

FACTS.

6B/2018

express

WHAT BROUGHT STUDENTS TO FINLAND, HOW DO THEY FIND STUDYING HERE?

The International Student Barometer of foreign degree students in higher education institutions

BACKGROUND

The effects of globalisation and the resulting growth in people's international mobility also reach the higher education sector. Around 5 million higher education students study outside their homelands – their number has doubled in slightly over 10 years. The biggest streams of students come from Asian countries to the western OECD countries, most commonly the United States, Great Britain and Australia¹. The number of foreign degree students has also grown in Finland. Today, in total over 20,000 foreigners are completing their degrees in Finland's 14 universities and 23 universities of applied sciences.

Finnish higher education institutions and foreign students have faced a new situation as higher education institutions implemented tuition fees from non-EU/EEA students in the autumn of 2017. The fees may affect both the students' willingness to come to Finland as well as their experiences of studying in Finland.

This change makes it particularly important to listen to the students now.

On what grounds do foreign students choose a Finnish higher education institution? What kinds of experiences do they have of studying in Finland? Are the students satisfied with the teaching they are given and are the services functional from the students' perspective?

International Student Barometer (ISB) is a survey aimed at international exchange and degree students studying in different countries carried out by the British iGraduate since 2005. Finland has previously participated in the survey in 2010 and 2014. The present ISB survey which was carried out in autumn 2017, had 15 Finnish higher education institutions take part, including 13 universities and 2 universities of applied sciences. The Finnish National Agency for Education EDUFI supported the participation to receive results from as many higher education institutions as possible.

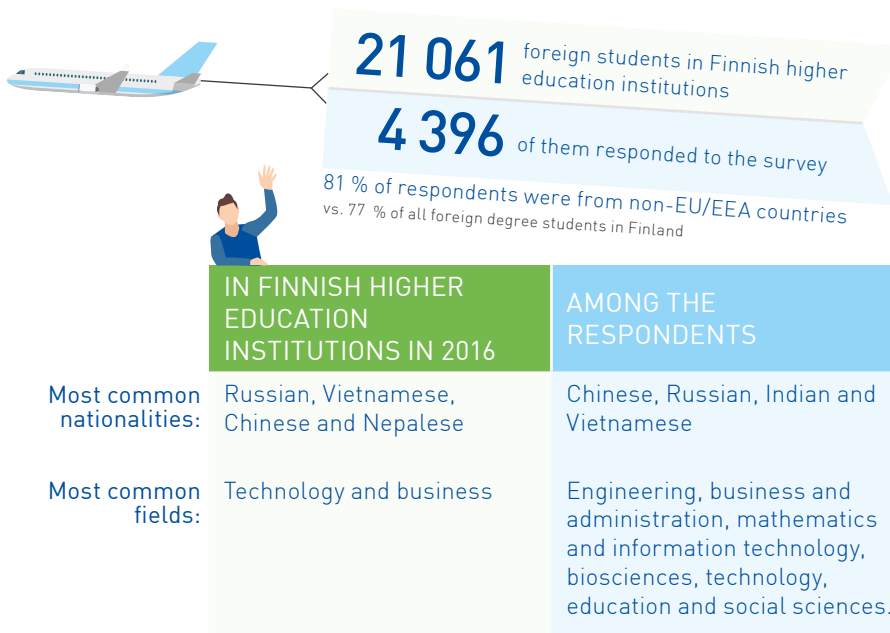
The ISB survey tracks satisfaction with studies, services and living, and the students' reasons for coming to the country and plans after graduation. As higher education institutions from several countries participate in the survey, the participant institutions can also compare their results at the international level. In total, 110,386 students from 129 higher education institutions and 17 countries responded to the ISB survey of autumn 2017.

This publication presents the results of the foreigners completing their entire higher education degree in Finland. The results indicate how interesting and attractive Finnish higher education is and provide information on how arrival to Finland could be made easier. The themes will also be highlighted in the policies to promote internationalisation in higher education of the Ministry of Education and Culture².



