through a brand that focuses on social responsibility (Finnish National Agency for Education 2016).

Based on our experience, this is an indicative division which has common hybrid forms.

WAYS TO IDENTIFY COMPANY'S NEEDS

- personal conversations
- occupational and business barometers
- reports by Chambers for Anticipation and Forecasting
- statistical overviews prepared by cities and higher education institutions
- web-based tools, such as the open data-based Vainu prospecting tool
- job search portals, e.g. Jobs in Finland portal by Business Finland (2020a)
- the networks of one's own organisation and those of partner organisations
- encounters taking place in events and via communication
- traditional recruitment and networking events

The most important information regarding company needs is always obtained through face-to-face conversations with a company representative. However, even before this, plenty of information and tools are available. Is it possible to familiarise oneself with them and use them in order to plan the course of action and be in contact with the companies benefitting from the services? Occupational and business barometers compiled by public organisations, reports by Chambers for Anticipation and Forecasting, as well as the statistical overviews prepared by cities

and higher education institutions offer a wealth of valuable information about the regions' businesses and the needs of companies as well as about international talent and students. Potential partners and companies and their needs can also be mapped through web-based tools, such as the open data-based Vainu prospecting tool (2020), and by following job search portals targeting international talent. One portal is the Jobs in Finland portal launched in January 2020 by Business Finland (2020a). Co-operation opportunities should also be examined through the networks of one's own organisation and those of partner organisations, as well as through encounters taking place in events and via communication. Traditional recruitment and networking events have proven to be excellent occasions for discussing employers' competence needs and for providing forms of co-operation that best meet their needs.

2. Offer networking opportunities

Companies should be supported and assisted in their initial encounters with international talent, since it seems experience is closely linked to employers' willingness and preparedness to recruit an employee with foreign background. A report by the North Savo Centre for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment (2012, 14) observed that 95% of employers who had recruited a foreign employee in the past would be willing to do so again in the future. By contrast, 40% of employers without previous experience in recruiting employees with foreign background did not consider it to be an option in the future either. A sector analysis report prepared in Vantaa (Björn 2020) also indicated that employers' ambivalence about their preparedness for international recruitment was among the main obstacles for hiring international talent.

The variety of work placement opportunities found in our networks has reinforced the impression that the sector-specific differences in terms of talent needs and job opportunities for international talent are not necessarily huge. However, the impact of previous experience in recruiting international talent may well be considerable. Therefore, it is important to facilitate the encounters between companies and international talent by setting up networking events that have a low threshold to attend. The Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment (2018) analysis of labour force recruitment methods, for example, sheds some light on the importance of networks in recruitment processes. Based on the analysis, employers' most important recruitment channels are the companies' current and previous employees as well as other networks. Correspondingly, only slightly more than a third of the respondents in

SITRA's survey (2017) had found a job by applying for a publicly advertised position.

Therefore, in order to promote employability, it is particularly important to offer employers low-threshold opportunities to get to know international talent. This can be in the form of invitations to networking events or as access to profiles of potential talent, without any financial obligations or other commitments. At the same time, the employer receives financial benefits: at its best, a skilfully built co-operation network may offer a risk-free recruitment channel for the company as the talent pool being presented to them has, as a rule, already been tailored to the company's needs. This reduces the workload for the company's HR. This type of a service model has been piloted in, for example, the SIMHE path project. In the project, companies and public sector employers have been given opportunities based on their competence needs to meet international talent who have completed a higher education degree in business administration or ICT abroad (Metropolia 2020a; Deseille & Lemettinen 2020).

3. Know and make use of the services offered

Knowing the service offering extensively is important to be able to direct the employer to services that are suitable for them. This then enables the employer to accumulate experience in working with international talent. If the company has no prior experience in co-operation with international talent, the company's needs and potential fears must be heard. By mapping them, it is possible to offer the company suitable solutions. Perhaps the company is not in the position to offer an international student a work placement or a thesis work opportunity. Nevertheless, the company might be interested in organising a visit or an innovation project for a student group e.g. in six months. Or maybe the company and its employees would like to participate in the next mentoring programme aimed at international students? For example, the Helsinki Region Chamber of Commerce annually co-ordinates an English-language EntryPoint mentoring programme. It provides a networking opportunity for international talent and other experts in different fields to share their views with each other (Lahtinen & Salonen in this volume).

In addition to the networking opportunities, language instruction provided in the workplace, organised by the employment and economic services (2020), or an opportunity to make use of Business Finland's Talent Explorer funding support (2020b) in hiring may offer an interesting and decisive benefit that prompts the company to engage in co-operation. A report published by the Centre for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment on recruiting immigrants highlights

how up to three quarters of the recruitment managers in different sectors who participated in the study find Finnish language skills a prerequisite for becoming hired in their respective companies. On the other hand, more than two out of three companies find language instruction incorporated in the work hours feasible. Thus, providing information about services that support the development of language skills could well be decisive in the recruitment of international talents. (Centre for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment 2020.)

In addition to language instruction, it is essential to be aware of other services being offered to identify and supplement prior learning. These have been developed within the SIMHE operations to promote the employability of international talent (Ministry of Education and Culture 2017). Among others, the SIMHE path and the Deploying Competence in Finland projects have offered flexible education paths for people with a higher education degree from abroad and given them a better understanding of the labour market in their respective fields in Finland (Deseille & Lemettinen 2020; Lemettinen, Kukkohovi, Saaristo & Autero in this volume). In our experience, these services have raised interest among employers, but the often-short life cycle of project funding has in many cases become an issue. Due to the funding issues, awareness of the services is often lacking. However, people working with the SIMHE operations at the SIMHE member institutions can serve as a link between employers and international talent as these people are familiar with their region's services directed at both parties (Finnish National Agency for Education 2020b).

4. Be proactive and bring services closer to the users

We have observed that awareness of the Talent Boost thematics is still lacking in companies in the Helsinki metropolitan area. Recruiting international talent continues to be a new concept for many companies, even if the company was familiar with internationality as such. Public sector services related to recruiting international talent are not well known, which is why companies do not know how to look for such services or even feel the need to do so (Björn 2020). It seems that few companies are aware of, for example, the coaching for multicultural working communities offered by the employment and economic services (2020) or Business Finland's (2020b) Talent Explorer funding support for recruiting international talent, even though these are on the more established side. Almost without exception, companies have been pleasantly surprised upon learning of the assistance that is available in the public sector for international recruitment.

A proactive approach has been key in reaching out to these companies. Engaging companies in events and bringing the information close to target groups are effective ways to reach companies and to inform them about the available services. Various low-threshold pop-up events and info days for recruiting international talent have been popular. For example, a pop-up event for recruiting international talent was piloted at the Vantaa Business Development Center Leija in the autumn of 2019 by the International House Helsinki employer counselling services (2020). In the event, companies were able to meet experts directly without making an appointment and ask questions about international recruitment. In addition to offering services like this, traditional "cold calls" are also needed. They can help reach companies that our services or communication channels have not reached yet.

