

Foreign students as a part of international mobility

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Abstract: International mobility has increased, and people are in growing numbers receiving their education or a part of it outside their home countries. Temporary migration of students can become permanent if, upon graduation, they do not return to their home countries but stay in the new countries of residence. Transitions to other countries' labour markets further expand the international flow of skilled persons for whom countries often compete.

This article is analysing foreign students as a part of international mobility using a case-study from the University of Oulu. Among the foreign students of the University of Oulu were basic degree students, post-graduates, exchange students and other students passing separate studies present at 14.9.2005. The article clarifies, in addition to students' home countries and fields of study, their ranking of attracting countries to work in the future in which Finland got a good position. Some students have had working experiences in Finland and their aspects of working life have been included to the analysis. There were also conducted special interviews for example for the authorities of labour and education administration, enterprises and trade unions.

Introduction

The international mobility has increased and these days more and more young people get their education outside their home country. From year 1998 to year 2003 the amount of foreign post-graduate students has increased in OECD-countries by 45 per cent. The increase has not only occurred in countries whose main language is spoken around the world, but the increase is also to be seen in the Nordic countries, Italy, Japan and Netherlands. The increase of international student mobility is expected to continue especially in the countries and the fields where there is a lack of working

force (OECD 2006: 37, 39). The Bologna-process of the European Union aims to unify the education systems and exams of the countries, so that they would be fit for comparison between EU countries. This will surely increase especially the mobility of the educated in finding both education and working places. At the same time they strengthen the brain circulation. After the studies the temporary migration can turn to permanent migration, if the students don't move back to their home countries after graduating, but stay in the new country of living. This would give the target country the best benefit from brain circulation when the students would commit to local working life (see Raunio 2005: 49–50).

Less than one percent of the European students leave for Erasmus-exchange. The most popular destinations are Spain, France, Germany and Italy. From these countries one also leaves for an exchange the most. New member countries have not yet attracted great crowds, but their popularity is rising all the time. The Commission of the European Union has the aim to double the amount of students taking part in the international Erasmus-exchange in the EU area. By year 2012 there are expected to be even three million exchange students. The aim is to ease the participation of exchange to the students who come from poorer than average backgrounds. The financial difficulties of the students are seen as the greatest weakness of the exchange program, so the rise of the grant is being planned (Turun Sanomat 2006). Raunio (2005: 40) states that raising the amount of students in Finnish universities offers the chance to create genuine multicultural networks, which when entering the work life would offer a more equal starting point to non-Finnish experts, too.

This article is analysing foreign students as a part of international mobility using a case-study from the University of Oulu. Among the foreign students of the University of Oulu were basic degree students, post-graduates, exchange students and other students passing separate studies present at 14.9.2005. The contact information for the survey of the students was obtained from the student information registry of the University of Oulu. There were also conducted special interviews for example for the authorities of labour and education administration, enterprises and trade unions. This article is based on "Internationalization

of Population and Labour Force from the Present to the Future" -anticipation project, which was funded by the European Social Fund (ESF), the Finnish Ministry of Education, and the Institute of Migration (Heikkilä & Pikkarainen 2008).

Some statistical background

The University of Oulu has drawn foreign students for a long time and amounts are in clear rise. 15 years ago 22 persons came as foreign exchange students, but in the year 2006 the amount had risen already to 445 comers (Figure 1). The amount of exam students has in the 2000s risen from over two hundred students to 345 students. In the year 2006 above mentioned 445 foreign students came from 42 different countries to the University of Oulu. The most common home country of exchange students in the same year was predominantly Germany (67 students), next came France (55), Spain (44), and the United States (28). The most popular study program of in-coming exchange students according to the amount were the study programs of the Faculty of Technology (150 exchange students), but the faculty is also the largest at the University of Oulu in the total number of students. Thus the third of all exchange students chose to go there, whereas from the total number of students of the University of Oulu, 28 percent of the students study in the above mentioned faculty. Respectively the Faculties of Economic and Business Administration, and Medicine got small over-representation. The Faculty of Science had an opposite situation, where only 18 % of the exchange students went, whereas 27

