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Towards understanding the factors affecting the employability of international
graduates: the case of Finland

Yulia Shumilova
yulia.shumilova@uta.fi

Yuzhuo Cai
yuzhuo.cai@uta.fi

University of Tampere

Abstract:

Currently there is a global tendency that the employability of graduates is used as a benchmark to measure the quality of higher education, hence the concept gaining importance in higher education policies and strategies (Teichler, 2009, p. 15, 16). “In general terms, employability is defined as having the skills and abilities to find employment, remain in employment or obtain new employment as, and when, required” (Crossman & Clarke, 2010, p. 602). We follow Harvey (2001) who states that graduate employability cannot be a purely institutional achievement, it is rather contingent on a number of variables such as “students’ previous experience, their extracurricular activities, their career intentions and networks, [...]” and the peculiarities of the recruitment procedures used by the employer (Harvey, 2001, p. 102).

However, despite an increasing number of studies dealing with the various aspects of employability, the transition of the *international* graduates to the world of work has not been properly researched. This paper represents an attempt to draw a preliminary theoretical framework to explore the factors affecting the employability of international graduates from the point of view of multiple stakeholders. Furthermore, the review of relevant literature and examples drawn from previous research (based on the case of Finland) are used to suggest a few tentative hypotheses for further research.

Key words: international graduate employability, Finland

Introduction

It is widely recognized that international graduates are not only a source of high-skilled labor force with a broad range of positive attributes, but that they also bring a lot of benefits to their host country and alma maters including among others support with international marketing and outreach, talent acquisition, and commercialization efforts. Acknowledging these benefits, Finland's recent higher education internationalization strategy (2009-2015) emphasized the efforts to increase the number of international students up to 20 000 by 2015¹, promote the export of expertise and enhance even more the international competitiveness of Finnish higher education (HE). At the same time in the context of the ageing population, the Finnish government is trying to make the Finnish labor market attractive to foreign graduates from Finnish universities (Kärki, 2005).

However, until now, the foreign graduates in Finland have been facing many practical barriers when trying to enter the labor market including the language barrier, complicated bureaucracy related to residence permits, closed professional networks, and limited career options (Vehaskari, 2010). Moreover, according to the Finland's New Universities Act of 2009, Finnish HEIs are now allowed charging tuition fees (in experimental mode) from degree students coming outside the European Union (EU) or European Economic Area (EEA). And according to the preliminary studies on the effect of introducing tuition fees in Finland, even fewer international students might choose to study in this country (Kärki, 2005). This apprehension can be summarized by the following quote: "With same expense I can get education at universities that are better rated in terms of their international ranking" (*ibid.*:39). On the whole there is a perceived inconsistency between Finland's policy goals to attract more international students, the transition to the market-driven approach in HE internationalization and the scarcity of support available for those who wish to stay in Finland after their studies.

As a response to these trends in internationalization strategies – shifting from aid to trade, the HE researchers in Finland and other countries have started paying closer attention to the topics like the relevance of international mobility for employment (Garam, 2005; Crossman & Clarke, 2010); export of educational services and the employers beliefs on hiring international graduates (Cai, 2011). Along the general line of research on the mechanisms of transition from HE to employment (Lindberg, 2008; Teichler, 2009;) and employability issues (Allen & de Weert, 2007; Krempkow & Wilke, 2009; Harvey 2001; Pavlin, 2010) an urgent need was also felt for more studies on what happens to *international* students, as a separate target group, after they graduate. However, unlike in the Anglo-Saxon countries, where international education is one of the major export items, with graduate surveys representing an important quality management tool, the topic of international graduate employability is yet quite new for research agendas in continental Europe where HE has traditionally been tuition fee free.

Methodology

At the individual level, the graduate employability is usually explored through graduate tracer surveys, interviews with the graduates, employers and other stakeholders and life course analysis. Recognizing the fact that "neither quantitative nor qualitative methods are sufficient, by themselves, to capture the trends and details of a situation" (Ivankova, Creswell, & Stick, 2006, p. 3) and given the complexity of the "employability" phenomenon discussed below, we suggest that the best way to explore it would be by using the mixed method design. This paper reflects the theoretical and methodological choices made when preparing the quantitative part of the study on international graduate employability in the framework of the Valoa project² in Finland.

¹ Which will be an 85% increase compared to 2007 (Ciulinaru, 2010)

² Valoa is an EU founded national project promoting the employment opportunities of international degree students in Finland.

The first stage of the research will involve developing the list of preliminary assumptions/hypotheses on the basis of literature review; the operationalization of hypotheses in the survey design and the statistical testing of the hypotheses through surveying all international graduates of 2009 and 2010 in 16 higher education institutions of Finland. Furthermore, the discovered correlations between the variables will be explained through complimentary interviews with international graduates (N=10) and their employers in Finland and abroad. Hence, we will use the mixed method design in a sequential way, seeking to elaborate or expand the findings of one method with another.

With the help of the Valoa survey and complimentary interviews we hope to:

- obtain a broad overview of study background, job search strategies, the employment situation and occupation of targeted international graduates,
- based on their experiences and perceptions, to explore the factors affecting international graduate employability
- highlight the strengths and weaknesses of international higher education in Finland, and develop recommendations for ensuring a smoother transition to the world of work

However, we feel that later a more holistic approach will be needed to accommodate the perspectives of multiple stakeholders on international graduate employability and the ways of enhancing it. The case studies of HE institutions will supplement the research design that will make part of Ms. Shumilova's PhD research (see Figure 1).