5. Offer targeted and personalised services

According to our experience, employers are specifically interested in services tailored to their specific needs and service processes that are as simple as possible. Companies want to participate in events that target talent and students in their specific sectors, instead of general job fairs. In sector-specific recruitment events companies have the opportunity to meet candidates that potentially suit their needs. Companies have found this to be an interesting and worthwhile method.

Employers have also commended the personalised nature of the service, the designated contact persons, and the one-stop service for employer clients, all in the same manner as in the SIMHE model. This could provide a successful solution for organising the activities (Deseille & Lemettinen 2020). For a client recruiting a trainee, personalised service provided by a career counselling expert increases trust and the sense of convenience. It also the recruitment threshold, the more streamlined the recruitment process is. In the SIMHE process, the employer can submit their customised set of criteria for the person to be recruited. The SIMHE contact person then selects the candidates who meet these criteria. After this, the employer client is provided with a proposal of the suitable candidates and may proceed to the job interview stage with them. The process does not require the employer client to register or log in to any systems; a "turnkey" service model is applied to locate talent meeting their needs, reducing the burden on the company's HR.

The service model described above has been applied successfully in the public sector as well, such as in the trainee recruitment of the City of Vantaa. In addition, the JobTeaser system implemented in Metropolia and several other higher education institutions in the Helsinki metro-

politan area in the autumn of 2020 offers a streamlined opportunity for an employer to market, with just a few clicks, their work placement and job opportunities to the students of the higher education institution.

NEXT STEPS IN THE EVER-CLOSER NETWORK

Companies find workplace co-operation with higher education institutions very interesting and would like to increase co-operation with emerging talent in their respective sectors. Companies participating in the innovation co-operation (Metropolia 2020b) or in other joint projects have highly commended the advantages and the ideas developed by students. Companies have indicated that they would like to engage in a similar co-operation again. Workplace co-operation with educational institutions is also found to be important regarding the employer brand.

Regardless, co-operation between companies and higher education institutions is still relatively minimal and progresses slowly. According to a report by the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment (2019, 35), only 17% of small and medium-sized businesses are engaged in co-operation with higher education institutions. Often this co-operation is limited to individual activities instead of it growing into a more extensive operation between the higher education institution and the company. Thus, there is potential for increased co-operation. The report also states that companies engaged in co-operation with higher education institutions are growth-oriented, focused on networking and co-operation and aim to enter the international market more often than on average. These are the companies with which we should look to develop a more in-depth, highly functional network.

Concrete steps will be taken in the continuing work to strengthen the network and partnerships. The municipal employment trial to be launched in January 2021 and the centre of expertise promoting the employability of highly educated immigrants, to be piloted within the trial in the Helsinki metropolitan area, will offer yet another opportunity for employers interested in international talent to work in extensive co-operation with the cities, higher education institutions and public sector actors in the Helsinki metropolitan area (Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment 2020b; Metropolia 2020c).

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TOOLS FOR BUILDING CONNECTIONS AND NETWORKS BETWEEN INTERNATIONAL TALENT AND EMPLOYERS

The ageing population in Finland and the availability of competent labour force will provide a major challenge in the future. Most companies have already announced that the availability of competent labour force is one of the major obstacles to growth. Labour immigration and better engagement of international talent already living in Finland to the labour market are essential and increasingly important in terms of solving the shortage of skilled employees in Finland and the decline of the population. The situation in the Uusimaa region is more difficult than in other parts of the country, since one third of the labour force will reach retirement age by 2030 (Ennakointikamari 2019).

HELSINKI REGION CHAMBER OF COMMERCE AND INTERNATIONAL TALENT

The availability of skilled labour force and the resulting secured operating prerequisites of companies are among the most important factors in the advocacy work carried out by the chambers of commerce. In the Helsinki region, the fastest-growing population segment is people over 70, while the age group of 20-to-34-year olds is growing only slightly. People with foreign background account for 80% of the population growth. Without this source, the population growth and supply of labour force would slow down considerably. (Ennakointikamari 2019.)

The Helsinki Region Chamber of Commerce has been making long-term investments in supporting international competence and labour immigration. The internationalisation, multicultural capabilities, and the ability of companies to identify and recruit international talent have been a central aspect of member counselling, advocacy work and development projects in the Helsinki Region Chamber of Commerce.

The Chamber of Multicultural Enterprises (COME) project run by the Chamber of Commerce (1 March 2016–31 August 2018) was part of the regional Working in Finland project and focused on creating new connections between employers and highly educated immigrants living in Finland. After the COME project, the Chamber of Commerce launched the Chamber Talent Boost project (1 June 2019–30 June 2021), which aims to support companies' capabilities to recruit and identify international talent and to create stronger connections between the talent and employers.

A common theme in the projects has been the focus on companies: meeting the need for talent based on demand and highlighting the benefits provided by international talent from the perspective of both business operations and the working community.

EMPLOYERS' NEEDS AND EXPERIENCES

Measures by the Chamber of Commerce primarily aim to support the employers' capabilities and to address their needs concerning international talent. To identify these needs, the Chamber of Commerce has, since 2016, prepared five reports (4/2016, 1/2017, 7/2018, 8/2018, 12/2019) related to companies' experience and views related to international talent.

The reports indicate that in approximately half of the member companies of the Helsinki Region Chamber of Commerce, the share of personnel with foreign background is less than 5% of the entire personnel (Helsinki Region Chamber of Commerce 2018b). Companies have gained experience in working with employees with foreign background through, among other things, recruitment by their HR, temporary agency work, subcontractors, co-operation partners and project assignments.

The educational backgrounds of employees with foreign background working in companies vary and are reflected in their job duties. However, the reports show that employees with foreign background are assigned to duties that are not aligned with their education more often than their Finnish counterparts. This being the case, part of the competence potential and capacity of highly educated employees with foreign background remains untapped. Among employees with foreign background, the most common educational backgrounds are vocational education, a bachelor's degree, and a master's degree. (Helsinki Region Chamber of Commerce 2018b.)

Language and the related competence are among the major obstacles to the employability of people with foreign background. A report (2018) prepared by the Chamber of Commerce focused on the language proficiency of foreign-language employees. The responses show that low proficiency (levels A1–B1) of Finnish is sufficient for entry-level positions, such as work placement, traineeship, and on-the-job learning. By contrast, in expert, supervisory and management positions, the language proficiency requirements are higher, and in executive management, near-native language skills are required. (Helsinki Region Chamber of Commerce 2018a.)

| RECRUITMENT CHALLENGES | POSITIVE IMPACTS OF RECRUITMENT |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● finding suitable employees ● bureaucracy related to residence permits and work permits ● identification of prior learning ● assessment of education and competence ● educational opportunities of the person being hired | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● strengthened language competence ● new perspectives to the operations and products ● new contacts ● increased customer satisfaction ● improved awareness of the target markets |

In addition to language proficiency, the greatest challenges that companies experience in recruiting foreign labour force include finding suitable employees, bureaucracy related to residence permits and work permits, the identification of prior learning, the assessment of education and qualifications, as well as the educational opportunities of the person being hired regarding vocational competence and language skills (Helsinki Region Chamber of Commerce 2016, 2018b).