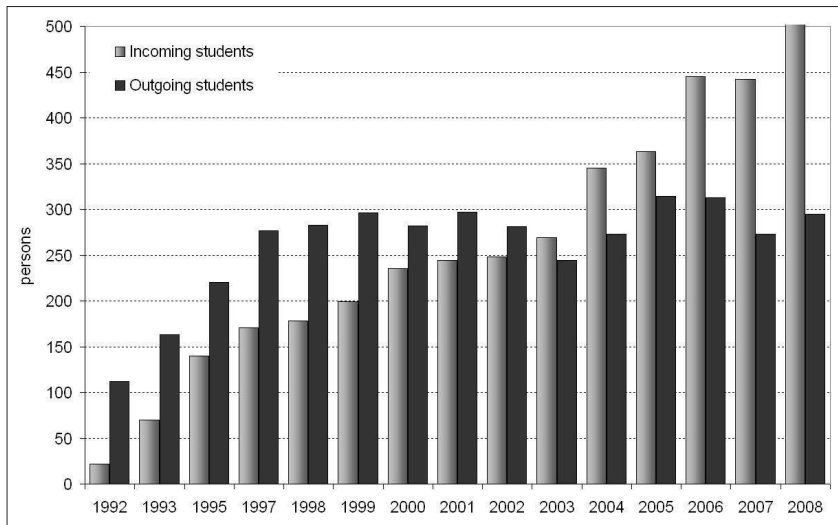


Figure 1. International mobility of students in the University of Oulu in 1992–2008.

% of the whole student population of the University of Oulu studies there. In 2008, the number of incoming students was 502 persons, and during last six years there have been more incomers than outgoing students from the University of Oulu.

Besides the exchange students, the internationality also shows among the students aiming for a degree. In the year 2006, altogether 345 students from 57 countries were studying in the study program aiming for an exam: of those 190 were doing the basic examination and 155 post-graduate.

At the University of Oulu the foreign exam students come mostly from China, Russia and Germany. The most common home countries of the exchange students are Germany, France, Spain and Italy, the part of the United States has declined in recent years. In the next 5–10 years the flows are impacted by the possibly activation of Finnish universities towards Asia and Russia. If the Finns increase the

collaborations, the amount of exchange students can rise. The amount of people coming from the United States is difficult to estimate, according to the university. They have areas where the population grows fast in the United States. Nowadays minority of the lower Latino social classes has started to raise people to higher education, which can cause pressure to the universities. As a result the universities possibly want to send people also for exchange because they are paying clients who would be off enrolment. In other words, the university would get the money, but the students would be somewhere else. When one looks at the situation of exchange students ten years ahead, the interesting area, according to the representative of the University of Oulu, is Africa. The international mobility of the students may rise, which is also impacted by the development of the economy and the societies. The flows from Africa could be raised by new stipend systems and otherwise active practical actions.

Part of the experts interviewed for the survey suspect that in the future in China there is going to be more supply in education within the country itself and thus their flow to Finland isn't likely to grow. Others are of the opinion that although the amount of college supply in Asian countries will be increased, the volume won't cover the need for education, meaning that the mobility will remain and even grow especially in China and India, countries of large population. Among the interviewees Russia is thought of as an important and growing country in sending students. When the amount of foreign exam students grows in the universities, the English study schemes will also increase. In comprehensive schools, especially in the international schools the pupils coming from English-speaking countries are on the rise. The background for this is that the parents have come to work for example at Nokia or universities, whose working language is English.