Theoretical perspectives

Traditionally, the relations between education attainment and labour market outcomes, have been studied by applying human capital theory (Becker, 1964; Schultz, 1961) or job market signalling (screening) theory (Arrow, 1973; Spence, 1973). Although both theories imply a positive relation between investment in education and labour market return, their explanations of how education affects employment differ (Cai, 2011). Human capital theory argues that education increases individuals' productivity, which consequently enhances job performance and leads to higher salaries. However, in the case of international education this link is not always that straightforward as the graduates might have to adjust their salary expectations upon returning to their home country or miss out on some employment opportunities in the host country due to necessary cultural and social integration.

In contrast, signalling theory argues that education only serves as a tool for job-seekers to signal their inherent ability to employers. In other words, it is the innate ability not education itself that increases productivity. For instance, it is assumed that "job-seekers with a higher education are presumably more adaptive, more motivated and have greater learning abilities" (Pavlin, S., 2010:3). Only very few studies deal with screening/signalling of international education in the labour markets (Cai, 2011). Wiers-Jenssen (2008) discusses the signalling effects of foreign education by arguing that a foreign education experience generally signals certain country specific skills (e.g. mastery of a foreign language and intercultural competences) and characteristics of job seekers to employers. The researcher asserts that foreign education's signalling effect is weak, if it is less known by the employers. The practical example of such weak signal would be the rather new joint degree diplomas of Erasmus Mundus graduates that are not always understood by the employers. Therefore, we have included in our survey a question concerning challenges with the international degree recognition in countries other than the host ones.

Recognising the positive impact of HE in general and international HE, in particular, on the development of individuals' competences and employability, it yet remains unclear what really matters in the recruitment process: the human capital shaped by the HE institutions, or the inherent capabilities developed during the student life (Allen et al., 2009). Moreover, factors

external to HE, such as social background, gender, age, ethnic affiliation, career aspirations, networks, the quality and availability of work experience; access to information; the peculiarities of the job search behavior; and labour market conditions, are increasingly believed to be affecting the employability of graduates (Pavlin, 2010; Kremkow & Wilke, 2009; Lindberg, 2008: 378; Harvey, 2001:102). These aspects are not reflected by either human capital or signalling theory. In the cross-border context the list of influential external factors might be even longer. For instance, we assume that the initial motivation to come to study abroad may influence one's employment prospects. To overcome these gaps we have looked into the definition of employability concept, the skills agenda, the network perspective, the "push-pull factors" model (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002); and have included a number of relevant questions on the external variables in our survey (See the draft questionnaire in the Appendix 2)

Employability concept

There have been many attempts to define and measure employability as an indication of quality of individual institutions as well as the social relevance of HE as a whole (Lindberg, 2008). The university rankings or national evaluations in some countries, for instance, use the employment rates of institutions' graduates as one of the criteria (Harvey, 2001). Hence there is a notion of 'institutional employability' as the set of outcomes of the universities' implicit and explicit measures to enable graduate employability. Another approach is to view employability through the eyes of employers as the propensity of the graduate to exhibit the skills that employers expect to be necessary for efficient functioning of their organization (Rothwell & Arnold, 2007; Thijsen et al., 2008). However at this stage we are more interested in the employability as an individual attribute involving the graduate's ability and skills to gain, retain and (when necessary) find new fulfilling/satisfying work (Harvey, 2001; Hillage & Pollard, 1998). The key aspect in this definition is "fulfilling/satisfying" as the employability is not the same as actual employment, or the fact of getting any salaried job.

The concept of employability is closely linked to 'professional success', which can be described by a number of subjective and objective indicators such as: "a) the smoothness of the transition from higher education to the labour market (duration of job search); b) income and socio-economic status; c) a position appropriate to the level of educational attainment; d) desirable employment conditions (independent, demanding and responsible work); and e) a high degree of job satisfaction" (Pavlin, 2010:5). The reason for starting with individual level is that the feedback on international graduates' success or challenges may later be used by HE institutions to manage the quality of their programs and attract more international students, which is high on the HE policy agenda in Finland. Following Harvey, 2001, and Crossman & Clarke, 2010, we also recognize that employability cannot be a purely institutional achievement, rather an outcome of the joint initiatives of the identified stakeholders including - students, graduates, academics, program coordinators, project managers, employers, representatives of relevant associations (e.g. AIESEC) and policy makers (See Figure 1 in Appendix 1). To sum it up, the concept of employability breaks down to the following main constituents: ability to gain employment – measured by the employment rates; objective and subjective job success factors, and skills relevant for employers.

The skills agenda

The skills/ competences agenda is very prominent in the debates around the concept of employability and will inform part of the study on the relevance of skills gained in Finnish HE institutions for the world of work in terms of the associated expectations and tensions among students/graduates and employers. While the employers tend to be generally happy with the graduates' subject specific skills, they have been less satisfied with the generic or transferrable

skills (Yorke, 2006). Among the most important generic skills identified by various researchers exploring the employers and graduates views are:

- analytical/research skills
- computer/ technology skills
- interpersonal/teamwork skills
- communication skills, both verbal and written
- leadership/problem-solving skills
- creative/innovative skills
- self-management
- life long learning
- emotional intelligence (Hoo et al., 2009; Badillo-Amador et al., 2005; Shmarov & Fedyukin, 2004; Department of Education Science and Training, 2002).