Although employers face challenges in recruiting employees with foreign background, they also bring up experiences of the positive impacts of foreign labour force. A large share of companies reports that hiring employees with foreign background has strengthened their own language competence. Other positive impacts reported include gaining new perspectives to operations and products, creating new contacts,

increased customer satisfaction and improved awareness of the target markets. (Helsinki Region Chamber of Commerce 2017.)

STRONGER CONNECTIONS BETWEEN EMPLOYERS AND INTERNATIONAL TALENT

EntryPoint – a cross-cultural mentoring programme

Recruiting a first foreign employee is a big step for many companies and employers. The more experience the company's recruiting managers and employees have of working with people from different cultures, the more receptive the company will be towards applicants with foreign background (Korhonen 2020).

To strengthen the networks of and interaction between employers and international talent already living in Finland, the Helsinki Region Chamber of Commerce launched the co-ordination of the cross-cultural EntryPoint mentoring programme as part of the COME project in the autumn of 2016. The programme was developed based on the experiences gained in the earlier HERIEC project to better address the wishes and needs of employers.

The programme's mentors include people in supervisory and management positions with a long experience in the Finnish working life. The mentees are international talents who already live in Finland. They are primarily international students completing their degree in Finland or recent graduates of higher education institutions in the Helsinki metropolitan area. The objective of the programme is to create a reciprocal and mutually beneficial partnership between the mentor and the mentee.

The Chamber of Commerce launched its first EntryPoint mentoring programme in October 2016, and thereafter, it has organised a total of five mentoring periods by the summer of 2020. The duration of one mentoring period is 4–6 months. Each programme has consisted of groups of 16–45 mentor-mentee pairs, and the total number of participants has been approximately 300.

A 3-dimensional model in the core of mentoring

EntryPoint has been built on the model of three dimensions (the 3-Dimensional Learning Trajectory):

1. Pair Meetings: the core of the programme – one-on-one meetings between the mentor and the mentee;

2. Collective Meetings: joint meetings of all participants;
3. Thematic Group Meetings: voluntary company visits, workshops, and themed group meetings.

It is recommended that the mentoring pairs meet at least once a month throughout the mentoring period. At the beginning of the programme, each pair signs a mentoring agreement, which outlines the ground rules and objectives. It is recommended that the mentee assumes a more proactive role concerning what will be covered during mentoring. This approach aims to encourage the mentee and help them discover their strengths.

The collective meetings intended for all participants are the single largest event in the EntryPoint mentoring programme. During one mentoring period, three events are held that are directed at the entire group of participants: the kick-off, mid-term, and wrap-up. The kick-off starts the mentoring period and is an opportunity for all participants to meet each other for the first time. The mid-term takes place halfway through the period and consists of a recap of the mentoring journey up to that point and sharing of the experiences gained and lessons learned. The wrap-up is held at the end of each period as a celebration of the mentoring journey being completed. The collective meetings offer participants the opportunity to meet other participants and network with other mentors and mentees.

Company visits and workshops have mainly been designed with the mentees in mind, but they also offer an opportunity for the mentors to introduce their organisation and learn about the other mentors' organisations. The purpose of the company visits is to increase the mentees' awareness of the variety of organisations in Finland and the matters these organisations pay attention to when recruiting, for example. Company visits have also provided opportunities for the participating mentors to introduce their own organisation to and build their employer image among international talent. The activeness and interests of the participants play a major role in the organisation and topics of the workshops: the Chamber of Commerce provides the facilities for and assists in the arrangements of the workshops, but the mentoring programme participants are responsible for the content. The topics of the workshops have ranged from intercultural communication to job-seeking skills to the Finnish business culture and understanding it. In particular, the mentees are encouraged to be proactive and to organise workshops in their own areas of expertise, since the workshops provide opportunities to practice public speaking and facilitation, among other things, in a safe environment.

Successful matchmaking is key

Above all, the mentoring pairs are formed based on the wishes and criteria listed by the applicants in their applications. Special emphasis is placed on wishes that are aligned with the objectives of the mentoring programme. The participants' educational and vocational backgrounds and future goals also play a decisive role in matchmaking, but in many cases, pairs are also formed between persons with differing educational and vocational backgrounds. In addition to the cultural diversity, pairing people whose educational backgrounds and employment sectors are different also offer new dimensions to the programme.

According to feedback from participants, the EntryPoint programme has improved their intercultural communication skills and understanding and helped expand their networks. The mentors emphasise e.g. the improved management and coaching skills and the strengthened understanding between generations. The aspects highlighted by the mentees include improved self-knowledge, expanded networks and contacts with working life in Finland.

The implementation model of the EntryPoint programme is simple and can be applied in a variety of environments that are approximations of real business world deployments and aligned with the employers' philosophies. Implementing a programme like EntryPoint is relatively labour-intensive, and the organising party must have solid, well-functioning company and employer networks in place.

THE OBJECTIVE OF ENTRYPOINT MENTORING IS TO:

- create a reciprocal partnership between the mentor and the mentee
- improve the participants' professional networks
- develop the participants' cross-cultural communication and management skills
- improve the mentors' management and coaching skills
- support the job-seeking and workplace capabilities of the mentees as well as their networks with Finnish working life

For the programme to succeed, it is essential to carefully map out the needs, motivations and wishes of the mentors and their companies to ensure the best possible outcome in the planning of the programme content and, above all, in forming the mentor-mentee pairs. This is the most demanding and arduous stage of the programme but without it, achieving the desired outcomes will be difficult. Secondly, the driving force of the programme is the fact that in addition to a one-on-one mentoring relationship, the participants have the opportunity to network with the other mentors and mentees. Moreover, the programme offers employers a unique opportunity with relatively minimal investment in terms of time to learn new things and to build networks with future talent and to strengthen their own employer brand among students..

Matchmaking events

To facilitate the meetings of employers and international talent, the Chamber of Commerce has organised five matchmaking and networking morning events since 2017. The matchmaking mornings have been organised in co-operation with the higher education institutions in the Helsinki metropolitan area, and SIMHE-Metropolia has been the co-organiser in all of them.

The purpose of the events is to bring together international talent already living in Finland and companies looking for highly educated labour force and prepared to recruit talent with foreign background. The low-threshold events enable the companies to introduce their organisation and talent needs. This has effectively helped strengthen encounters between employers and professional talent. For the professionals, the events have offered an opportunity to meet recruiting companies face-to-face, pitch their own competence and receive information on the competence needs of the line of business in question.

MATCHMAKING EVENTS:

- low-threshold events for companies seeking talent and international talent to meet
- free-of-charge events targeting a specific sector
- target employers who are ready to recruit international talent
- the talent is invited to the events based on the employers' talent needs
- the participating talent has the opportunity to pitch their competence and to get to know employers

The events are free of charge to make them more appealing to as many companies and professionals as possible. The events are kicked off with the companies taking the stage to pitch their operations and describe their needs. After the company pitches, the talent can freely mingle, visit companies' booths and exchange contact information with employers.