The results of the University of Oulu case study

The international mobility of foreign students was observed with the case study of the University of Oulu. Information on the foreign students of the University of Oulu was gathered through a survey. In the target group were counted foreign graduate students, post-graduates, exchange students and other students doing separate studies present in 14.9.2005. There were altogether 175 people who answered the survey, and the answering percent on the

part of foreign students was 48 %. Their average age was 26 years; the youngest was 17 years old and the oldest 54 years old. 44 % were women, and 56 % men. Of the foreign students answering, there was about 18 % of both engineer science or computer science students. The mentioned groups grow big because various education fields are attached to them. Computer science fields include the students of the computer science of the Faculty of Technology, telecommunication, information technology as well as the Faculty of Science's data processing science. As students of engineer science are counted the students of the Faculty of Technology other than computer science field or architecture.

The foreign students represent altogether the nationalities of 44 countries. Those who have got dual citizenship are totally six persons, of which five's other citizenship was Finnish. The biggest nationality groups are formed by the Germans (17 %), Russians (13 %) and Chinese (10 %) students. These represent those larger foreign groups that come to the University of Oulu either as exchange students or exam students. The most common home country of exchange students when looking the statistics of the whole University of Oulu was Germany and the exam students came mostly from China or Russia. It is good to mention that also among the foreign employees of the University of Oulu the most were, according to the answerers of the other conducted survey in the anticipation project, Germans, Chinese and Russians. Of the foreign students answering the survey almost half had come to Finland during the year 2005; among this group were especially the exchange students. Altogether during

the 2000s 137 students had come of all the answerers. Among the group were thirty immigrants of the 1990s and also a few who had arrived to Finland in the 1980s. One must remember that these who had arrived years ago to Finland may have lived in Finland for other reasons than to study and they may have started studying only now. Among the foreign students are both persons interested in staying temporarily and permanently in Finland. Forty percent of the answerers noted that they intend to live in Finland only under a year. Over fourth of the answerers were planning to stay in Finland for a few years and 27 students were going to stay in Finland permanently. Of the answerers, 17 percent had no knowledge yet of how long Finland is of interest as a country to live in.

On the survey the foreign students were asked on their eagerness for returning or staying in Finnish working life after they have passed their exams. Majority of the answerers (84 %) let know of being interested in Finnish work life. Only 16 percent announced that they had no intention of considering staying in Finland or returning to Finland after passing the exam. Nearly a third of the students who answered had already studied abroad earlier. About a fourth of the answerers had worked abroad. The ones who had studied and worked abroad before were almost the same people. Of those who had not studied abroad before arriving to the University of Oulu, only 13 percent have worked abroad instead. Also the fifth of those who hadn't worked abroad had however studied abroad.

Of the foreign students answering the survey, 90 percent noted that they are interested in working abroad in the future.

There is no remarkable gender difference. The examination of interest by education fields is not possible because of small case amounts, but an interesting observation is that even in the groups with many answerers the percentage amount on the part of those interested rose greatly: all of students of the economic sciences (17 answerers altogether) and all but one of the students of the computer science field (32 answerers altogether) are interested of the work market outside Finland. Working abroad interests especially those answerers who have studied or worked outside the home country before. 94 % of those who have studied, and 98 % who have worked abroad before note that working in a foreign country would be interesting.

Attracting countries to work abroad

A question was presented to the foreign students interested in working abroad where they were asked to name three most attracting countries. In Table 1 are included all answerers interested in working abroad who have named the most, the second and the third attracting working country and the percentages have been counted from these. The total amount of the answerers differs in different columns because all did not name other than the first and the second most attracting country or any country at all. On examining the percentage distribution one can see that Finland got clearly most number one places: almost every third answerer puts Finland in the first place. 8 percent of the answerers have Finland as the second most attracting country and

11 percent of the answerers have Finland as the third most alluring country. After Finland, Great Britain, the United States and Australia are named the most attracting country the most. Among the answers Sweden is regarded as the second most attracting country. After Sweden, Great Britain and the United States got the most votes. The third most attracting country in the answerers' opinion was, besides Finland, the United States. The next ones getting the places as the third most attracting country are Canada, Norway and Great Britain. The most attracting countries besides Finland are thus English speaking countries Great Britain, the United States, Australia and Canada, and Finland's close neighbours Sweden and Norway.

