

# Employment and professional capabilities of international graduates from Finnish Higher Education Institutions

2<sup>nd</sup> DEHEMS International Conference:  
Employability of Graduates & Higher Education Management  
Systems  
Ljubljana, 27 - 28 September 2012

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# Why research graduate employability?

- \* Worldwide: Employability as a measure of HE quality
- \* The feedback from graduates can be used to improve the quality of educational programs in terms of their labor market relevance and to market these programs

# Why focus on international graduate employability in Finland?

- \* An important issue in attracting international students and Finnish labour market/economic development
  - \* Employability development has been considered as a key factor affecting students' decision when studying abroad
  - \* Finnish policy to increase the number of international students and make the labour market more attractive for them (in the view of ageing population)
- \* Little information concerning employment of international graduates' (educated in Finland)

# Definition of employability

- \* Employability=graduate's ability and skills to gain, retain and (when necessary) find new fulfilling/satisfying work
- \* Closely linked to job success criteria:
  - \* duration of job search;
  - \* income and socio-economic status;
  - \* a position appropriate to the level and field of studies;
  - \* a high degree of job satisfaction
  - \* desirable employment conditions\* (Pavlin, 2010:5) (only partly included in our study)

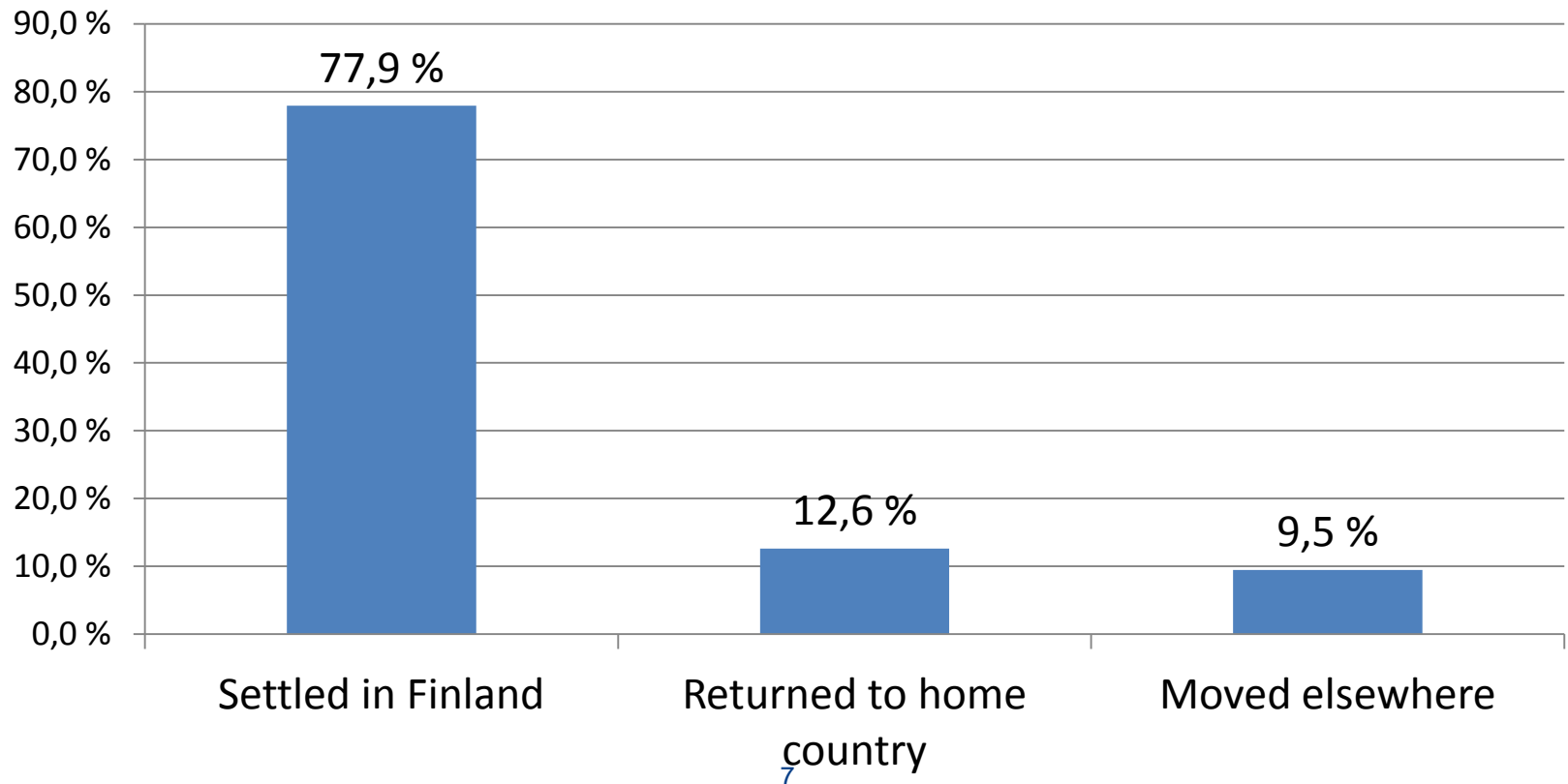
# VALOA study (2011-12)