The matchmaking events are always planned around a certain line of business or sector. Invitations to the events have been extended to relevant degree programmes in the higher education institutions, and clients of Metropolia's SIMHE services have also been invited to the events. As with the EntryPoint mentoring programme, mapping the companies' talent needs is the prerequisite of the success of the events and, subsequently, marketing can be targeted to a pool of suitable talent. Aligning the pool of talent with the companies' competence needs as closely as possible ensures that the events offer genuine opportunities for potential encounters between the employers and the professionals. Reaching the right kind of professional talent requires that the participating educational institutions profoundly know their respective student body and educational offering and that they understand how potential participants are reached in practice.

There have been 8–14 companies and approximately 100 international professionals at each matchmaking event. The events have resulted in dozens of additional measures, such as job interviews and project assignments. The feedback provided by company representatives on the events and the contacts established in the events has been excellent.

CONCLUSION

To accelerate and streamline the engagement of immigrants in the Finnish labour market, it is of utmost importance to take employers' needs into consideration. Many employers may feel out of their comfort zone when considering recruiting their first foreign employee, which emphasises the need for information and support. The measures implemented by the Chamber of Commerce, such as the EntryPoint mentoring programme and the matchmaking events, establish connections and networks between international talent and employers. At the same time, the competence and potential of international talent living in Finland is made more visible to employers.

In addition to providing mentoring and matchmaking events, the Chamber of Commerce pursues other measures to support employers' capabilities to recruit international talent. Among other things, the employer counselling service provided by International House Hel-

sinki provides concrete advice and assistance for employers in matters concerning international recruitment. The Talent Boost indicator (n.d.) designed jointly by the Helsinki Chamber of Commerce and Business Finland offers companies an opportunity to map out the preparedness of the organisation to recruit international talent.

THE CHAMBER OF COMMERCE PROMOTES ENCOUNTERS BETWEEN INTERNATIONAL TALENTS AND COMPANIES AND THEIR RECRUITMENT THROUGH:

- The EntryPoint mentoring programme
- Matchmaking events
- The employer counselling services provided by International House Helsinki
- The Successful Multicultural Company campaign and the Talent Boost indicator
- The Intercultural Toolkit website (n.d.)

Mentoring programmes and various matchmaking measures demonstrate that properly planned measures can generate well-functioning models, which help strengthen connections between companies and international talent and which subsequently make employers aware of the international competence. When designing these models, it is important to take the employers' needs into consideration and tailor the measures accordingly.

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PART VI

FUTURE OUTLOOK OF EDUCATION- BASED AND LABOUR IMMIGRATION

Laura Lindeman & Kaisu Piironen

TALENT BOOST AND SIMHE - GOING FORWARD TOGETHER

TALENT BOOST AND SIMHE – GOING FORWARD TOGETHER

In recent years, it has become clear in Finland that the immigration policy must be linked to the industrial, innovation, education, and employment policies. Without adequate immigration, the supply of labour will decline considerably, which will affect the dependency ratio, employment rate and fiscal sustainability. In addition, the immigration of talent will have a strengthening and internationalising impact on the entrepreneurial and innovation activities in Finland and support attracting investments to Finland. (Deschryvere et al., 2018.)

A key aspect of an active immigration policy is understanding that the objective of labour immigration and education-based immigration should not be to just increase the supply of labour or the number of the employed, but to harness the immigrants' competence to generate added value. To meet this objective, immigrants should be engaged in activities that generate added value; in other words, in growing and innovative business operations (Raunio 2015, 9). This, in turn, calls for a more active and open approach by the business life and employers in providing foreign talent with opportunities to join professional networks and innovation ecosystems.

The objective of Prime Minister Sanna Marin's government is to promote labour immigration. In the Government Programme, the assigned priorities of labour immigration concern sectors suffering from labour shortages, and the specialists, students and researchers who are essential for the leading and growing fields of the RDI activities.

TALENT BOOST PROGRAMME CREATING A SETTING FOR ATTRACTING AND RETAINING INTERNATIONAL TALENT THROUGH MULTI-ACTOR WORK

To great extent, matters concerning international talent are cross-administrative and require co-operation between several different actors. Since 2017, the international Talent Boost programme has been bring-

ing together different actors to strengthen the determined action to attract and retain international talent and to provide opportunities for companies, innovators and international talent to meet. Since 2019, the perspectives of students, researchers and the extensive immigration of labour force have been strengthened in the Talent Boost programme. Closer co-operation between the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment, the Ministry of Education and Culture and the ministries' agencies will improve the prerequisites of a comprehensive approach to the development of competence-based immigration, which generates growth and well-being.

The Talent Boost programme closely intertwines attracting talent and the marketing efforts targeting talent, international recruitment, immigration, settling-in, integration, and reputation management. In addition, the programme includes measures that promote encounters between international talent and companies and other employers. In a changing world, smooth collaboration in all these areas is key. For example, the efforts to attract talent and the hard work put in may be watered down by slow residence permit processes, which may then result in the recruited talent not being able to enter the country. On the other hand, if the international talent has a negative experience of Finnish society and working life, their spouses fail to find employment or the school for their children is not what the family expected, there is little that even faster permit processes can do to help. The diversity and non-discrimination of Finnish society and working life are of critical importance for Finland's attractiveness as a destination country for skilled labour force, international students, and investments, as well as for the employability of immigrants who already live here.

Attracting and employing international talent will not succeed unless employers are open to hiring the talent. According to various studies, jobseekers with foreign background experience discrimination, prejudice and even racism in working life (e.g., Ahmad 2019). The abilities and skills of the talent can be honed indefinitely without seeing results if the reason for talent with foreign background not being hired is not a lack of competence but attitudes and prejudice. Most employers who have hired immigrant employees are prepared to do so again (Kotona Suomessa 2020). Not tapping into the competence of international talent already living in Finland is an underutilisation of resources, which will also have a negative impact on the country's image.

According to reports, the lack of information is the main reason for underutilisation of international competence: the talent has not applied / known of the possibility to apply for jobs in suitable companies, and the companies are not familiar with channels to use to reach

potential candidates. (Finnish National Agency for Education 2017, 5, 10.) Thus, challenges in networking are the most difficult issues faced by highly educated international talent already living in Finland, in terms of employability. Companies are cautious about recruiting beyond their own networks. Jobs with high added value are created through interaction between actors, as differing views and ideas meet and are transformed into innovations. Therefore, a smart employer creates networks of talent with future needs in mind to ensure that the talent pool is as extensive as possible when the recruitment need arises. Interaction with talent with various backgrounds is a success factor that more and more employers should seize.

It is, thus, a matter of systemic development, in which interrelated components of the system are promoted simultaneously. From the perspective of higher education institutions, systemic refers to incorporating co-operation with companies and employers with the full study path from student recruitment to entering working life post-graduation. For the increased internationality of higher education institutions to benefit Finnish society and companies, an increasing number of foreign degree students should be attracted to remain in the Finnish labour market after graduation. The problem is not the students' unwillingness to do so: based on the International Student Barometer survey (2017), approximately half of the international students in higher education institutions plan to stay in Finland after graduation either to work or to pursue further studies (Finnish National Agency for Education 2018). The Eurostudent VII study (Saari et al. 2020, 92–93) also indicated that 50% of the international students of higher education institutions want to stay in Finland after completing their degrees. In addition, 40% of the students were still undecided about their future plans, so active and successful integration could still influence their decision-making.