Finland seems to be the most attracting country especially in the opinions of the citizens of the Asian and English speaking countries. The interest of the Japanese and Chinese shows well because there are 20 of them among the people who answered the questions, of which nine (45 %) name Finland as the most interesting country in relation to working in the future. The Great

Britain and Australia are the most attracting countries especially among the citizens of European nationalities. Those interested in the United States are found among citizens of every country. As a further information one can mention that among the Russian answerers, of which there are 20 persons in this question, as the most attracting country rise both Finland (20 %) and Germany (20 %). Of Germans about a every third think of Finland as the most alluring working country.

A little under a half of those foreign students of the University of Oulu who are interested in working abroad in the future, have the intention to stay in country outside their home country for a couple of years. Only below 13 percent of the answerers are planning to stay abroad permanently, and correspondingly seven percent have the intention to spend a time of under a year in a foreign country. About fourth of the answerers state that it would be the most comfortable if one could alternate working between foreign and home countries.

Table 1. Three most attractive countries' six top names according to students interested in working abroad (%).

The most attractive (n=154)		Second most attractive (n=152)		Third most attractive (n=140)	
Finland	30,5	Sweden	13,2	Finland	11,4
Great Britain	11	Great Britain	9,9	USA	11,4
USA	9,7	USA	9,9	Canada	7,9
Australia	7,8	Finland	7,9	Great Britain	7,1
Sweden	5,8	Canada	6,6	Norway	7,1
Canada	4,5	Germany	6,6	Sweden	5,7
Other countries	30,7	Other countries	45,9	Other countries	49,4
Total	100	Total	100	Total	100

Experiences on Finnish working life

The foreign students of the University of Oulu have some experiences on Finnish working life. A fifth of the answerers state that the working conditions in Finland are good and even every third tell of their work life experience in our country to be positive. Only two answerers criticise the working conditions of Finland, and nine answerers state that they have only bad experiences of the work life in Finland.

“I like the work surroundings and my opinion is that the Finnish employers are family friendly. For example most people work the agreed working hours per day and can leave the work at four.” (Woman, Great Britain)

“Finland is a really good working country when one takes the workers’ conditions in account.” (Woman, Spain)

“I had lots of things needed which were not easy to get in my own country, like a working room and a computer. Work- and management surroundings are good, not too formal so you don’t have to fear asking things, but not too friendly so that the time would pass in just talking not working.” (Woman, Spain)

“In general I have had good experiences in all my working places in Finland and I have felt that they take care of human rights from both the workers’ and the employers’ side.” (Woman, Great Britain)

Communication is the subject which divides the opinions of the answerers. Some are of the opinion that you can get by with English in Finland very well, others are worried about getting by with English and some think that in Finland you have to learn Finnish language. A few state that in Finland the lack of language skills prevents getting work, meaning that in order to get work one has to learn the Finnish language. The difficulty of Finnish language also brings up different opinions: the language is thought of among the answerers both as too difficult to learn and as a learned skill.

“Because of the language problem a foreigner has a hard time finding a job from Finnish companies.” (Woman, China)

“Learning the Finnish language is a compulsory demand in order to get by in Finland.” (Man, Bangladesh)

“One has to learn at least the basics of Finnish in order to get to know what is happening at the working place.” (Man, Sweden)

“It is possible to win the language barrier.” (Man, the United States)

“In my opinion a foreigner has great chances to work in Finland, because the average Finn has good English language skills.” (Woman, Czech Republic)

“On principle all speak English and it enables the foreigners to easier communication.” (Man, Hungary)

"The foreigner has a chance to get by also in English language." (Woman, Estonia)

Some answerers' thoughts on working life in Finland are connected to Finnish taxation and salary system. A few complain of the high taxation level of Finland and the low salaries. On the other hand, five answerers do praise the size of the salaries. Also the foreign students also have opinions in the answers about the permissions and think that they are difficult and complicated to take care of.