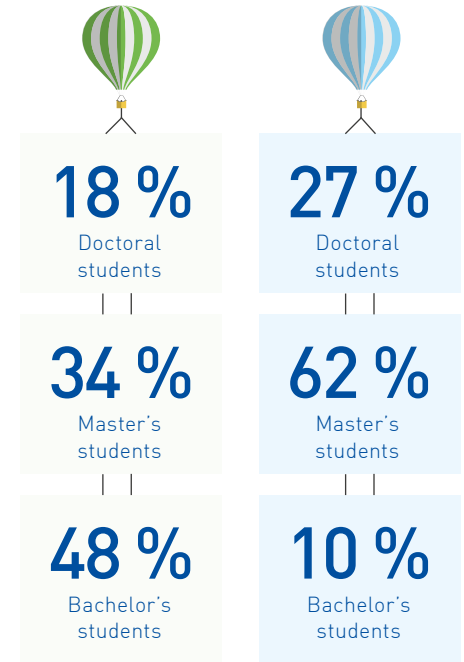
FINNISH NATIONAL
AGENCY FOR EDUCATION

FOREIGN DEGREE STUDENTS



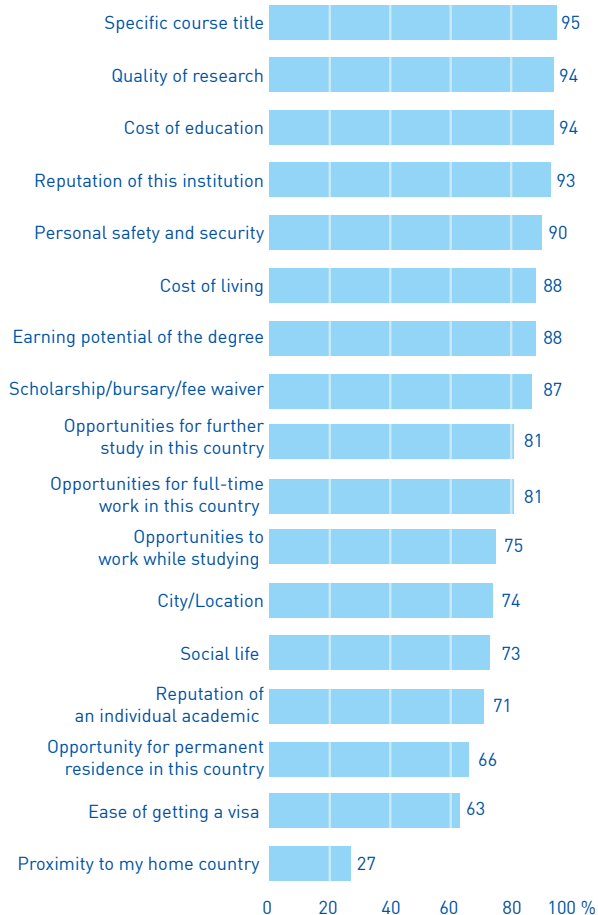
In Finland's higher education institutions:

Among the respondents:



HOW IMPORTANT WERE THE FOLLOWING FACTORS WHEN DECIDING WHERE TO STUDY?

The respondents who found this criterion important or very important (%)



DECIDING ON A STUDY PLACE – THE CONTENTS OF EDUCATION, COSTS, QUALITY OF RESEARCH AND REPUTATION OF THE HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION ARE MOST INFLUENTIAL

The most important reasons for choosing to study in Finland were the content and cost of education, quality of research and reputation of the higher education institution. The proximity to home country stood out as the least important factor.

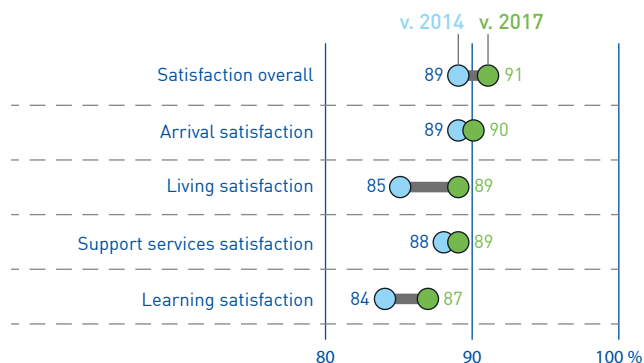
The foreign students studying in Finland considered an opportunity to a scholarship, bursary or fee waiver as a more important selection criterion compared to their peers in other countries. By contrast, the foreign students in Finland perceived the city or location of studies, opportunities to work during or after studies and the reputation of an individual academic as less important criteria than the respondents in other countries.

There were no major changes in these numbers compared to the results of 2014. However, there was an increase from 77% to 87% in the significance of an opportunity to receive a scholarship, bursary or fee waiver. The number of students who considered the opportunity for permanent residence as an important factor had also grown (from 60% to 66%).