International students and talent staying in Finland is important not only for our society and individual regions but also for the people themselves. The SIMHE operations offer numerous examples of how important encountering individuals in a professional setting is, especially when circumstances have forced them to keep their academic professional identity hidden for a long time. In a more general sense, it is important for highly educated individuals and internationals who have completed a degree in Finland to find employment that matches their competence, enabling them to give back to society.

¹According to information provided by Vipunen Education Statistics Finland, 47% of foreign students who graduated in 2017 still work in Finland one year after graduation. In addition, 5% of them continue studying (for another degree). In this case, employability may also mean part-time work. The statistics do not indicate what type of work the students are engaged in.

Higher education institutions play a central role in creating paths for highly educated immigrants to the academic world and working life. In this, SIMHE co-operation is key. Regional co-operation between a higher education institution, city, business life and the employment and economic administration is invaluable for all the pieces of the work to attract and retain international talent to fall into place and for the business life and RDI actors to be able to utilise the expertise provided by the talent. In the Talent Boost programme, this regional ecosystem of various actors is called Talent Hub co-operation.

WORK TO CREATE A ROADMAP OF LABOUR AND EDUCATION-BASED IMMIGRATION OUTLINES AN ACTIVE LONG-TERM IMMIGRATION POLICY FOR FINLAND

As a phenomenon, education-based and labour immigration call for examination and setting of objectives over the long term. Thus, the questions we face are quite fundamental. What kind of Finland do we want? What type of demographics will the future society and its services be built on? How does Finland want to be connected to the world and the global value networks? The commitment must span different government terms to ensure that active immigration policy is conducted sustainably and with a long-term focus.

The internationality of higher education institutions increasingly consists of co-operation in which solutions are sought to global issues that connect higher education institutions around the world. Long-term development of the internationality of higher education institutions requires closer co-operation especially between the actors of global networks. Finland should connect to global networks of information production and utilisation more intensively than is currently the case, so that we are able to attract students, employees, and special talents from abroad. This is supported by the international recruitment of RDI personnel in higher education institutions as well as the more systematic recruitment of foreign students.

The work to prepare a roadmap for labour immigration and education-based immigration targeting the year 2035 will begin in autumn 2020. The first phase of the work is scheduled for completion by the Government's mid-term policy review session in spring 2021. The intention is to obtain a shared snapshot of the situation and to prepare knowledge-based assessments concerning the immigration of talent needed in the development of society. The objective is to define the goals, focus areas and framework of labour immigration and edu-

cation-based immigration for the coming years, as well as the measures to reach the defined goals. The goals and measures to be defined in the roadmap work are built on population and competence need forecasts as well as the key policies and processes concerning immigration, education, research, and innovation. These include reports on the educational policy and integration and the RDI roadmap.

DEVELOPING THE EMPLOYABILITY OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS IN HIGHER EDUCATION BRINGS MORE EXPERTS TO THE FINNISH LABOUR MARKET

The employability of graduates of Finnish higher education institutions varies widely, viewed by the native language of the graduates. The share of foreign-language (as well as international) graduates among those who have emigrated is considerably higher than that of students who speak a national language of Finland as their native language. Of the foreign-language graduates in universities of applied sciences, nearly 18% have moved abroad one year after graduation (Vipunen 2020a), whereas the share of university graduates with a master's degree is 34% (Vipunen 2020b). In addition, the category "Other" seems to include foreign graduates who are not employed nor unemployed but have not filed a notification of change of address even though in reality they have emigrated. The assumption is based on reports compiled on the groups in question from entries (including earned income, study grant or care allowance) from different registers. These specifications show that, for example, three years after earning their degree, 36% of foreign-language graduates of academic universities and 33% of foreign-language graduates in universities of applied sciences graduates have emigrated. (Mathies & Karhunen 2020, 3–4.)

The circumstances under which foreign students work during their studies in Finland are uncertain. Foreign students are only allowed to work 25 hours per week during the academic year. Even if a foreign student was able to support themselves, the high-income requirement and potential tuition fees increase their need for earned income in order to continue their studies, and this may also delay their graduation. Someone with a student's residence permit to Finland must apply for a work permit separately. Due to labour market testing, one can only obtain a work permit for their own field or for fields where there is a shortage of labour. This is the reason why international, non-European students can primarily only be employed in low-paid jobs in the service sector, such as cleaning. After graduation, a foreign student will need a new justifi-

cation for their residence in Finland, since currently students can only receive a one-year extension to their residence permits for job-seeking. (Könönen & Himanen 2019, 58–59.)

On average, graduated degree students who stay in Finland after completing their studies do well in the Finnish labour market, but in terms of employment and income, they still fall behind native Finns with the same level of education. On a wider perspective, the difference between the income transfers received and paid by foreign degree students after graduating indicates that after graduation the expenses incurred during the studies are returned to the public sector fairly quickly – especially with master’s degree and doctorate-level graduates. Suhonen (2015, 14–22) estimates that the unit cost of one foreign degree student, also known as the net cost of the public sector, is an average of EUR 7,000 for one year of study. The variables that describe the family and social networks of a foreign degree student are important in terms of the research. Influencing these factors through measures taken by the government is difficult. An exception to this would be to facilitate the residence of the student’s spouse in Finland (Mathies & Karhunen 2019, 69–78).

NEGOTIATIONS BETWEEN THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION AND CULTURE AND HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS IN AUTUMN 2020

The Talent Boost programme and the SIMHE services have been included in agreements between the Ministry of Education and Culture and higher education institutions as a key element in the 2021–2024 agreement period. Part of the core funding to be allocated between higher education institutions will be allocated based on the strategy. The Talent Boost service promise that is included in this programme entity consists of measures that strengthen the integration of international students and researchers into Finnish society and their entry to the Finnish labour market. The service promise supports the measures of the global programme portion of strategy-based funding, which enable Finnish higher education institutions to enter the global arena effectively and together and to promote competence-based immigration more systematically – namely student and researcher recruitment.

In the 2021–2024 strategy period, EUR 40 million is allocated to academic universities and EUR 6.5 million to universities of applied sciences annually as an internationalisation programme resource from the programme portion of strategy-based funding. Part of the funding

in the internationalisation programme is also allocated annually to the implementation of the Talent Boost service promise. During autumn 2020, a comprehensive listing of integration measures targeting international students and carried out by the higher education institutions is prepared in co-operation with the higher education institutions. At the time of writing this article in the autumn of 2020, the more detailed specification of this service promise was under way in the process led by the Ministry of Education and Culture that involves the Presidents of the higher education institutions. Each higher education institution selects from the listing of the integration measures the measures deemed the most relevant for its internationalisation objectives and commits to the implementation of these measures (partially also on the level of numeric targets). The higher education institution's service promise will be attached to the agreement for the 2021–2024 agreement period. In addition to and within the institution-specific service promises, higher education institutions receive encouragement in the form of functioning partner networks or structures for the division of work, for example.

