

Recommendations for trade unions representing international researchers, teachers, and other university staff

Unions active in the university sector are stronger when they are inclusive organizations that actively invite international academics and staff to join and that proactively facilitate their participation in union activities. This is important to ensure that the interests of international members are promoted, to secure the longevity of union organizations in the sector, and to ensure readiness for possible industrial action. Participation in union activities also provides international members important opportunities to get to know working practices and current issues at universities.

Facilitating this participation necessarily includes work at the level of local associations, national unions, and broader labor market organizations like JUKO—and individual members of the unions can also play a role. The following recommendations emerge from research with international researchers, teachers, and staff at Tampere universities, including a survey and a series of interviews. Reports from this research are available on Tatte's website (<https://tieteentekijat.fi/en/tatte-international-working-group-finishes-research/>), along with a separate set of recommendations aimed at the university (<https://tieteentekijat.fi/en/tatte-releases-international-recommendations/>). While drawing from this research in Tampere, we have tried to think broadly about problems and principles that could be more widely relevant. We also recognize that different unions are in somewhat different positions in relation to the proportion of their members who might be 'international', as well the proportion of the type of work done by members. Thus, while we aim for the recommendations to be broadly relevant to unions and employee associations active in the university sector, we acknowledge that they may be more directly applicable to some situations than others.

Orientation and induction is an extremely important time for incoming international academics and staff. **Unions and local associations need to creatively and proactively find ways to reach people as they are arriving at the university.** This should include seeking to help shape the content of informational materials presented to new staff and, where possible, actively and directly participate in induction and orientation events and processes. This can also involve encouraging activities by local associations and even individual members to routinely reach out to newly arriving community members, such as by inviting them to informal discussions or social gatherings.

Unions should further develop practices to monitor potential gaps in salaries, working conditions, or career progression, and also recognize and address how being an 'international' academic or staff intersects with inequalities around gender, class, sexuality, racialization, disability, ethnicity, religion, etc.

Unions and local associations need to actively maintain ongoing and clear lines of communications with members *and* potential members. There are different ways of going about this that may be appropriate for different associations or in different situations, but the request for more and more accessible information and communication was a recurring theme in the research.

Union democracy is an important value, and, especially for those unions with significant international memberships, specific actions are needed to make this value a reality.

Inclusive language practices in decision-making are one important area. Union and association assemblies and board meetings should be conducted in ways that proactively allow participation in, at least, both Finnish and English. Beyond questions of language per se, it is also important that union activities and communications are conducted in ways that accommodate the fact that international members will not always have the same 'background' knowledge and assumptions about unions and association law and practices. In keeping with a substantive vision of union democracy, we also think unions should value the benefits of having people from diverse backgrounds in decision-making roles and incorporate these considerations into the work of nominations/elections committees.

Unions and local associations depend on the initiative and contributions of their active members. For unions with significant international memberships, **it is important that resources and training offered for active members should be available also in English**, for example, informational guides to union practices and roles or the kinds of training in association activities that are currently available primarily in Finnish from TJS Opintokeskus.

It is an important action point to make information regarding membership fees as clear and easily accessible as possible. International members specifically might not be familiar with Finnish union practices and membership costs and benefits, including the earnings-related unemployment funds. For example, clearer information on fees in cases such as mixed grant and employment income and tax deduction opportunities for membership dues should be available at a glance.

The uncertainty or lack of knowledge about unions that some international academics and staff express is a potentially serious challenge in terms of readiness for any necessary industrial action. In the event of industrial actions, unions and employee negotiations organizations need to be prepared to communicate swiftly in multiple languages and be ready to proactively address questions from international members about how participating in such actions might affect them, for example if they have concerns about how striking might affect their employment or residence permit status. Wherever possible, international members should be actively encouraged to participate in strike committees, and forums organized to explain or prepare potential industrial actions should be organized with inclusive language practices in mind.

The shop steward system represents an important resource for international members, and we know that many shop stewards already do important work in supporting international members. Nevertheless, this is not a system with which international members are always familiar. Additional efforts should be made to continuously communicate its purposes and benefits. Further, the perspectives and common problems of international members could be further addressed in training that shop stewards receive.

Unions should continue or develop efforts to influence policy-making around improving conditions around residence permits, and take active, public stances against the imposition of racist, xenophobic, restrictionist migration policies. Growing attention to the potential importance of so-called ‘international talent’ is likely to shape these conversations as they apply to the university sector, but union activities and communications should always maintain solidarity with all workers and people on the move.

As a part of recognizing the broad range of issues that international members may care about and be affected by – and in keeping with long traditions of union solidarity across sectoral and national borders – **unions and associations need to also be prepared to productively respond and engage with calls for action or statements that may fall outside their traditional focus on specific work sectors in Finland.** More broadly, we think unions and associations would be well served to approach the different expectations and understandings of union activity that international members may bring with them as a valued source of potentially new ideas and practices.

As we have outlined, there are many specific actions that unions can take to support international members. We conclude by noting the central importance of broader structural issues in the university, such as the sector’s reliance on fixed-term contracts or the erosion of university democracy that all have important, specific impacts on the experiences of international members as well. We know that most unions in the sector are well-attuned to these issues, and we just note here that assertive work in these areas is important also for international members, and that there may, at times, be advantages to making the links between these issues more visible in union activities and communications.