This is in line with the paradigm of the ‘knowledge society’ that emphasizes the importance of flexibility, adaptability, entrepreneurialism, readiness, etc. to improve one’s probability for professional success (Lindberg, 2008; Brown and Hesketh, 2004; Chisholm, 1999). Yet, in the case of international education, the country specific human capital theory suggests that additional skills might be useful such as the language and cultural skills and professional skills adapted to national requirements (Støren & Wiers-Jenssen, 2010, p.31). Besides these, the researchers (Garam, 2005; Salisbury et al., 2009, p. 120) argue that a broad range of skills and traits can be developed during the period of study abroad, such as social or life skills; a deeper understanding and respect for global issues, more favourable attitudes toward other cultures, improved personal and professional self image, self-confidence, ability to handle ambiguity and difficult situations, insight into their own value systems and overall maturity.

However, according to Holmes, (2001: 112), the skills agenda – so popular these days – can be criticized for three reasons. First, the meaning of *skill* can be different in the discourse of academics and employers. Second, the employers do not want ‘skills’ per se, they rather need the employees to perform efficiently and to possess certain attributes. Third, the “skills agenda provides little help in understanding the complexity of post-graduation career trajectories, for it assumes that the process of gaining a job is simply a matter of matching skills required and skills possessed. [...Therefore,] what is also needed is a way of framing, in conceptual and theoretical terms, the *interactional processes* by which a graduate and prospective employer engage with each other, and the outcomes of such interactions.” (ibid.). In this perspective, the job assignment model (Sattinger, 1993) focusing on job - skill/education level matches and mismatches can only have a limited role in understanding the factors affecting employability.

Allen & de Weert (2007:62) suggested analysing the job-education (mis)matches according to the adequacy of level and field of education using the following categories: ‘job at a higher level than own education’, ‘job at own level and within own field’, ‘job at own level but in different field’, ‘job at lower tertiary level’, ‘job below tertiary level’. However, we felt that it is better to have two separate questions concerning the correspondence of level and field of HE obtained to the job (see Q 32, 33 of the survey).

Types of HE to work transition

The traditional beliefs in the rationality of the labor market in regulating the demand and supply side have waned recently as more research was done on the transition process from HE to work. The studies showed, for instance, that the specific dynamics of the transition could provide the smart but less qualified graduates with better employment opportunities (Teichler, 2009). Therefore, in order to understand the mechanisms behind a smooth transition from HE to the world of work, it is not enough to simply identify the gap between the skills required by the employers and skills possessed by the graduates.

After taking a closer look to the transactions between the stakeholders identified in Figure 1 it is also necessary to see how these transactions and other variables affect the job search strategies adopted by the graduates and the resulting types of transition from HE to the world of work. Lindberg (2008: 377) identifies the following types of transition:

- 1) *Standard or traditional*, characterized by a short job search and substantial returns to education in terms of wages and socio-economic prestige
- 2) *Involuntary deviation from the standard* featuring prolongation of job search and lowered expectations about the quality of jobs and returning to studies as an alternative to being unemployed.
- 3) *Voluntary deviation from standard* associated with return to studies after completing the first degree in order to enhance career opportunities or acquire new skills for a career change
- 4) *Deviation from standard due to relative disadvantage* characterized by a lack of formal and/or informal connections with working life; misguided job search strategies; becoming an ‘eternal’ student.

Given the vulnerability of international students (who do not have all the social benefits offered to the local students), we assume that they will use an array of coping strategies and mainly fall in categories 2-4 featuring non-standard transition from HE to work if they are willing to stay in a host country.

Network perspective

It is believed that the individuals’ actions are not only determined by their personal characteristics, but by their social connections, which may, for instance, filter their career choices (See the psycho-social model of employability by Fugate et al., 2004; Dassen, 2010). This statement is connected to the social capital metaphor explaining the competitive advantage of certain people and organizations by the fact that they are better connected (Burt, 2000). The importance of social networks for finding employment is well documented (Calvo-Armengol & Jackson, 2003; Amuedo-Dorantes & Mundra, 2004). Granovetter (1973, 1983), for instance, found in his study that more than 50% of jobs are obtained through informal contacts (or social networks). And that the majority of those 50% obtained information on a vacancy through ‘weak ties’ with acquaintances rather than through strong ties with friends. The thesis of the “strength of weak ties” is partially explained by “the fact that acquaintances move in social circles distinct from those of your close friends. As a result, weak ties may offer inside information on alternative job openings” (Amuedo-Dorantes & Mundra, 2004:5). The role of social networks in securing a job may differ from country to country, but generally two questions help to clarify this role at the individual level: (1) whether the person knew anybody in their current workplace before accepting the job, and (2) whether they heard about the job from acquaintance or friend (*ibid.*:4). The knowledge on the way international graduates acquire information in the job search process may prompt necessary steps for universities and other involved actors to help make the transition smoother, though organizing networking events, for instance. We have included a couple of questions related to international graduates’ social integration during their studies and the pertaining challenges as well as the option “I used personal connections” in the question about job search techniques used.