The SIMHE operations in higher education institutions are an independent tool that supports the Talent Boost objectives. In future, the goal will also be to increasingly deploy good SIMHE practices in higher education institutions where the SIMHE operations have not yet been implemented. Similarly, the intention is to disseminate the good practices to all international students through the guidance, counselling, and career services, for example. The services primarily targeting and built for the SIMHE target group also serve and support the needs, such as the themes and actors of attracting students globally, of student groups of other higher education institutions – and vice versa.

The competition for skilled labour force is global. The role of promoting active labour immigration and education-based immigration has strengthened in different parts of the world as part of the innovation economy's reforming industrial policy and the arsenal of methods available to increasing the supply of skilled labour. Educated talent is the most mobile force. An active education-based and labour immigration policy can also influence immigration to Finland. This work calls for the input of society as a whole; the issue cannot be solved by any sector or individual actor alone. Talent Boost is a good and strong ecosystem of multiple actors, and incorporated closely with the SIMHE operations, it will create and offer solutions for attracting, educating, employing, and integrating international talent.

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AUTHORS

Maija Airas (M. Pol. Sc.) works as the head of the International higher education co-operation unit in the Finnish National Agency for Education. She has worked in internationalisation positions in higher education for most of her career. She has gained insight into the SIMHE theme in her role as the chairperson of the Finnish Education Evaluation Centre (FINEEC) evaluation team tasked with assessing the share of people with foreign background in higher education and as the chairperson of the higher education institutions' SIMHE co-operation group.

Marika Antikainen (MA, Vocational Teacher) works as a project manager at SIMHE-Metropolia in projects promoting the employability of international degree students. She is developing a model of career counselling and Finnish language for international degree programmes and building students' workplace connections as part of the Talent Boost network in the Helsinki metropolitan area. Marika is particularly interested in comprehensive integration, networking and the added value provided by diversity in working life.

Marianne Autero (BA, MA, study counsellor) worked as a career coach in the SIMHE services of Metropolia University of Applied Sciences in 2016–2020 and participated in developing the services since their inception. Marianne's interests include the development of guidance and counselling specifically designed for immigrants and the streamlining of their education and career paths. Marianne also worked as a teacher in study programmes preparing immigrants for higher education in the technology field in Metropolia in 2011–2020.

Lotta Björn (M. Soc. Sc., B. Sc. (Economics and Business Administration)) works as a project manager in the International Talents Accelerating Growth project in the City of Vantaa services for business. Her duties include building connections between the City, higher education institutions and local enterprises as well as developing routes that enable encounters between international talents and workplaces.

Annu Brotherus (Doctor of Science (Economics and Business Administration), MA, kindergarten teacher) has worked as a university lecturer in education at the University of Helsinki and as a continuing education

teacher since 1995, specialising in pre-primary and primary education, early childhood education and care pedagogy, alternative pedagogies, theses and teaching practice. Over the years, she has been a director of multicultural kindergarten teacher education and a deputy director of kindergarten teacher education, as well as a scientific director of immigrants' qualification training in early childhood education and care. In addition, she has worked as a person in charge of pre-primary and primary education studies and in the faculty admissions working group since 1995.

Emilia Deseille (M. Soc. Sc.) works as a career coach for both SIMHE guidance and counselling clients and international degree students at Metropolia University of Applied Sciences. In addition, she is developing partnerships with working life to promote encounters between international talents and potential employers. Therefore, Emilia is specifically interested in networking as well as the identification, verbalisation, and development of prior learning.

Aino Ezeonodo (Master of Health Care) works as an expert lecturer in the School of Health Care at Metropolia University of Applied Sciences and has participated in the development of qualification training for immigrant nurses in a number of projects on a long-term basis. Her specific areas of interest include the development of guidance and counselling targeting immigrant nurses and supporting their career routes. For more than a decade, she has been teaching in Metropolia's Degree Programme in Nursing and in nursing programmes as well as working as a tutor teacher (career counsellor) for students.

Teemu Haapalehto (M. Soc. Sc., EMBA) works as the manager of Immigration Affairs at the City of Espoo Economic and Urban Development Unit.

Johanna Heimonen (MA) works as a university teacher at the Department of Finnish, Finno-Ugrian and Scandinavian Studies of the University of Helsinki. She was involved in developing career counselling education for academic immigrants, implemented in 1995–2011 as vocational labour market training, and the Specima training, funded by the Ministry of Education and Culture, for immigrant teachers in 2011–2016. Heimonen is particularly interested in language-aware and culturally aware guidance and counselling.

Marita Häkkinen (M. Pol. Sc., graduate student in adult education) works as a coordinator in the University of Jyväskylä Admission Services, focusing on the SIMHE services since their 2016 pilot. She is particularly

interested in researching experiences and meanings in learning and guidance and counselling. She works as a counsellor in the INTEGRA training at the University of Jyväskylä and has been facilitating small groups of interculturalism in the pedagogic adult education studies.

Eevamajja Iso-Heiniemi (MA, lecturer) works as a Finnish As a Second Language (S2) expert in the SIMHE Continuation project. The project aims to build increasingly diverse, consistent, and flexible Finnish language study paths for international degree students. In addition to the development work, Eeva-Majja teaches Finnish in the S2 courses being piloted in the project. Previously, she worked as an S2 and coordinating teacher in integration training programmes for adult immigrants.

Riina Johansson (MA, planning geography) works as a development specialist at the University of Helsinki Centre for Continuing Education HY+. She has participated in numerous education projects in Finland and abroad.

Hanna Jokela (PhD, university lecturer) works as a university lecturer of Finnish language at the University of Turku. She is in charge of the Finnish language and culture study module (for non-native speakers). She has also participated in developing language support projects for highly educated immigrants at the University of Turku.

Tuula Jäppinen (MA) works as a lecturer of Finnish language and communication at Haaga-Helia University of Applied Sciences. She specialises in Finnish As a Second Language instruction and has participated in several development projects in this field. In addition to her own job, she is also a long-term editor-in-chief of the Suomenopettajat magazine for teachers of Finnish language.

Heli Kamppari works as a coordinator in the Brahea Centre of the University of Turku. Her primary areas of responsibility are education, guidance and counselling and development projects which target highly educated immigrants. Her specific interests include, in particular, Finnish As a Second Language instruction and career counselling.

Riitta Konkola (Licentiate of Education) is the President and CEO of Metropolia University of Applied Sciences. In 2016, she was a member of the SIMHE steering group coordinated by the Ministry of Education and Culture and still actively follows the development of the operations.

Katri Kosonen (Lic. Sc. (Tech.), study counsellor) works as a principal lecturer at Oulu University of Applied Sciences. She is the coordinating teacher of education for immigrants and development work as well as the

project manager of the MAIKO – maahanmuuttajien integrointimalli korkeakouluun project on a model of integrating immigrants in higher education. In addition, she participates in the operations of SIMHE-Oamk.

Pirkko Kukkohovi (PhD, Italian/applied linguistics) has worked as a lecturer of Finnish language and communication, an Oamk project manager in the SIMHE path project and as a Finnish As a Second Language specialist in the UOMA, MAIKO, From Steps to Learning Towards Working life, and SIIMA projects aimed for immigrants. She has been working as an adult educator in Finnish As a Second Language at various levels of education and in liberal adult education since 1991.