- \* 363 eligible responses from international graduates of 2009-10 from 15 HEIs (part of VALOA network)
  - \* response rate - 21.3%
  - \* Majority of respondents (62.4%) are university graduates
  - \* 75 nationalities
- \* 20 complimentary interviews with graduates and employers
  - \* Graduates: employed, unemployed
  - \* Employers: IT, Production, servicers/consulting, public sector

# Top five reasons to choose Finland as a study destination

- \* Free of charge education,
- \* Possibility to study in English,
- \* **A chance to improve employability,**
- \* A chance to explore a foreign country
- \* Reputation of HEIs

# Location after graduation

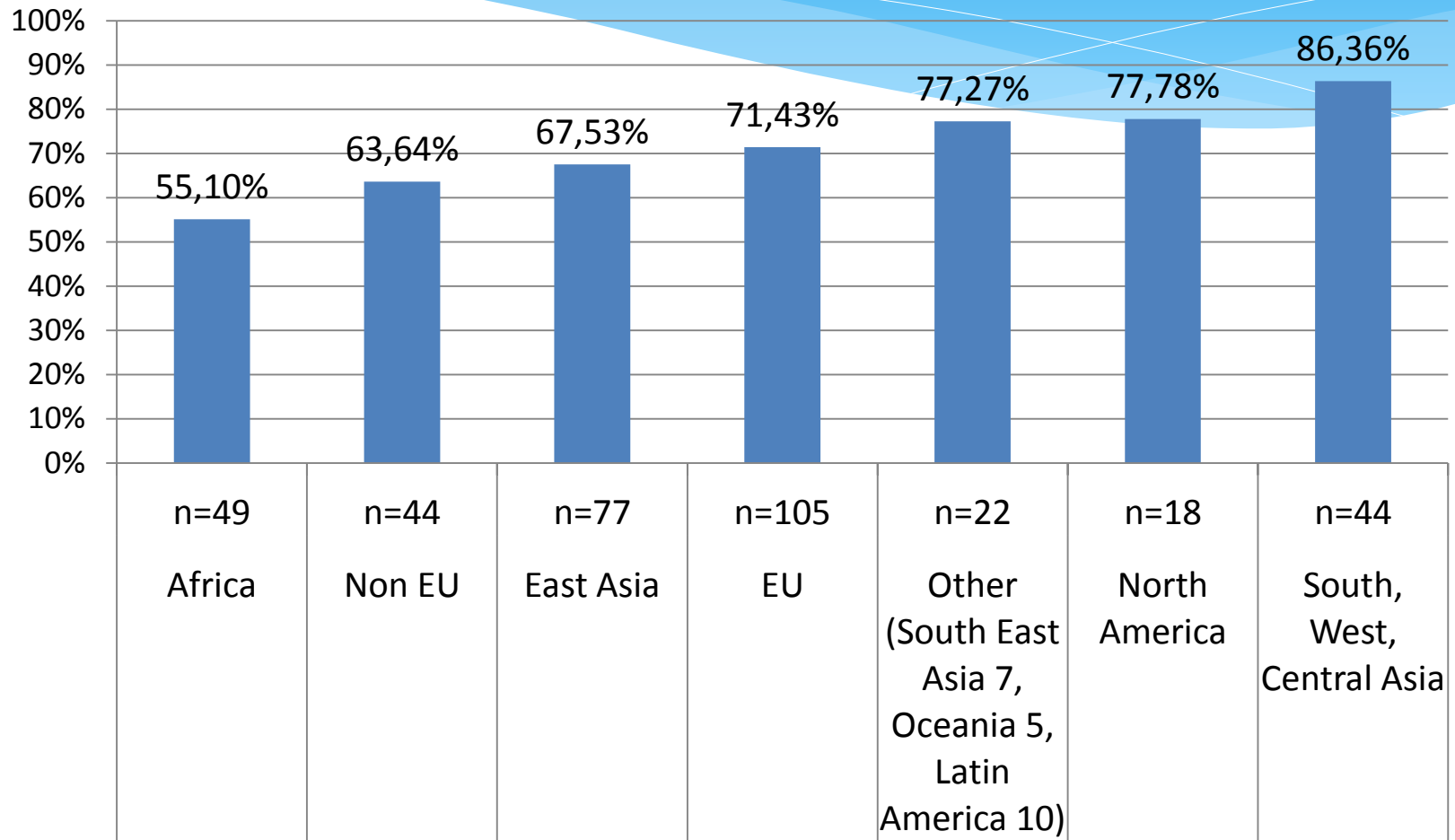


# Employment rate

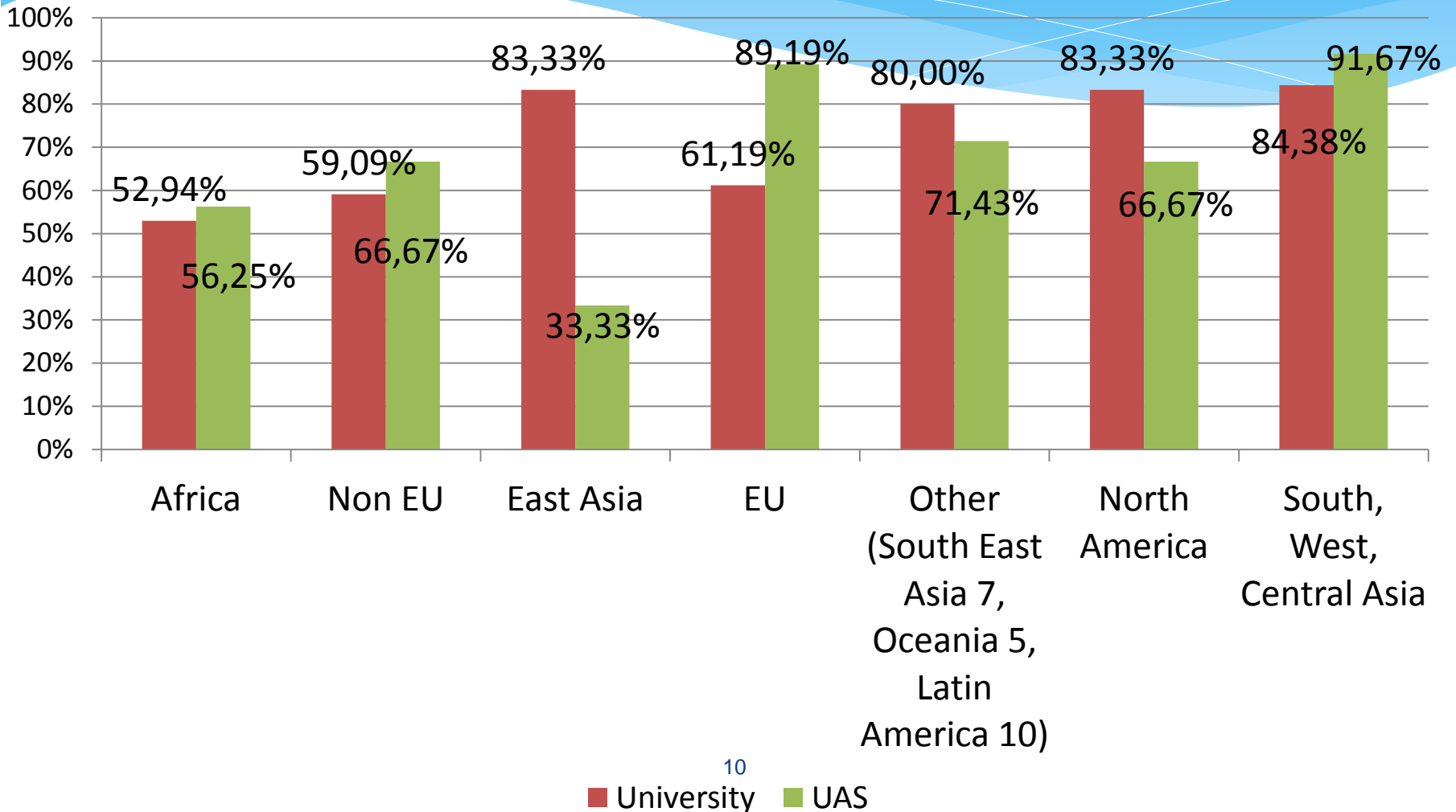
- \* 70% of all respondents are currently employed (N=253)
- \* Among those who are not employed (N=110),
  - \* 61% are undertaking further studies,
  - \* 11% are doing internship,
  - \* 29% are taking care of family,
  - \* 12% are in other situation.