The case of Finland

Apart from 16 universities, Finland has a strong polytechnic sector represented by 25 Universities of Applied Sciences (UAS) offering mostly professionally oriented Bachelor degree programs. One of the enrolment criteria for UAS Master level programs is – having at least three years of work experience. These peculiarities of Finnish HE are reflected in the employment rate patterns given below.

Table 1: Main type of activity of graduates from Universities and Universities of Applied Sciences (Polytechnics) one year after graduation at the end of 2009

Level of education	Graduates, total 2008 100 %	Employed, total %	Full-time students %	Unemployed %	Others %
Bachelor, polytechnic degree	20 535	85,0	4,1	7,5	3,4
Bachelor, University degree	7 851	68,7	27,9	1,8	1,6
Master, polytechnic degree	673	95,5	0,6	2,7	1,2
Master, university degree	21 249	86,4	3,7	5,7	4,3

Source: Official Statistics of Finland, 2011

The similar data on the employment status of international graduates is yet to be collected, however, according to the OECD report (2009), the unemployment rate for foreign graduates with tertiary education in 2009 was almost twice higher than those of native born (male: 17,9% against 8.7 %, female 14,6% as compared to 7,4% respectively). No wonder, that more international graduates preferred to enrol into further full-time studies (11.9% against 6.4% of Finnish ones) as observed in the study of international graduates in Universities of Applied Sciences (Majakulma, 2011). Nevertheless, this difference in the unemployment rates among native and foreign-born graduates is typical for the majority of Western European countries (Johansson, 2008).

When analysing the reasons for coming to Finland to study, the researchers are usually interested in the “pull” factors. According to the results of Student Barometer survey conducted in Finland in 2011, “what matters for students when choosing a study place are teaching quality, cost of study and reputation. However, ranking reputation is not that important for students studying in Finland and Finland is still chosen as a destination in general rather than a particular institution” (CIMO web-site). The tuition free education was important when choosing Finland as a study abroad destination for 57% of students surveyed in 2005 (Kärki, 2005). The possibility to study in English and the abundance of English-language courses available were also important reasons for coming to study in Finland (Garam, 2003). However, oftentimes the course announced to be taught in English are offered only through a self-study and book exam option (Ciularu, 2010). Besides, taking up studies in English may do more harm than good to the international students in terms of employability in Finland (Majakulma, 2011).

When evaluating the quality of HE in Finland, the Student Barometer survey showed that “Finland is doing well on physical spaces and conditions for studying, technology, learning support and entry services. However, the course content and quality of lectures was ranked lower than in Europe in general. The biggest weaknesses were seen in employability, career services and living costs” (CIMO web-site), which is reflected in the existing brain drain among the highly-skilled graduates (Strategy for the Internationalization of Higher Education Institutions in Finland 2009–2015). Bearing in mind, that foreigners comprise only 2.2 % of the HE degree students in Finland, whereas the average of foreigners in OECD countries is 5.3 %, it is also recognized that the Finnish HE and research is still characterized by low level of internationalization (ibid.).

Thus, it seems to be difficult to keep the foreign talent to work in the country. An earlier survey of international degree students in Finland, shows that 21% of students were planning to leave Finland when asked about their future plans after graduating (Kärki, 2005). Eight percent felt that they would like to stay, but it was not possible, with the main reason being – difficulties in finding employment (ibid.) And the main reasons for not being able to find a job in Finland were quoted to be – the lack of Finnish/Swedish language skills, the lack of the right contacts and the lack of work experience (ibid., Ciularu, 2010). These findings are consistent with the

statistical data of 2007 showing that out of 1 332 foreigners who graduated from the Finnish universities, only 67% remained in Finland one year later. In our questionnaire we have included questions concerning the push-pull factors for staying in or leaving Finland and the perceived difficulties with finding employment. Yet it might be difficult to reach those who left, because the postal addresses are only updated after the first move abroad and not all Finnish HE institutions keep the e-mail database for international alumni.

Apart from surveying the international students and graduates, the employers' beliefs and perceptions have been studied by several researchers in Finland (Garam, 2005; Söderquist, 2005, Laine & Kujanpää, 2008; Cai, 2011). Here are some of their findings vis-à-vis international education. Most of the employers interviewed by Laine & Kujanpää (2008) (N=13) reported "having no real need for foreign labour. There were some companies that had employed foreigners because there were not enough Finnish workers available [...Yet,] almost every company expected their employees to speak Finnish at a decent level" (Laine & Kujanpää, 2008). The study abroad experience and the associated with it developed intercultural competences are only valued by Finnish employers when the company is involved in international operations. Otherwise, the work experience gained in Finland is preferred to international one (Garam, 2005).

Cai (2011) who studied the beliefs of Finnish employers (N=18) in China towards Chinese graduates educated in Finland came up with the following conclusions:

-There are around 300 Finnish companies in China, but this information is not available to the job seekers, nor do employers know how to find the returnees with Finnish HE qualifications

-Only six of the interviewed companies had employees with a Finnish HE degree (max. 3 persons)

-The overall perception of the graduates with the Finnish HE degree among these employers is positive, appreciating their practical skills, the intercultural perspectives and understanding of Finnish corporate culture.

-However, the returnees may also be considered overqualified for some jobs. Also, their salary expectations do not live up to what Finnish employers in China are ready to offer. And these graduates often do not have any work experience and lack the network of contacts in China (so important for sales jobs).