Markku Lahtinen (M. Pol. Sc., M. Sc. (Economics and Business Administration)) works as a director of the Promotion of Interests unit of the Helsinki Region Chamber of Commerce. His interests include promoting the success and growth of companies and boosting the competitiveness of the Helsinki Region internationally.

Jaana Lampikoski (MA (Education)) works as an education specialist at the University of Helsinki Open University. Her career includes positions in career planning and study counselling. Currently, her area of responsibility is the computer science and digital skills studies. Lampikoski has been involved in developing face-to-face and online guidance of academic students and supported study paths by developing study skills, among other things. She has been the Open University representative in the SIMHE project.

Päivi Lehtinen (MA, lecturer, S2) works as a Finnish As a Second Language lecturer in the SOHE Bridge and Deploying Competence in Finland projects at Metropolia University of Applied Sciences. She also teaches in the programme preparing immigrants for higher education and in the English-language Degree Programme in Nursing. She is interested in Finnish language in the health care sector and online learning in instruction provided for immigrants.

Tuija Lehtonen (Licentiate of Philosophy) works as a Finnish As a Second Language instructor at the Centre for Multilingual Academic Communication of University of Jyväskylä. Her duties include teaching Finnish to the university's international staff and students and coordinating the studies. She participates in several national development tasks in the Finnish As a Second Language sector and is interested in developing the pedagogy of learning a second language as well as promoting the access to higher education of highly educated immigrants and immigrants eligible for higher education. Currently, she coordinates and teaches in the INTEGRA project funded by the Ministry of Education and Culture.

Outi Lemettinen (M. Sc. (Economics and Business Administration)) works in the SIMHE services of Metropolia University of Applied Sciences. She works in development projects concerning the education of immigrants. She was a project manager in the SIMHE path and Deploying Competence in Finland projects.

Laura Lindeman (M. Soc. Sc.) works as a Chief Specialist in the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment. She is the lead of the international competence and labour force team and is responsible for the development of labour immigration and aligning the immigration policy with the industrial, employment and innovation policies. She is also in charge of the coordination and preparation of the Government's Talent Boost programme.

Marja-Terttu Lounavaara (MA, teacher of Finnish, literature and Finnish As a Second Language) has been working as a teacher of Finnish in the qualification training for immigrant teachers and early educators at HY+ and, previously, in the OPE-AMARE joint project of the Universities of Helsinki and Turku. She taught Finnish at the Lahti Rudolf Steiner School in Lahti for 18 years and, thereafter, worked as a teacher of Finnish As a Second Language for 20 years. She has also held the positions of a secretary and chairperson of the Suomi toisena kielenä -opettajat association of teachers of Finnish As a Second Language.

Tanja Malo (BA International History & International Politics, MA General History) works as a project manager in the International Talents Accelerating Growth project at the Labour Force and Immigration unit of the Economic Development division in the Helsinki City Executive Office. In addition, she has worked as a specialist of international HR management at the University of Helsinki and in expert positions in the settling-in services.

Mari Manninen (Nurse, Master of Health Sciences) works as a lecturer of nursing at Metropolia University of Applied Sciences. She has a long experience in nursing and teaches various areas of clinical nursing. She has been participating in the nursing path of the Deploying Competence in Finland project since 2019.

Sonja Mitroshin (MA, coordinator) works as a SIMHE coordinator in the University of Helsinki Admission Services. She is particularly interested in promoting equality in higher education.

Hannu Niemelä (Master of Theology, M. Pol. Sc.) works as a development specialist in the management theme area at the University of Helsinki Centre for Continuing Education HY+. In addition to his duties in the development of the theme area, he works as a project manager in the AKVA project and in the qualification training project for immigrant subject teachers and early childhood educators. In particular, he is interested in managing sustainability and diversity.

Hannele Niskanen (MA (Education), study counsellor, teacher) works as a counsellor for highly educated immigrants in the SIMHE service of Karelia University of Applied Sciences. She also works as a project manager in the SIMHE model project and as a project specialist in the SIMHE path project. She is also the coordinating teacher of the training preparing immigrants for higher education at Karelia University of Applied Sciences.

Elina Nurmi works as an immigration manager at the Labour Force and Immigration unit of the Economic Development division of the Helsinki City Executive Office.

Rebekka Nylund (M. Pol. Sc., social psychologist), works as a specialist in the Strategic Services for Teaching unit of the University of Helsinki. Rebekka is interested in the integration of immigrants and international students into Finnish higher education and society. She is the chairperson of the student services for immigrants at the University of Helsinki and is in charge of the education path of early childhood educators in the Deploying Competence in Finland project.

Verna Pelkonen (MA, Finnish language teacher) currently works as a teacher of Finnish language at the University of Helsinki. She has participated in projects that promote language awareness and develop the language guide activities, such as the Itä-Helsingin uudet Suomen kielet (Finland's new languages in East Helsinki) and the Suomen kieli sanoo tervetuloa (The Finnish language welcomes you) projects. She works as a Finnish language teacher in the qualification training for immigrant teachers and early childhood educators at HY+.

Leena Peniche Ferreira (MA) works as a university teacher in the Finnish Language and Culture specialisation at the University of Helsinki. She has also been teaching Finnish as a second language in other higher education institutions in the Helsinki metropolitan area. In the AKVA project, she works as a teacher of Finnish language and study skills and as a career counsellor.

Seppo Piiparinen (M. Pol. Sc., coordinator) works in Educational Affairs and in the SIMHE service at the University of Turku. His areas of specialisation are the open university, adult education and guidance and counselling as well as guidance and counselling for immigrants. He has also worked in the Ministry of Education and Culture web services for educational information (opintoluotsi.fi and avoinyliopisto.fi), as well as in the Opini Ovi project, which develops information, guidance, and counselling services for adult education. He currently continues his guidance duties in the Opini Ovi project.

Kaisu Piironen (M. Soc. Sc.) works as a counsellor of education (*opetusneuvos*) in the Ministry of Education and Culture. Her duties include various tasks related to international students and students with immigrant backgrounds. She has worked as the chairperson of the SIMHE steering group and is currently the vice chairperson of the SIMHE co-operation group.

Pirjo Pitkämäki (M. Sc. (Tech.)) works as a senior lecturer in the Sales degree programme at the Haaga-Helia University of Applied Sciences. Pirjo was the initiator behind a network of higher education institutions, the objective of which is to increase the appreciation of sales work in Finland. Before joining the UAS, Pirjo had a career of more than 20 years in sales, sales management and leading a sales company in the ICT sector.

Marjo Pääskyvuori (MA (Education), Bachelor of Hospitality Management) works as a senior lecturer of the travel industry and hospitality management sector and a study counsellor at Laurea University of Applied Sciences. Her interests include, in particular, the development of guidance and counselling aimed for immigrants and flexible study paths. She participated in the Deploying Competence in Finland project and worked as a counsellor in the Employment Through Service Competence training which was designed and implemented in the project.