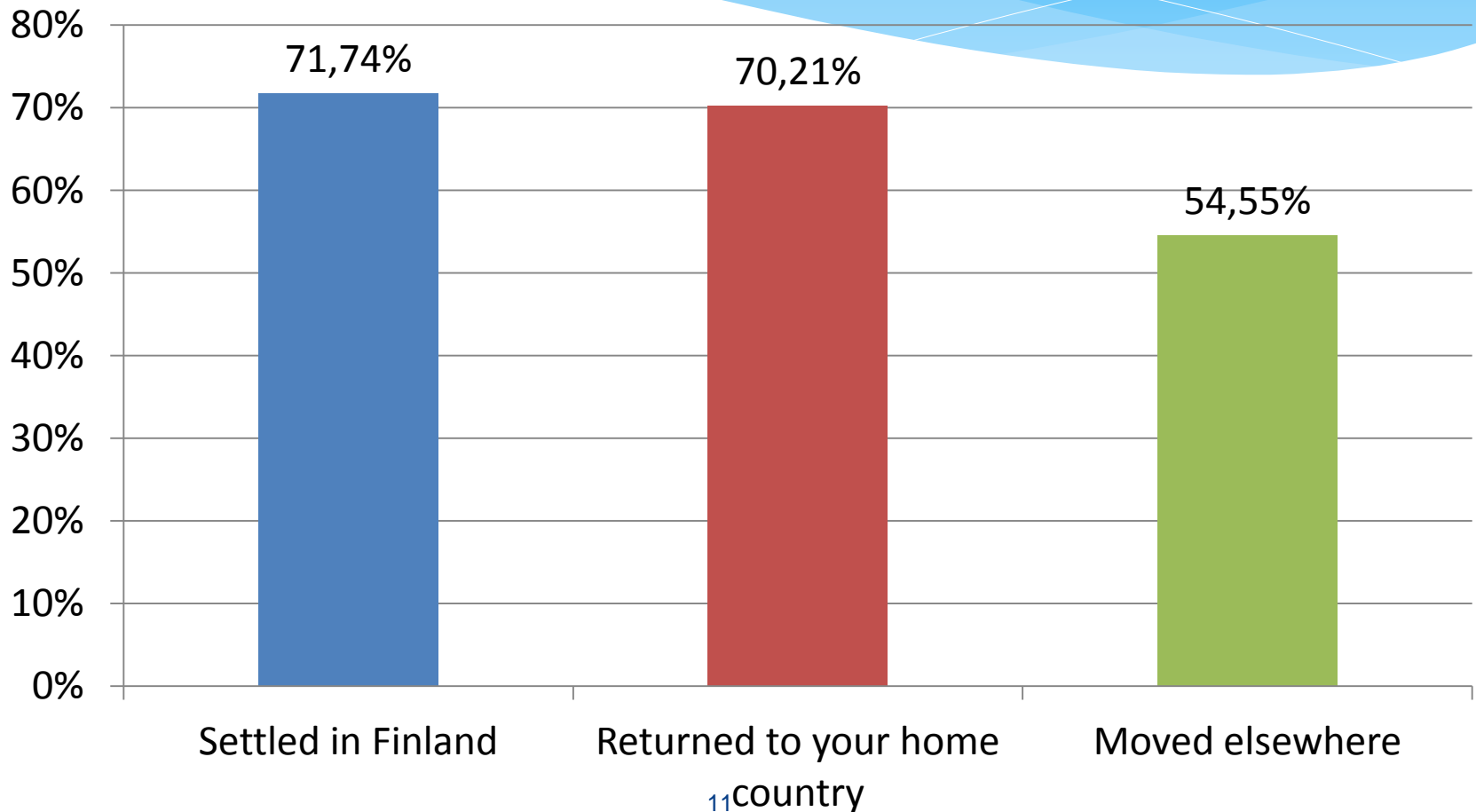
# Employment by regions



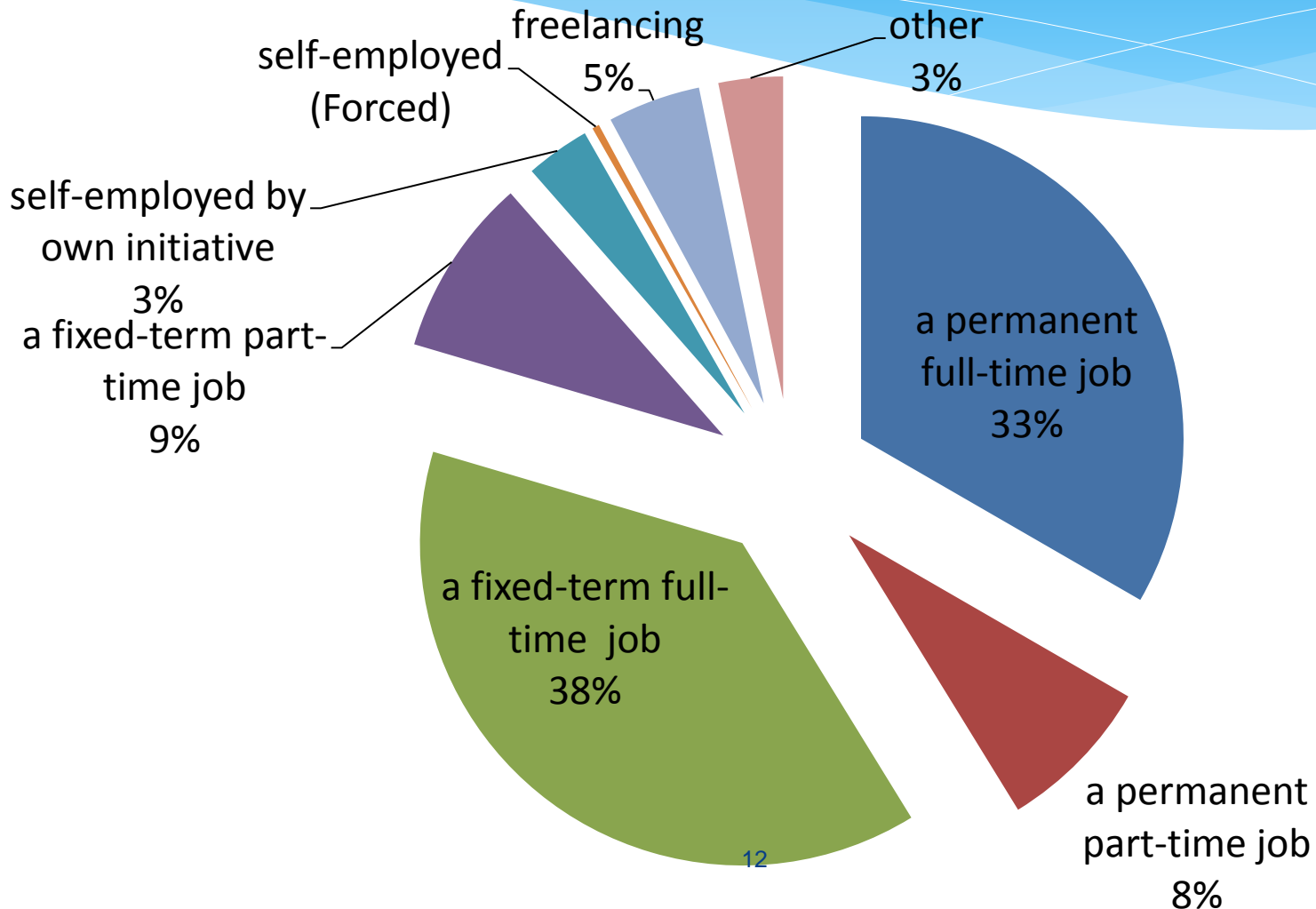
# Employment rate by sectors

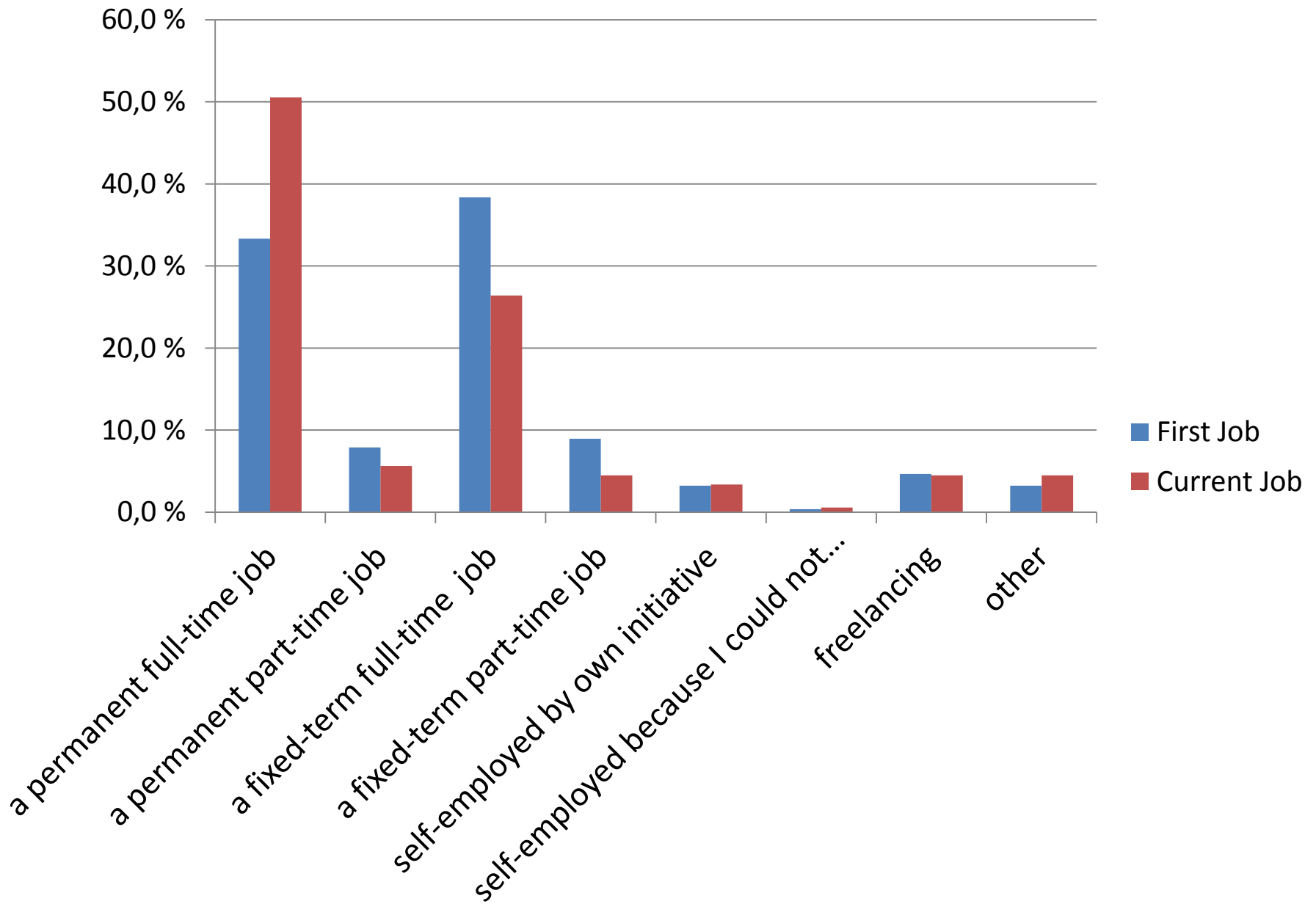