Based on these preliminary findings, it is clear that more research is needed to understand the perceptions of employers and the recruitment process in the context of cross-border education. Bailly (2008), claims that such perceptions are shaped via trial and error process, based on the actual performance of the employed international graduates. By adding complimentary interviews with the employers to our study we would also raise awareness and contribute to public learning on the availability of foreign talent in Finland.

Hypotheses

- 1) There might be variations of employment rate of international graduates between study field, level of studies, students' home countries, type of institution (University vs. Polytechnic sector), the country of employment (host country, home country or elsewhere), and the field of employment.
- 2) The following factors may affect the employment opportunities of international graduates:
 - The initial motivation to move to the host country
 - Certain skills developed during HE studies abroad, such as cross-cultural skills and language proficiently in English and, especially in the host country's language.
 - The work experience prior to studies in host country or gained during the study.
 - The degree of socio-cultural integration during the studies abroad

- The job searching techniques and access to information on employment through networks
 - The availability and quality of student and career services
- 3) Given the difficulties of finding employment reflected in several studies of international students and graduates in Finland, we assume that one of the popular coping strategies of staying in Finland is taking up further HE studies, including 2nd Master's or PhD programs.

Conclusions

From students' perspective, the employability factor is one of the key components associated with the quality of education, while from the university administrators' perspective – good employment rates of their graduates will help successfully market the educational programs, build their reputation and raise the prestige. To see the specific added value the Finnish higher education is providing, it is important to investigate both the employers' beliefs with regard to the relevance of international graduates' skills and the graduates' perceptions of what skills are needed for a successful career in a host or home country. As the international graduates are considered to be more vulnerable as opposed to the local students (Walters, 2011), we assume that a number of factors not related to their subject specific or even generic skills will result in labor market disadvantage and preclude them from staying in Finland or result in some type of deviation in HE to work transition. Hence, it is necessary to explore the “push-pull” factors influencing the decisions to leave Finland and move to another (home?) country. Bearing in mind the multifaceted nature of the ‘employability’ concept, it should also be explored from the point of view of other stakeholders (in addition to graduates and employers) through policy analysis and by investigating the HEIs' strategies of responding to the changing labor market demands (Teichler, 2009).

The previous studies stressed that in coming to Finland to study students want to start a life here rather than just obtain a degree. On the positive note, there is an opportunity for them to extend their residence permit for 6 months after graduation to look for a job. In addition, the EU funded projects like Workplace Pirkanmaa and Valoa are aimed to help the international students to enhance their employability or entrepreneurship skills, through job fairs and other networking events; mentoring programs and awareness raising campaigns. Yet more joint efforts are required, especially with the view of helping students with the Finnish language mastery, networking with the potential employers and gaining the work experience – to overcome the typical obstacles on the way to successful employment in Finland.

Questions for future research:

- 1) How do universities identify and measure the employability of their graduates?
- 2) What are the expectations, tensions, and best practices of the key actors involved in the transition from international HE to the world of work?
- 3) What patterns of HE- to-work transition can be identified among the international graduates?
- 4) What are the factors affecting the international graduate employability from the point of view of the identified stakeholders?
- 5) What are the “push-pull” factors influencing the graduates' decisions to leave Finland and move to home country or elsewhere?
- 6) What is the role of networking in the transition from international HE to work?

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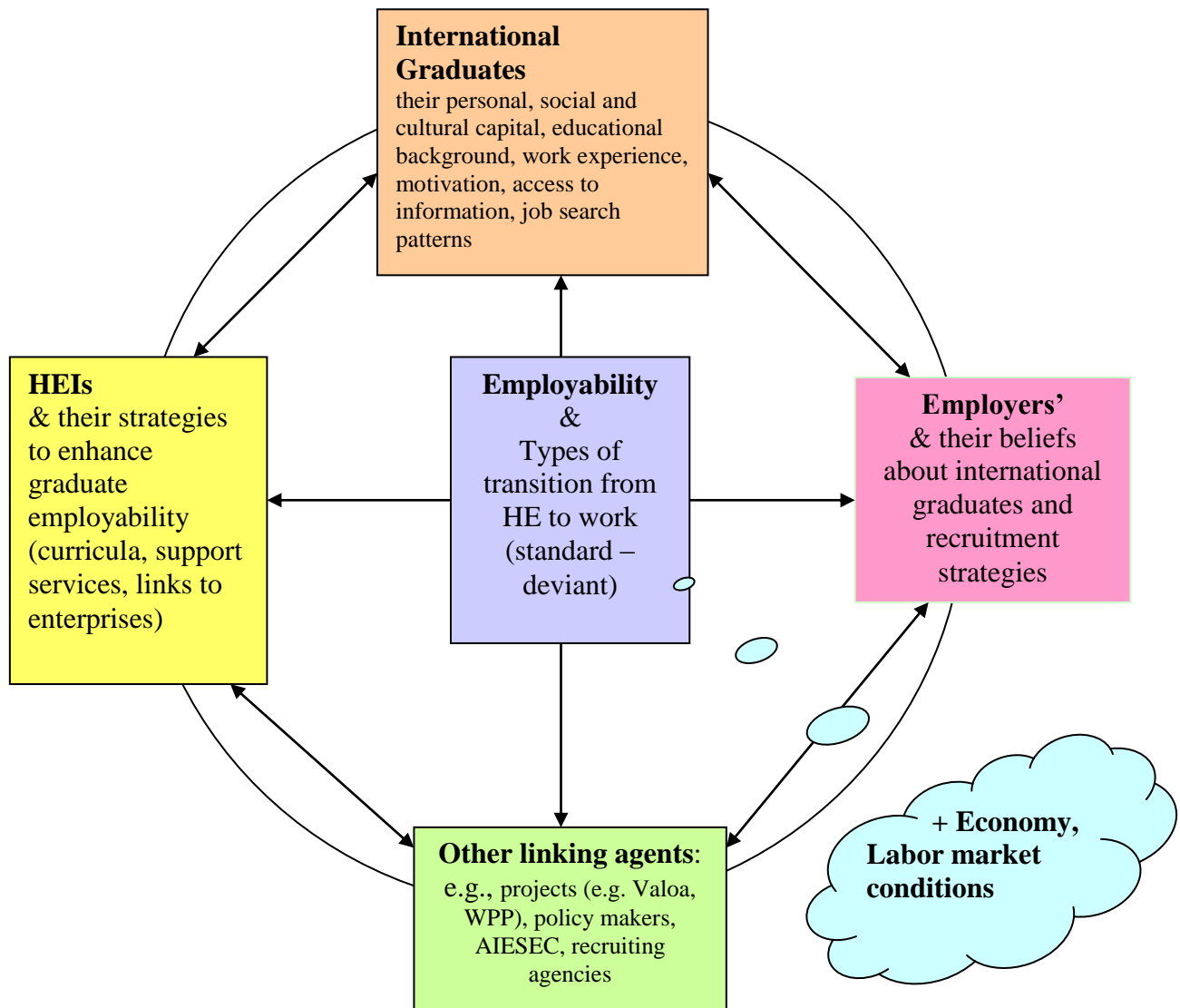
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Appendix 1