Päivi Rimpioja (MA (Education), nursing instructor, specialised nurse) works as Head of Nursing Education and the project manager of the SOHE Bridge project at Metropolia University of Applied Sciences. Her areas of interest include nursing care, development of instruction, multiculturalism, guidance, and counselling, teaching as well as internationality.

Leena Saarikko (BA) has been working as a teacher of Finnish As a Second Language in several educational institutions since 1986 and has been a lecturer on the Leppävaara campus of Laurea University of Applied Sciences since 2000. Her specific areas of interest are the development of

language instruction aimed specifically for immigrants and the integration of immigrants into Finnish society. From the autumn of 2018 until the autumn of 2020, she participated in the Deploying Competence in Finland project, which designed and implemented a study path for travel industry and hospitality management in Laurea.

Sini-Tuuli Saaristo (M. Sc. (Economics and Business Administration), BA) works as a project manager in the SIMHE path project co-implemented by Karelia University of Applied Sciences and as an enterprise coordinator in the KOVAT – Kansainvälisen osaajan valmennus työhön project on coaching international talents for employment.

Satu Salonen (M. Pol. Sc.) works as a project manager in the Talent Boost project of the Helsinki Region Chamber of Commerce. The project focuses on strengthening connections between employers and international talents by means of mentoring programmes and matchmaking measures, among other things. Her areas of interest include supporting the capabilities of employers to recruit international talents and to manage multicultural working communities.

Heidi Stenberg (MA (Education), PhD student) works as a project manager of the SIMHE operations at Metropolia University of Applied Sciences. She is an active representative of the Rectors' Conference of Finnish Universities of Applied Sciences Arene and Metropolia in various steering groups and working groups related to SIMHE, Talent Boost and the thematics of immigration. Her special area of interest is the development of personalised, student-centred models of teaching in co-operation with workplaces.

Jorma Säteri (M. Sc. (Tech.)) works as a manager in the Construction and Real Estate Management competence area at Metropolia University of Applied Sciences. He has participated in the SIMHE projects nearly from the beginning of the operations, working on the identification of prior learning and participating in the development of continuation projects. In the Deploying Competence in Finland project, he is in charge of designing and implementing the construction and real estate management path.

Niina Tapanainen (MA (Education), study counsellor, teacher of psychology) works as a full-time career coach in SIMHE-Metropolia and as a guidance specialist and information officer of the Ohjausosuuskunta Ote cooperative on the side. Nina's longest study and career counselling positions have been in Finnish higher education institutions, and for the past decade, she has also worked with international talents. She enjoys

solution-oriented and innovative work that allows her to use both Finnish and English.

Milka Toikko (MA) works as a university teacher of the Finnish language and written communication at Aalto University. At the beginning of the AKVA project, she worked as a university teacher in the Finnish Language and Culture specialisation at the University of Helsinki. In the AKVA project, her duties include teaching Finnish language and study skills courses and participation in career counselling.

Taija Udd (MA) is a university teacher in the Finnish Language and Culture specialisation at the University of Helsinki. Many students of Finnish remember her as the author of the Suomen mestari series of textbooks. She has had numerous roles in the AKVA project: first, a coordinator of the Finnish language studies and, from the autumn of 2020, also a teacher of Finnish language and a career counsellor.

INTERNATIONAL TALENTS:

Sharmin Afrose (Master's degree in social work) is originally from Bangladesh and moved to Finland in 2013. She completed a Bachelor's and a Master's degree in social work in Bangladesh. In Finland, she has worked in an assisted living facility and a library as a volunteer and is now looking for work in the third sector. Sharmin was a SIMHE guidance client in 2018.

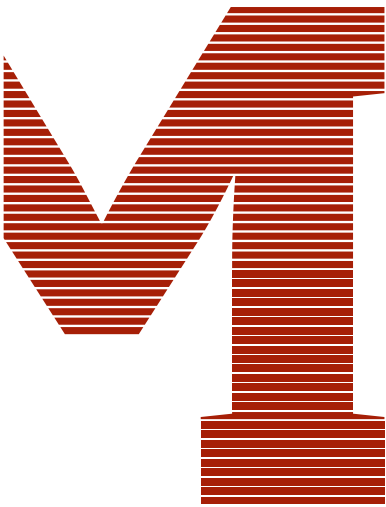
Daniel Boateng (M. Sc. in Business and Health, a qualified teacher) has worked in various capacities as a teacher, secretary, and facilitator and in HR management. He has a special interest in intercultural communication, academic progression, writing, internationalisation and travelling. Daniel became a SIMHE client in December 2019, and he has participated in the EntryPoint mentoring programme, career guidance, CV clinic and a recruitment event.

Juliana Holanda (Bachelor of Communication/Journalism) is a Brazilian journalist who has worked in local newspapers, news agencies, and magazines for 20 years. Her professional background includes early childhood education and care studies. She moved to Finland with her family in the autumn of 2019. She is completing her Master's degree in Digital Communication and a consultancy for entrepreneur women. She participated in a personal guidance discussion with SIMHE in 2019.

Malgorzata Szczypka-van Heeswijk (M.Sc. in Architecture and Urban Planning, BA in Philology, Spanish language) has lived in Finland for over 5 years. She currently works in a consulting and design office as an architect and BIM specialist. She participated in SIMHE guidance and counselling in 2017.

Samiul Sultana (M.Sc. in Psychology) has worked as a counsellor in Bangladesh for three years. He has also worked as an auditor in a private bank. Samiul has been living in Finland since 2012. He became a client of the SIMHE-Metropolia career and guidance counselling services in 2016.

Seblewongel Tariku (BA degree in Global Studies and International Relations, Diploma in Computerised Marketing Management) works as a freelance journalist in Helsinki, writing mainly on immigrant and multicultural issues. She has been working in the media field for more than twelve years, specialising in politics in Ethiopia, for example. She has also worked as a project coordinator and in activities for the empowerment of women. Seblewongel has lived in Finland for five years and currently works as a volunteer instructor for Työnhakuveturi. She recently completed a one-year Immigrant Journalism course at Haaga-Helia University of Applied Sciences. She has been a client of the SIMHE counselling and guidance service since 2017.



Towards a Finland of talents together – insights on the SIMHE operations

Finnish society needs talents. To solve this nationwide challenge, the SIMHE member institutions and their co-operation networks have developed new operating models for continuous learning. By working together, we will secure Finland's growth, well-being and innovativeness and support all of the talents in our society in finding their individual educational and career paths.

This publication describes the SIMHE – Supporting Immigrants in Higher Education in Finland operations, launched in 2016, through the perspectives and experiences of a vast network of actors. The objective of the operations, funded by the Ministry of Education and Culture, has been to develop models that support the access to higher education of highly educated immigrants and immigrants eligible for higher education, as well as their employability in Finland.

The publication is a compilation of the insights, best practices and identified development needs from the 2017–2020 strategy period. The operations are covered from the perspectives of the SIMHE member institutions, various projects and the multi-actor co-operation network. International talents who have used SIMHE guidance and counselling and other services also share their experiences of studying and building careers in Finland. The publication thus offers an extensive overview of the SIMHE operations and supports the launch of the services and their development in the future.

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