

Recommendations to Tampere universities for supporting international researchers, teachers and staff

The following recommendations emerge from research with international researchers, teachers, and staff at Tampere universities, including a survey and a series of interviews (reports available from Tatte's website: <https://tieteentekijat.fi/en/tatte-international-working-group-finishes-research/>). They are also informed by input gathered from members of the university community at a range of events where that research was presented and discussed. The recommendations were prepared by members of the Tampere University Association of Researchers and Teachers' (Tatte) working group on international members, and they have been endorsed by Tatte's board. Taken together, the recommendations suggest a range of areas where there are opportunities to develop policies and practices that can support international members in doing the work they have been hired to do and contribute to creating a more inclusive and democratic university.

The work behind these recommendations stretched over the course of two years, and we recognize that this has been a busy time, in which many things have changed in the university and the world. The still shifting landscape of the Covid-19 pandemic and the geopolitics of war and displacement, including but not limited to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, continue to have global and local ramifications. News from the national political system suggesting the possibility for future investments in research, but also seemingly ever tightening basic funding for universities presents a mixed picture for academics and other university staff. Here at Tampere University, the effects of staff redundancies and the reorganization of support services continues to reverberate, and looming space reductions raise questions about what kind of community the university will be and how decisions about it will be made. We also recognize that new projects relevant to international members of the community have been ongoing throughout—from work around language policies and equality and non-discrimination to the HEI LIFE project's work on a national 'welcome package' and the launch of the Network for International Academics and Staff.

Even as much is in flux, the **survey and interviews also reveal the impact of persistent problems in the university sector.** For example, the university sector's reliance on short, fixed-term contracts has a broad negative impact on the conditions of academic work for nearly everyone, but it presents specific difficulties for many international members, if their right to reside in Finland is linked to their work contract. Further, our research shows that the uncertainty and pressures of fixed-term work contracts, hyper-competitive research funding, and a broken academic career model can play a significant role in hampering international members' efforts and motivations to make progress in learning the Finnish language, even if they otherwise value learning the language. Thus, while we present many specific and concrete recommendations based on the research, we also want to emphasize at the outset—and reiterate throughout—that **addressing these broader structural problems in the university sector is an important and necessary part of responding to the needs and aspirations of international members.** We also want to recognize the ongoing contributions of so many people across the university whose work already intersects with the issues we discuss here—from

HR and other support staff to shop stewards to researchers and teachers of all backgrounds and career stages. We deeply appreciate this work. While we recognize that implementing some of these recommendations would take more work, we are not seeking to simply add to everyone's workload. Instead, we offer these recommendations in the spirit of contributing to ongoing conversations about language and internationalization, but also necessarily about university democracy, the rights of workers, and the conditions of academic research and teaching more broadly.

We organize our recommendations into the following categories, although they obviously often overlap or intersect in complicated ways:

1. [Orientation and induction practices](#)
2. [Language practices and working life](#)
3. [Support for making a life in Finland beyond the workplace](#)
4. [Creating equal opportunities and preventing discrimination and harassment](#)

Orientation and induction practices

Orientation and induction practices happen at a crucial time for newly arriving international members of the community, and we appreciate that this seems to be broadly recognized as important across the universities. Nevertheless, the survey and interviews reveal a somewhat mixed picture in terms of orientation and induction in practice. For many participants in the research, this was one of the things that has worked best, but others seem to have 'fallen through the cracks'. These divergences can be explained, in part, in relation to the fact that participants in the research 'arrived' at different time periods and in different situations. Further, pandemic conditions and restrictions were a complicating factor for some. It has also been difficult to fully ascertain the effects of the reorganization of support staff on services for international members, although we note that the relatively high level of services that some participants noted receiving in the past can only be maintained with sufficient, dedicated staffing going forward.

The timing and targeting of international induction and support services should be carefully evaluated to minimize people 'falling through the cracks' and to ensure that services are available at the time when they are needed. For various reasons—such as a period of prior residence or a degree from a Finnish university—not everyone who could benefit from some of these services are immediately recognized as a new 'international' community member. It is also important that detailed and actionable information is available early enough to those who need it. As different policies and practices change both within and outside the universities, **staff should continue to receive active support in navigating their rights and obligations throughout their employment and changes in titles.** This could include, for example, reminders and guidance on tax matters and notes on changes in the collective agreement.

An adequate and stable contact point for support should be available to each international member starting from induction. The complexities of working life in a new and sizable environment such as the university cannot be fully presented in welcoming information packages and events. This could take the form of a mentorship program where new international members of the community are assigned as individual mentor for, at least, the first six months of employment. The mentor would support and help the mentee to become acquainted with the local workplace culture and (implicit) practices of the community. This task should be included in the mentor's workload. Ideally, mentors and mentees would be in a similar career position – this will enable orientation to the workplace practices in general, as well as to the tasks and aspects relating to specific job positions. Other versions of this suggestion included emphasis on the potential value of ongoing contact with a specific member of the HR staff knowledgeable about the issues that international members face living and working in Finland (as opposed to a generic email address). We see important potential in the new Buddy programme now being introduced and hope that it might fulfill some of these purposes. Nevertheless, as these kinds of suggestions emerged frequently in various forms during our research, we wanted to maintain them here.