The students from non-EU countries put more emphasis on factors linked to subsistence: the opportunities for a scholarship, bursary or a fee waiver, costs of living and opportunities to work while studying. They also put more value on opportunities for further study, full-time work and permanent residence in Finland. By contrast, there was no difference in the cost of education as a selection criterion between the students from EU and non-EU countries.

91% WERE SATISFIED OR VERY SATISFIED WITH THEIR STUDIES IN FINLAND

Satisfaction has slightly increased in all areas



ARRIVAL – BEST OVERALL SCORES GIVEN TO SERVICES AT THE BEGINNING OF STUDIES

The services delivered at the beginning of studies include services and support related to the arrival in the country, accommodation and settling in the local area as well as the services and support available when starting one's studies. Satisfaction with these aspects is important as first impressions may play a crucial role in shaping the student's subsequent experience.

The students were most satisfied (87–92%) with the service and orientation provided by the higher education institution, including meeting academic staff, academic registration, formal welcome at the institution and orientation. 81% were satisfied with explaining how the student's course of study would work.

EU citizens have a more critical view on the services at the beginning of studies compared to others. Doctoral students were more frequently dissatisfied with the formal welcome and orientation of the higher education institution than other students. However, doctoral students arrive to universities throughout the academic year, whereas the events are mainly organised at the beginning of the academic year.

Out of the respondents, 80–83% were satisfied with the services of the accommodation office, welcome or pickup, the condition of accommodation on arrival and internet access at the accommodation, and 80% were satisfied with organised events. Again, doctoral students were less satisfied than others, which might serve as evidence of their being left outside of the organised activities. Setting up a bank account was considered most difficult, and only 62% of the respondents were satisfied with this.

“The teachers are seriously committed to their work, so the learning experience is even more inspiring.”

– student, Brazil

Group sizes and opportunities for studying with people from other cultures are a strength of Finland.



“I am totally satisfied with the process and services. Just one problem I faced and that was about the internet connection in the very first day which was not connected in my room, so couldn't communicate with my family that day.”

– student, Bangladesh

STUDYING – LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS AND FACILITIES ARE A STRENGTH OF FINNISH HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

The survey included three areas concerning studies: teaching, studies in general, and learning environments and facilities.

Learning environments and facilities are a strength of Finnish higher education institutions. Whether concerning classrooms, library facilities or virtual learning environments, the students were nearly invariably (92–95 %) satisfied or very satisfied with them.

In teaching, the students lauded the subject area expertise of lecturers and the English skills of staff. The assessment of work and personal support with learning were also highly rated. While the scores for feedback on coursework and the teaching ability of lecturers received the lowest score in connection to teaching, there was nonetheless a satisfaction rate of over 80%.

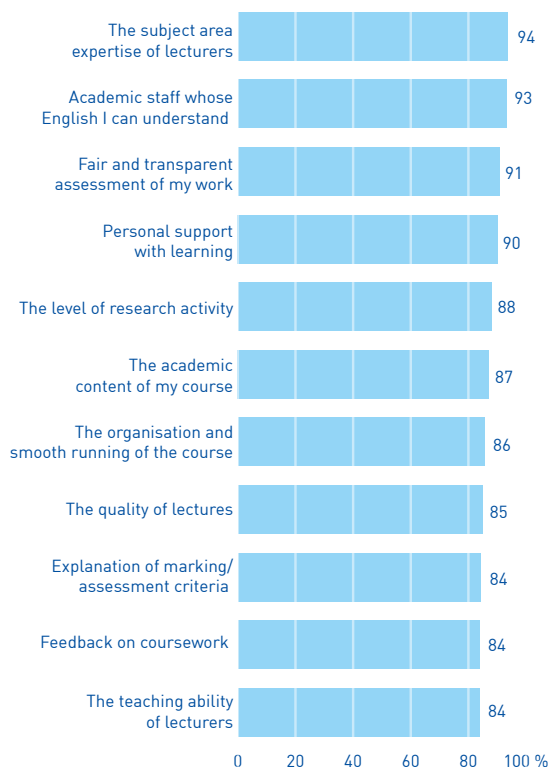
There was greater dispersion in the factors more generally connected to studies. Nearly all respondents were satisfied with the size of the classes and multicultural aspects. However, only around half of them were satisfied with factors related to employment and career. These included advice and guidance on long-term job opportunities and careers from academic staff, and opportunities for work experience as a part of the studies.