Figure 1. Multiple stakeholders and factors affecting international graduate employability



Appendix 2

(Draft) Valoa survey on employability of international graduates in Finland

Dear graduates,

We kindly ask you to participate in a survey aimed at all international graduates from Finnish higher education institutions who completed their degree studies in 2009 or 2010.

The survey is part of the research conducted by Higher Education Group (HEG), University of Tampere, Finland in the framework of VALOA project. Valoa is an EU founded national project promoting the employment opportunities of international degree students in Finland.

With the help of this survey we hope to:

- obtain a broad overview of study background, job search strategies, the employment situation and occupation of targeted international graduates,
- based on your experiences and perceptions, to explore the factors affecting international graduate employability
- highlight the strengths and weaknesses of international higher education in Finland, and develop recommendations for ensuring a smoother transition to the world of work

The data provided by you in this questionnaire will only be used for statistical purposes and will not reveal your identity. It should take no longer than 15 minutes to complete all the questions. Each participant to the survey has the chance to receive the final study report once it is ready. Thank you in advance for contributing to the success of this research.

Instructions: Please fill in the relevant information and tick “√” or “x” the boxes that apply. Then return the questionnaire in the self-addressed envelope attached, by _____, 2011. The questionnaire can also be filled in at _____
(web-link)

Before undertaking degree studies in Finland

1. In which country have you completed your secondary school studies?

Was it your home country? Yes No

2. What was the main reason for you to move to Finland initially?

higher education degree studies

other studies

employment

family reasons (including boyfriend/girlfriend)

other, please specify _____

3. If your initial motivation was ‘higher education degree studies’, was Finland your first choice among study abroad destinations?

- Yes No

If no, please specify what other countries you applied to for higher education studies

4. Prior to your higher education degree studies that you completed in Finland in 2009/2010, have you been employed or received any other higher education/ traineeship in your home country, Finland or elsewhere? Tick all that apply and mention the length of the experience. Multiple choice possible

	In home country	In Finland	elsewhere	Period
higher education studies				___ years ___ months
traineeship				___ years ___ months
full-time employment				___ years ___ months
part-time employment				___ years ___ months

5. How long have you lived in Finland before taking up your degree studies there?

- <=1 week
 >1 week - <=1 month
 >1 month - <=6 months
 >6 months - <=1 year
 >1 year - <=3 years
 >3 years - <=5 years
 >5 years

6. How important were the following reasons for you when deciding to take up higher education degree studies in Finland? Please rank the following factors by circling the corresponding number in each row.

	Least important Most important				
	←—————→				
Free of charge education	1	2	3	4	5
Reputation of higher education institution(s)	1	2	3	4	5
Possibility to study in English / Finnish / Swedish	1	2	3	4	5
Desired program not available in my home country	1	2	3	4	5
Available funding (scholarship) opportunities	1	2	3	4	5
Easier enrollment compared to programs in other countries	1	2	3	4	5
A chance to improve my career prospects in home country	1	2	3	4	5
A gateway to work in Finland during the studies	1	2	3	4	5
A prospect of building a career in Finland after the graduation	1	2	3	4	5
An opportunity to emigrate from my home country	1	2	3	4	5
A gateway to study/work in other countries	1	2	3	4	5
Reputation of Finland as a place to live	1	2	3	4	5
Opportunities to travel in Europe	1	2	3	4	5
An opportunity to learn Finnish language	1	2	3	4	5
An opportunity to learn other foreign languages	1	2	3	4	5
Someone's recommendation	1	2	3	4	5

Please specify, if you had any other reasons (e.g. joint degree studies; my employer sent me to Finland to study)

Studies in Finland

7. Please provide information on the studies that you completed in Finland in 2009/2010 in the table below. Please tick and fill in the boxes that apply.