Information regarding employee associations, shop stewards, and earnings-related unemployment funds should be presented to all incoming international staff and grant holders. We welcome the inclusion of basic information regarding trade unions in the 'welcome package' developed by the HEI LIFE project, but we also recommend the preparation of Tampere universities-specific information that would be distributed to all incoming international staff and long-term resource agreement holders at the same time that details around banking, taxes, and other arrival matters are handled. To be useful, such materials should provide concrete information about the shop steward system, the collective agreement, earnings-related unemployment funds, and all the employee associations active at Tampere universities, including their contact information/webpages, as well background on the usual services and activities of trade unions in Finland.

Language practices and working life

The question of language will continue to open up both difficulties and opportunities, and the complexity of these issues likely means that no single policy or set of practices will solve them. There are a number of important issues to consider, including academic freedom to pursue and present research in a chosen language, the need to recognize and value scholarship in range of languages (beyond only English, Finnish, and Swedish), and concerns about the status of the Finnish or Swedish language in scientific work. It should also be recognised that in academic contexts where expertise often needs to be communicated in English to the international research community, most academics alike have similar challenges when using other than their native language.

Furthermore, it is important to acknowledge that questions of language, like other aspects of international members' experiences, do not happen in a vacuum. Discussions of Finnish language and international members sometimes seem to assume that learning Finnish is a choice

that some international researchers just do not want to make. Undoubtedly, international members are diverse in terms of how long they may intend to stay in Finland or in their desire to learn Finnish. Nevertheless, for many this is less a straightforward choice and more a result of the uncertainty in career and life plans introduced by the prevalence of fixed-term contracts and the difficulties of career progression. The level of language influences also the scope of work—achieving an everyday level of conversational Finnish does not necessarily mean that one is prepared to engage in more demanding academic tasks such as teaching or job supervision in Finnish. We also acknowledge that there are significant differences already among faculties in how these issues are approached, so some of the recommendations may be more relevant to some than others.

Despite these complexities, there are clear actions the university and faculties can and should take:

Work toward improving professional language skills in both Finnish and English should be encouraged as a non-trivial component of work plans for staff who desire it. While we understand that this is currently allowed as a form of professional development, knowledge of this possibility seems uneven among staff and supervisors. We also note that time set aside for language learning should be ensured in workload, including by lowering expectations of workload in other areas, because adding work time in Sole™ does not mean that time is actually being created. As a matter of policy and routine practice, this should be offered as an opportunity instead of becoming a compulsory work task.

The university should itself provide or otherwise arrange high quality Finnish and English language courses at all levels to be available to staff, including grant researchers, in a predictable and clear way. These courses should take into account the schedules and specific learning needs of academics and university staff, and the effectiveness of language offerings arranged by the university from outside providers should be regularly evaluated. Up to date information about available language courses should be presented in a consistent and prominent place on intranet. This should also include clear information about how to enroll in regular university language courses and relevant courses available outside the university. We welcome recent moves to fund language courses outside the university when necessary for individual staff, and we hope this practice will continue.

Materials communicated by the university (guidelines, instructions, meeting agendas and minutes) should be made available in both Finnish and English, without delay. It should be noted that often language precision is less important than timely sharing of information with the acknowledgement that policies must be appropriately translated but perhaps documents that prepare meetings not.

Meetings, presentations, or discussion events that are meant to be for all members of a faculty, unit, or the university as a whole should, in principle, be conducted in such a way that all members of the relevant group can substantively participate. This does not mean that those meetings always need to be in English, although that may be a solution in some circumstances. Other possibilities include arranging simultaneous interpretation between Finnish

and English. Holding separate events in Finnish and English, while not necessarily something we want to encourage as a general matter, may also work when the primary purpose of the event is sharing information. What is important is that substantive participation is facilitated. For example, presenting information entirely in Finnish then asking non-Finnish speakers to participate in discussions can still exclude those members from understanding the basis of discussion. Event announcements should clearly explain how participation will be arranged.

The university should ensure inclusive language practices throughout its organizational structure. Opportunity to participate in different preparatory, decision-making bodies and working groups should be enabled for non-Finnish speakers by facilitating multi-language work (e.g. flexible use of both Finnish and English language), which in turn facilitates career progression regardless of language skills and enables all members of the community to participate in its governance. Each working group could internally agree on its practices based on its members' needs.

Supervisors and managers should receive appropriate preparation and ongoing training for supporting international academics and staff. This could emphasize strategies for creating a fair and inclusive workplace, examples of inclusive language practices and their benefits, and some basic understanding of the relationship between work contracts and residence permits (here, we have in mind not specific technicalities better addressed, for example, by HR, but rather basic knowledge of how the length of work contracts can affect one's residence permit status that may be relevant, for example, when planning a new hire for a project or when there is discretion about how to combine funding sources to extend a contract period).