In many parts, Bachelor's degree students were more critical than students completing Master's and Doctoral degrees. They were less satisfied with the quality of lectures, the teaching ability of lecturers, the academic content of studies, feedback and assessment criteria. By contrast, doctoral students were most satisfied with these areas.

These results must be taken with a certain degree of

TEACHING

Satisfied or very satisfied foreign students (%)



FACTORS MORE GENERALLY CONNECTED TO STUDIES

Satisfied or very satisfied foreign students (%)



reservation, as the survey data included few foreign Bachelor's degree students because of the low participation rate of universities of applied sciences. Nonetheless, the results may indicate that more emphasis is put on the teaching for Master's and Doctoral degrees.

The students from the EU had a more critical view of many of the areas compared to those from non-EU countries. While this difference is not major, it reoccurs in many contexts, such as the teaching ability of lecturers, smooth running of the course, feedback on coursework and the fair and transparent assessment of work.

LIVING – FINLAND'S SAFETY AND SECURITY IS LAUDED

In addition to studies, other aspects of the students' lives also influence their studying experience. Indeed, satisfaction with living was observed from perspectives such as accommodation, cost of living, social life and the management of daily tasks.

90% were satisfied with the quality

of accommodation and nearly as many with internet access at their accommodation. There was more dissatisfaction with the cost and funding of living. Only 73% were satisfied with the cost of accommodation and 64% with the cost of living. Over half of the respondents were dissatisfied with the availability of financial support and the opportunity to earn money while studying.

The non-EU degree students were slightly more satisfied with the costs of living, and the EU citizens with their opportunity to earn money while studying. The responses do not include information on whether the dissatisfaction concerned the available jobs or the regulations restricting work.

Nonetheless, there was an increase in satisfaction compared to 2014. Back then, only 38% were satisfied with their opportunity to earn money,

52% with the cost of living and 66% with the cost of accommodation.

Satisfaction with social life varied according to whether concerning contacts with Finns or other foreigners. The students felt that they had fared well at making friends from other countries (89%) and their own country (83%), but more poorly at making friends from Finland (59%). This result strengthens

findings also made in other international studies: foreign students do well in forming groups among themselves but poorly in doing this with locals. Non-EU students were more likely to make friends from their own country; by contrast, students from EU member states were more satisfied with making friends from Finland.

The respondents were by far the most satisfied (97%) with the safety and security of Finland. Over 90% of the respondents were satisfied with the quality of the external campus environment, the institution's eco-friendly attitude, the design and quality of the campus buildings, and the surroundings outside the institution, and 87% with transport links.

"Finland is perfect mix of city life with human development and countryside and nature."

– opiskelija, Chile

WHAT KIND OF SUPPORT FOR FINDING EMPLOYMENT DID THE FOREIGN STUDENTS WISH TO RECEIVE?



Students from EU countries often wished to receive “lighter” forms of support, such as knowledge about sources of information and different alternatives. Students from non-EU countries wished to receive more comprehensive services: practising job-seeking situations, work placements and for the higher education institution to contact employers on behalf of the student.



RECOMMEND FINLAND

AS A COUNTRY FOR STUDIES



SUPPORT SERVICES – THE STUDENTS FAIL TO FIND CAREER AND RECRUITMENT SERVICES

The most commonly used support services included campus eating places, where most of the respondents (92%) ate their meals. The majority (72%) also utilised IT support. This was followed by accommodation services (58%), student organisations (58%) and healthcare (48%).

Nonetheless, the foreign degree students used relatively little support services. For example, less than half of the respondents (46%) reported having utilised student advisory services, while 39% had used an international office and only 18% career and recruitment services.

Career and recruitment services were also most poorly known: 38% could not even say where to find such a service. Awareness of the services related to study counselling was also low: over a third did not know where to find these services. One fifth of the respondents were unaware of the international affairs services or student advisory services at their higher education institution.

However, those who had used the services were satisfied with them. 95% of the respondents were very satisfied with the service-mindedness and English skills of the staff. At least 90% of those using the services were satisfied with the international office, IT and systems support, student advisory services, healthcare, counselling services and tutors, while slightly under 90% were satisfied with campus eating places and accommodation services. Poorest rates were given to careers and recruitment services, with which 79% of users were satisfied.