# Employment rate by location

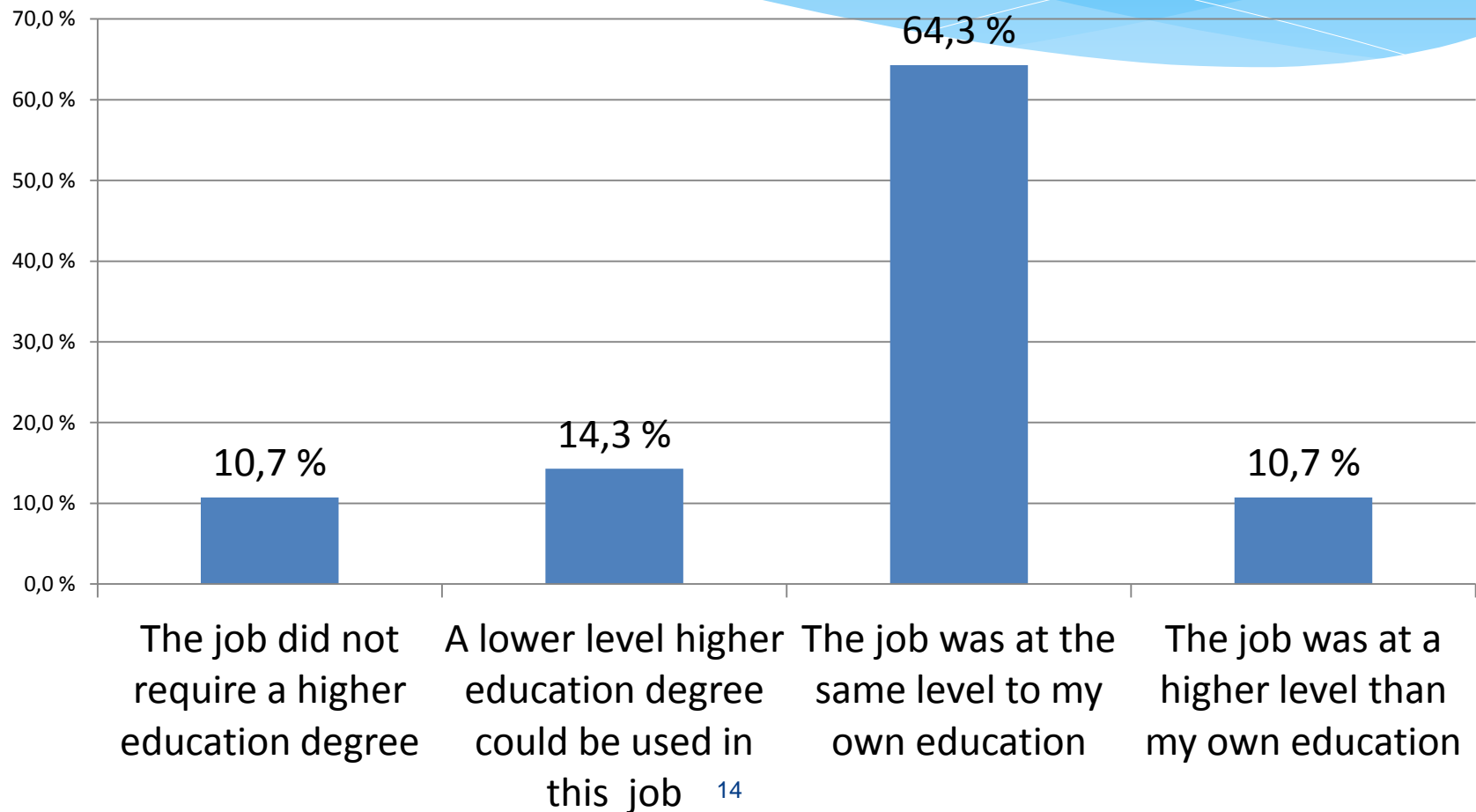


# Status of employment





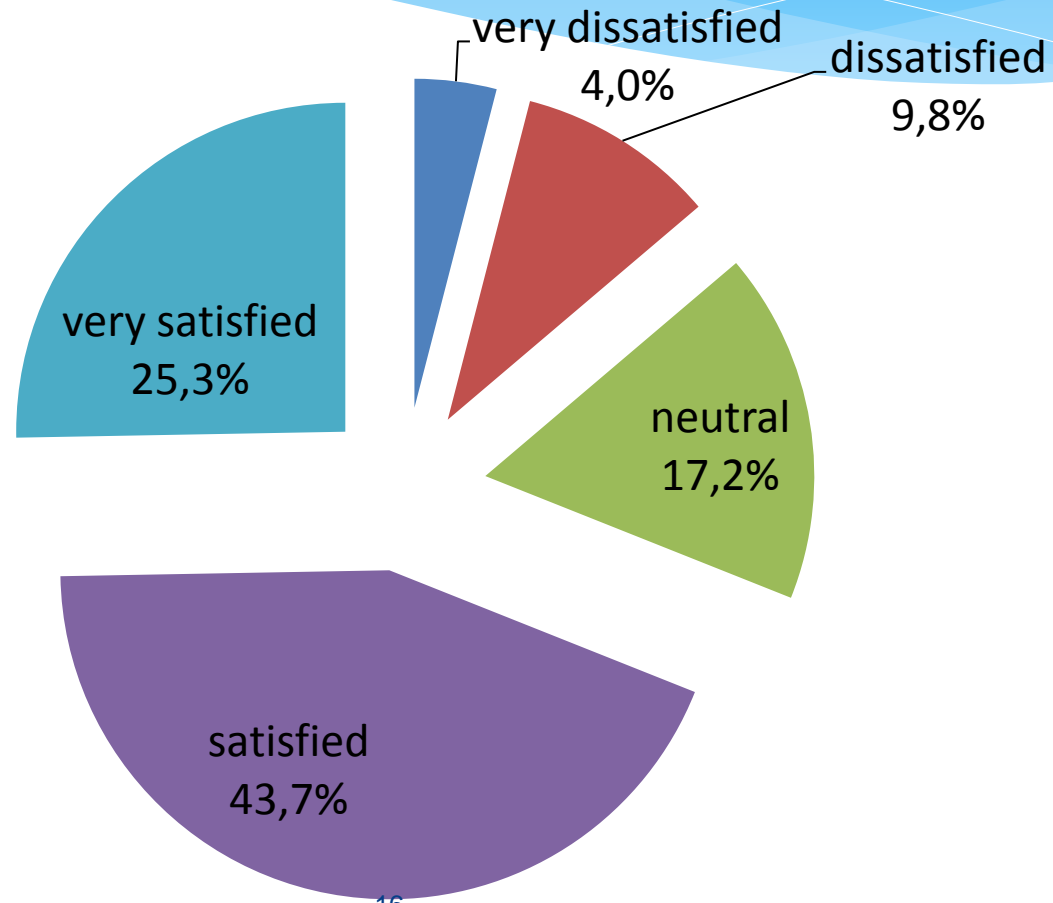
# The relevance of current job to the level of education attained in Finland



# Income

- \* The salary level is lower than the local average in the field. (the most typical gross salary level among those who settled in Finland is 2001 to 2500 euro)
- \* However, there is a tendency of salary increase when comparing the first job and the current one.