	Bachelor	Master
How long did it take you to complete the degree in Finland? (Please specify the enrolment and graduation dates)	Enrolled __mm__yy Graduated __mm__yy	Enrolled __mm__yy Graduated __mm__yy
What was the main language of instruction?		
English		
Finnish		
Swedish		
Which higher education institution did you attend?		
List of Institutions...		
Other, please specify		
What was the name of your degree program?		
Which cluster did your studies belong to? Please choose a corresponding <u>code</u> from the list below.		
Cluster list to be confirmed...		

8. Did you participate in an internship/ traineeship during your studies in Finland?

Yes No

If no, please explain why _____

If yes, please specify which country did you take up your internship in during your studies in Finland?

Finland Home country Elsewhere (Please specify) _____

To what extent your internship was related to your field of studies:

not at all somewhat fully

The length of your internship: _____ months

9. Have you had any other work experience apart from the internship during your studies in Finland?

No Yes

If yes, please specify how relevant it was to your field of studies:

not at all somewhat fully

The length of your work experience during studies in Finland: _____ months

10. What other activities linking your studies to the labor market did you participate in at your higher education institution in Finland? You can have multiple choices.

- Thesis writing in collaboration with companies/organizations
- Project work in collaboration with companies/organizations
- Lectures, seminars given by representatives of business/ industry or government officials
- Career guidance sessions
- CV writing workshop
- Other, please specify _____

11. Have you participated in an international student exchange program during your studies in Finland? If yes, please mention the country(ies)

- No
- Yes, in _____

12. Was your study program a joint degree program?

- No
- Yes

If yes, how long did you study in Finnish higher education institution? ____ years ____ months

13. How would you evaluate your skills in Finnish language?

- none
- basic
- intermediate
- advanced

14. What type of Finnish language course provision did you have during the degree studies that you completed in 2009/ 2010?

- not available in my institution
- offered optionally
- were a compulsory part of my curriculum

Please comment if you had any challenges with enrolling into a Finnish language course at your higher education institution _____

15. How important were the following groups of people in making your adjustment/integration in Finland easier? Please circle the relevant number in each row.

	least important ← → most important				
natives (Finns)	1	2	3	4	5
people from your own ethnic background / home country	1	2	3	4	5
people with other immigrant background	1	2	3	4	5

16. What are the 2 main aspects of living in Finland that you found challenging? (e.g. in terms of access to information, cultural guidance, practical matters, etc.)

After graduation

17. After graduating from Finnish higher education institution you: (Please tick one of the options that best describes your mobility pattern and fill in the blanks where applicable)

- Settled in Finland

- Returned to your home country _____ months after graduation and currently reside there
- Left Finland _____ months after graduation and currently reside elsewhere. Please specify where: _____
- Other, please specify _____

18. If you left Finland, are you planning to return?

- Yes
- No
- It depends on _____

19. Have you had any difficulties with the recognition of your degree obtained in Finland?

- No
- Yes

If yes, please comment _____

20. Please give your main reasons for staying in Finland or leaving after graduation in 2009/2010.

(You can have multiple choices)

I stayed in Finland after graduation because:

- I found a job
- I got an opportunity to continue my studies
- I started/have a family here
- I liked Finland as a place to live
- I did not want to return to my home country
- Other, please specify _____

I left Finland after graduation because (You can have multiple choices):

- I could not find a satisfying job
- My spouse/partner could not find a job
- I did not learn enough Finnish and felt socially isolated
- I was offered a better job elsewhere
- I got an opportunity to continue my studies elsewhere
- I could not extend my visa
- Other, please specify _____

21. Which of the following best describes your current status? (Tick all that apply)

- Employed full time
- Employed part-time
- Self-employed (entrepreneur)
- Doing an internship
- Undertaking further studies
- Freelancer
- Unemployed
- Taking care of the family
- Other, please specify _____

22. When did you start looking for a job? Exclude search for casual jobs (e.g. newspaper delivery, cleaning, etc.).

- Prior to graduation, _____ months earlier
- Around the time of graduation
- After graduation, _____ months later

I did not look for a job yet. Please explain why:

23. If you were looking for a job, which of the following methods did you use in your job search and which ones helped you find your first job that was not a casual one. Tick all that apply

	I used this method	this method helped me get the job
I applied for a vacancy advertised in internet, newspaper, etc.		
I contacted employers without knowing about a vacancy		
I launched advertisements by myself		
I was approached by an employer		
I contacted an employment agency		
I used the help of the careers/placement office of my educational institution		
I enlisted the help of teaching staff of the higher education institution		
I established contacts while working during the course of study		
I used other personal connections/contacts (e.g. parents, relatives, friends)		
Other, please specify _____		

Employment

Please answer Q. 24 - 35 only if you have been employed at least once following your graduation (including doctoral study contracts, freelancing and self-employment)..