FUTURE – NEARLY HALF PLAN ON STAYING IN FINLAND AFTER THEIR STUDIES

Finding employment after studies is often considered a challenge for foreigners staying in Finland, even though various projects and schemes have been used to advocate this. At the same time, there is discussion on the demographic development resulting from the ageing of the population in Finland; the working life needs international competence, experts and networks on a different scale compared to the previous millennium.

In 2009, 51% of graduated foreigners were still working in Finland a year after their graduation³ and 44% five years after their graduation. What do the results of the ISB survey say about the preconditions of employment?

There is most room for improvement in different matters

“My university should offer more job seeking opportunities for students.”

– student, China

WEAKNESSES



Foreign degree students were least satisfied with these areas

-  Opportunities for earning money while studying
-  Opportunities for financial support
-  Opportunities for gathering work experience as part of studies
-  Support from teaching staff related to employment and career opportunities
-  Costs of living
-  Setting up a bank account
-  Making friends with locals

linked to employment. For example, information on career and recruitment services should be provided more actively to make sure that foreign degree students can find and better utilise them.

One fourth (23%) of final year students planned on staying to work in Finland for a longer period, i.e. for over 2 years. 14% were planning to continue to further studies in their current higher education institution and 9% to stay in Finland for short term employment, i.e. less than 2 years. Technology and business students were more interested than average in long term employment in Finland, while students in social sciences, natural sciences, mathematics and information technology were more interested in staying in Finland for short term employment.

In total, half of the final year students were planning to stay in Finland. Only less than one fourth were planning to move elsewhere, and less than one fifth were still undecided. Staying in Finland was more popular among non-EU students than those from the EU member states.

Although there is room for development, overall, the results from Finland are good, a fact that is also partly strengthened by the respondent's willingness to stay in the country. The fact that as many as 83% would recommend Finland as a country for studies is also a good sign.

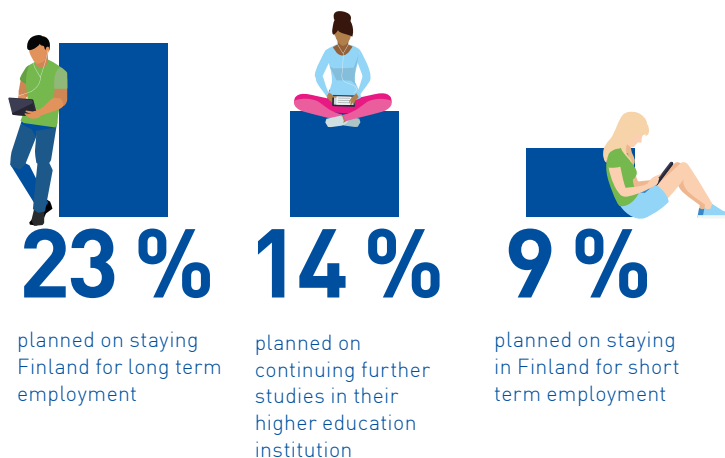
STRENGTHS



Foreign degree students were most often satisfied with these areas

-  Safety and security of living
-  High-quality classrooms and lecture halls
-  The surroundings outside the higher education institution
-  The service-mindedness and English skills of the staff
-  The subject area expertise of academic staff
-  The size of the classes
-  The English skills of academic staff
-  Learning technology
-  Libraries (physical and online facilities)

OF FOREIGN FINAL YEAR STUDENTS



Bibliography:

- 1 Education at a Glance 2017. OECD Indicators. Indicator C4 What is the profile of internationally mobile students?
- 2 Ministry of Education and Culture: Policies to promote internationalisation in Finnish higher education and research 2017–2025.
- 3 CIMO: In Finland, at work, elsewhere? Status of international higher education students in Finland 5 years after their graduation. Facts Express 1B/2016.

The Finnish National Agency for Education is an agency operating in the administrative branch of the Ministry of Education and Culture. It is responsible for the development of education, early childhood education and care, and lifelong learning as well as for the promotion of internationalisation.

ISBN 978-952-13-6516-4 (pdf)

ISSN 2242-296x (pdf)

Layout and graphics: Infograafikko Joel Kanerva

FINNISH NATIONAL AGENCY FOR EDUCATION

Hakaniemenranta 6, P.O. Box 380, FI-00531 Helsinki,
tel. 0295 331 000, www.oph.fi