Any and all language requirements in recruitment processes need to be carefully considered and negotiated. The necessity of any language requirements must be clearly justified and communicated transparently. As a principle, we oppose the addition of language learning requirements in hiring processes for fixed-term positions. The need for language learning requirements in recruitment for open-ended positions should be negotiated on an individual basis with job candidates in terms of employer's expectations and support for developing language skills. Any such requirement necessitates significant support and investment from the employer. No language learning requirements or pressures should be imposed retroactively on existing staff members.

Language support services offered to academics and staff (including grant researchers) should be further developed. As we understand it, the university currently provides a number of language services geared toward supporting the use of English by staff, including some translation and copy-editing services, as well as language assistance specific to research funding applications. The availability of these services should be evaluated to see if they meet existing needs, and similar services should be explored to support the use of Finnish by non-native speakers as well.

Equal opportunities for professional development and career progression should be available to international members. It is important to ensure equal opportunities for career-related merits such as grants, university pedagogy courses, teaching awards, docentships, and

positions of trust. In addition to developing its own practices in these areas, the university and its members should advocate for inclusive practices in scholarly associations and other relevant spaces beyond the university itself.

The university should proactively support and facilitate the societal impact of international researchers in Finland. Language barriers are an important question here, but so are the different kinds of professional networks and background knowledge that people may have. This could include promoting international members' research to relevant audiences, creating opportunities for researchers and community members to interact, providing substantive support for dealing with language barriers, and actively including the perspectives of international members in the development of societal impact strategies and plans.

If the universities want to strategically commit to internationalization, it is essential that there are ample opportunities for promoting, informing, and facilitating internationalization of the community as a whole. This should include opportunities both outside the university - such as mobility and international networks - and internally such as building multilingual environments and internationalizing curricula (e.g. closer interaction between programs taught in Finnish and English.).

Support for making a life in Finland beyond the workplace

Making a life in a new country is often accompanied by uncertainties and stress; thus it is important to understand that international members have lives and concerns beyond the workplace that need to be supported. Partners and families are often uprooted when the university hires international staff, and they are also key in the wellbeing of the hired employees.

The university should provide relocation support to its incoming international employees and researchers when moving to Finland. This includes more practical support and guidance—not just information—with relocation processes including pre-arrival procedures like residence permits, moving expenses, accommodation, and post-arrival procedures related to local registration, taxation, banking, and health insurance. It is essential that the university's relocation support extends also towards the needs of the partner/family accompanying an international member (for example, providing help with arranging schooling for children).

Support related to the employment of partners of international employees and researchers should continue to be developed. This could take the form of exploring policies and practices around possible 'partner hires' (where possible), continuing to develop programs like Hidden Gems, which several participants in research spoke highly of, and additional support with finding appropriate continuing education or degree studies opportunities.

The university should provide information and training related to Finnish society and culture, working culture in Finland, democratic institutions, and citizens' rights and responsibilities. This could be organized in cooperation with other local organizations, such as

the City of Tampere and its international programs, in the form of events, trainings, and socializing opportunities for international members and their families.

Creating equal opportunities and preventing discrimination and harassment

Alarming accounts of discrimination, racism, and harassment emerged over the course of the research. These accounts raise urgent questions about how such incidents are addressed at the university. Clear processes and support for people experiencing discrimination and harassment are vital. Beyond responding to individual instances, proactive work to address unequal positioning in both the workplace and the broader society is also necessary.

The university should commit resources, develop practices and foster discussion forums for ensuring diversity, equity and inclusion in its community. Forums for discussing challenging aspects of academic work and supporting equal opportunities are important avenues for this. Building an accessible, inclusive, and multilingual environment requires togetherness and an open dialogue.

Submitting reports on occurrences of discrimination and harassment should have as low a threshold as possible. Considering the vulnerability of the affected party both psychologically and professionally, reporting of incidents should be encouraged even for ambiguous situations and further discussed and evaluated, rather than deterred through complex and lengthy intranet handbook pages. The university's position on discrimination and harassment and information on how to report such experiences should be included also in the induction package for the new employees.

The university should advocate for more inclusive policies and practices in the broader society. For example, in legal changes affecting practicalities such as access to banking and e-identification, or in policies related to employability of its international graduates in both public and private sector. Additionally, in a sector organized around so much fixed-term work, we also think it is incumbent on the university to advocate for a well-funded and accessible system of social security for everyone living in Finland.

Recognizing that (international) academics and staff are affected in a range of ways by 'global' events happening outside of Finland, the university should offer concrete support to members who are affected where possible. It is also appropriate for the university to take actions or make statements in accordance with the values of the university, as it has done to some extent, for example in response to the invasion of Ukraine. In doing so, however, it is important that this is not only done when geopolitically convenient.