24. How many jobs, have you had in total since you completed your degree studies in Finland in 2009/2010? _____

In the table below tick and fill in the boxes that apply, leaving the “Current job” column empty if you are still in your first job

	First job after graduating from a Finnish higher education institution	Current job
25. How long did it take you to find the job?		
I got the job during the studies		
<=1 month after graduation		
>1 month and <=3 months		
>3 months and <=6 months		
>6 months and <=1 year		
>1 year and <=2 years		
>2 years		
26. What is/was the character of your employment?		
a permanent full-time job		
a permanent part-time job		
a temporary full-time job		

a fixed-term part-time job		
self-employed		
freelancing		
other, please specify		
27. In which country did you get employed?		
28. In which professional field was your employment?		
Academic / Research		
Agriculture, Forestry		
Architecture, Construction		
Arts & Entertainment		
Business, Sales		
Communications, PR		
Education & Training		
Engineering & Computer Science		
Government, Politics		
Health & Medicine		
Languages, translation		
Social services		
Tourism & Hospitality Management		
Other, please specify		
29. In which sector were you employed?		
Private		
Public		
Non-profit		
Other		
29. a) Please specify your title/position (e.g. export manager, teacher of English)		
30. How satisfied are/were you with your work in terms of salary?		
not at all satisfied		
somewhat satisfied		
very satisfied		
31. What is/was your monthly salary range after the taxation? If you reside outside euro zone, please provide an estimated equivalent in euro.		
Less than 250 euro per month		
251-500 euro per month		
501-1000		
1001 – 1.500		
1501 – 2.000		
2001- 2.500		
2.501-3.000		
3.001-3.500		
> 3.500		
31. a) How does your salary compare to that of the local average in your field?		
much higher than average		
above average		

same as average		
below average		
much lower than average		
32. How relevant is/was your work to the field of studies taken in Finland?		
not at all relevant		
somewhat relevant		
fully relevant		
33. How relevant is/was your work to the level of studies taken in Finland?		
The job was at a higher level than my own education		
The job was at the same level to my own education		
A lower level higher education degree could be used in this job		
The job did not require a higher education degree		
34. Does/did your work provide opportunities to use your intercultural competences (e.g. establish professional collaboration between Finland and your home country)		
Not at all		
Somewhat		
Yes*		

*If you answered ‘yes’ to question 34, please give 1-2 examples of using your intercultural competences at work:

35. How important, according to your perception, were the following aspects for your employer in recruiting you for your **first job** after graduation? Please circle the relevant answer in each row.

	Not important	Somewhat important	Very important
Field of study, major subject	1	2	3
Minor subject	1	2	3
Thesis topic	1	2	3
Writing your thesis for the employer	1	2	3
Exam results	1	2	3
Practical/work experience in your own field of study in Finland	1	2	3
Practical/work experience in your own field of study abroad	1	2	3
Practical/work experience not related to studies	1	2	3
Reputation of the higher education institution	1	2	3
Finnish/Swedish language proficiency	1	2	3
Skills in other languages	1	2	3
Intercultural competences	1	2	3
Computer skills	1	2	3
Recommendations/references from third persons	1	2	3
Personality	1	2	3

Any other important aspects? Please specify:

Benefits of the education in Finland

36. Please evaluate how taking degree studies in Finland has improved the following attributes and skills. Please circle the relevant answer in each row.

	Not at all		To a very high extent		
	←—————→				
Theoretical understanding of your own field	1	2	3	4	5
Practical abilities in your own field	1	2	3	4	5
Creative/innovative thinking	1	2	3	4	5
Leadership skills	1	2	3	4	5
Problem-solving skills	1	2	3	4	5
Computer skills	1	2	3	4	5
Learning skills	1	2	3	4	5
Employability skills	1	2	3	4	5
Independence & initiative	1	2	3	4	5
Analytical/research skills	1	2	3	4	5
Presentation skills	1	2	3	4	5
Inter-cultural competences	1	2	3	4	5
Language proficiency in English	1	2	3	4	5
Language proficiency in Finnish	1	2	3	4	5
Adaptability	1	2	3	4	5
Self-confidence	1	2	3	4	5

37. What factors related to your experience of studying in Finland do you see as having improved your employment possibilities?

38. What do you think are the biggest obstacles to getting a job in Finland for international graduates? Rank the top 3 (1=biggest)

- Lack of Finnish/Swedish language skills
- Ethnic/cultural/religious discrimination
- Lack of career guidance at higher education institutions
- Lack of access to job search information
- Lack of the right contacts
- Lack of opportunities to gain relevant work experience (e.g. though internships)
- Residence permit restrictions
- Small labor market
- Other: _____

39. What changes would you recommend to higher education institutions in Finland that could improve the employment opportunities of future graduates? _____

40. Looking back, if you were free to choose again, how likely would you ...
Please circle the relevant number in each row.

	not likely very likely				
	←				→
Choose the same country of study?	1	2	3	4	5
Choose the same institution of higher education?	1	2	3	4	5
Choose the same course of study?	1	2	3	4	5

Basic information

41. Your gender male female

42. Your year of birth? 19___

43. Are you married/ have a partner? Yes No

If yes, is your spouse/partner a Finnish citizen? Yes No

44. Do you have children? Yes No

45. Your citizenship upon arrival to Finland _____

46. Has your citizenship status changed by the time of graduation?

No Yes, please specify the new one(s) _____

47. What is/are your native language(s) _____

48. Would you like to participate in a follow up interview? Yes No

If yes, please provide your e-mail _____

Thank you for participating in our survey!