"The salaries are quite low in Finland." (Woman, Austria)

"Compared to others countries, high salaries." (Man, Russia)

"In Finland one is paid too small salary for highly educated people, until one is really qualified." (Man, Russia)

"You have to pay much more taxes as a foreigner." (Woman, Estonia)

In thinking about the future and Finnish working life half of the foreign students have no opinion. A fourth of the answerers feel that they have good chances in getting work in Finland, whereas every tenth think that the chances are bad. A little over seven percent of the answerers believe that the good chances of getting work are only found in certain fields and five percent say that the future chances for foreigners are pretty poor.

"In my opinion it would be good to work here, because Finland has a lot of modern working methods that are quite different when compared to other European countries." (Man, Germany)

"In my opinion working here would be great, because I could work with something I like and in great surroundings." (Man, Spain)

"The working permission doesn't look too promising, and it looks like Finland doesn't want for the foreign working power to stay in the country." (Man, China)

"I suppose that among most of the foreign graduates the higher salaries and more multicultural societies are reasons for leaving." (Woman, Netherlands)

The secure employment of foreign students is according to the interviewed experts the essential factor that could make them stay in Finland after graduation. One would have to have in offer better research surroundings and longer-time temporary research positions. One would often get better into working places if there would be connections to the working markets. Thus getting work could be made better if there would be more periods of work-learning included in the studies. These are already in use in vocational education, but the system could be expanded to other education fields and -levels. Through the training place one forms networks which are of help in searching for work after graduation. In Lapland the students coming from abroad have got in to local working markets,

because majority of foreign exchange and exam students are seasonal workers in tourism companies. In order for foreign students staying in Finland after graduation, it is essential that after graduation they have the permission to search for work long enough, and that they wouldn't have to leave the country.

Many experts state in the interviews that the foreign students who have gone through English-speaking education program don't often learn a lot of Finnish during their studying time. The students don't go on separate Finnish lessons so the post-study language skills are poor. As the whole education gives chances for global market search for work, a great majority of them leave Finland after finishing the studies. The local employers should recruit foreign students who have graduated here, but often the imperfect language skills are an obstacle for recruiting. Staying in Finland would require studying Finnish. All interviewed experts do state, that one should increase the language education. Basic courses are usually offered enough, but for the advanced there is no courses arranged. During the whole studying period it would be important to offer systematic, from one level to another leading language studies.

The integration of students is also a noteworthy factor for staying in Finland. Besides the studies of the language, it would be good to offer information on the culture and Finnish modes of action. The foreigner often lacks basic information on what services different authorities offer. The education doesn't however only touch foreigners living in Finland. Also in the Finnish working community education is

also needed for how to make the working place multicultural. The changing of the attitudes is an essential factor, when it is hoped for the foreigners to stay in Finland (see Heikkilä 2005). In the same way one must educate the staff coming into connection with the foreigners, so that they could take in account and understand the possibly out of the ordinary situation. For example, leaving something unsaid could cause great difficulties for the foreigner, because he/she doesn't have the information that the Finn would understand without saying.

Finally

The international flow of the experts is increased by the movement to other countries' work markets, and nowadays there is even competition on these experts. For this reason many countries have introduced special opportunities with which a foreign student can stay after graduation in the country to work. Many countries like Ireland and Great Britain have actively sought to attract foreign students, researchers and experts. By the science and innovation policy actions the countries have attracted them by for example investing in public sector's research and innovation circles and by creating special grant practices and working possibilities for foreign experts (Noki & Kovanen 2008). According to the chairman of the Finnish Expatriate Parliament, Pertti Paasio, dual citizenship has opened the chances for many immigrants to study in Finland. For example in the United States a study year in a university could cost 25 000–30 000 \$,

but in Finland the studying is almost free. Finnish students can also get support for studies from the state and for example housing support (Koskinen 2007: 15).

In the future with the help of foreign students one may be able to keep up the kind of education fields that don't have enough applicants from Finland. Recruiting can be taken care of in a way that the entrance exam is arranged also outside Finland in greater countries of origin, and the one who have passed are accepted to study in a Finnish university.

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