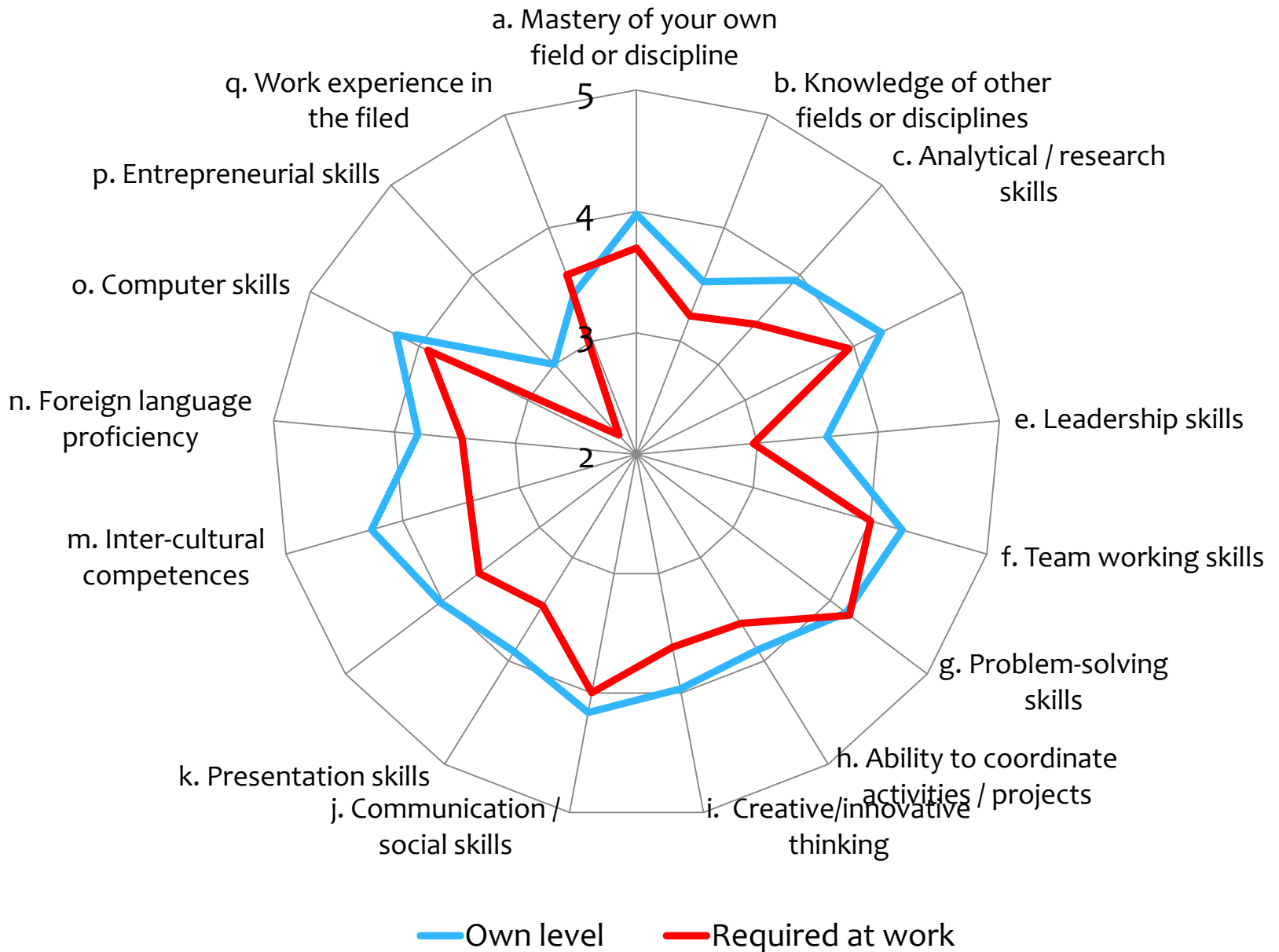
# Job satisfaction





# Skills own vs. required at work (Perceived by the graduates)

- \* According to the graduates' perception: their skills are higher than those required at work
- \* Overeducated or underemployed?

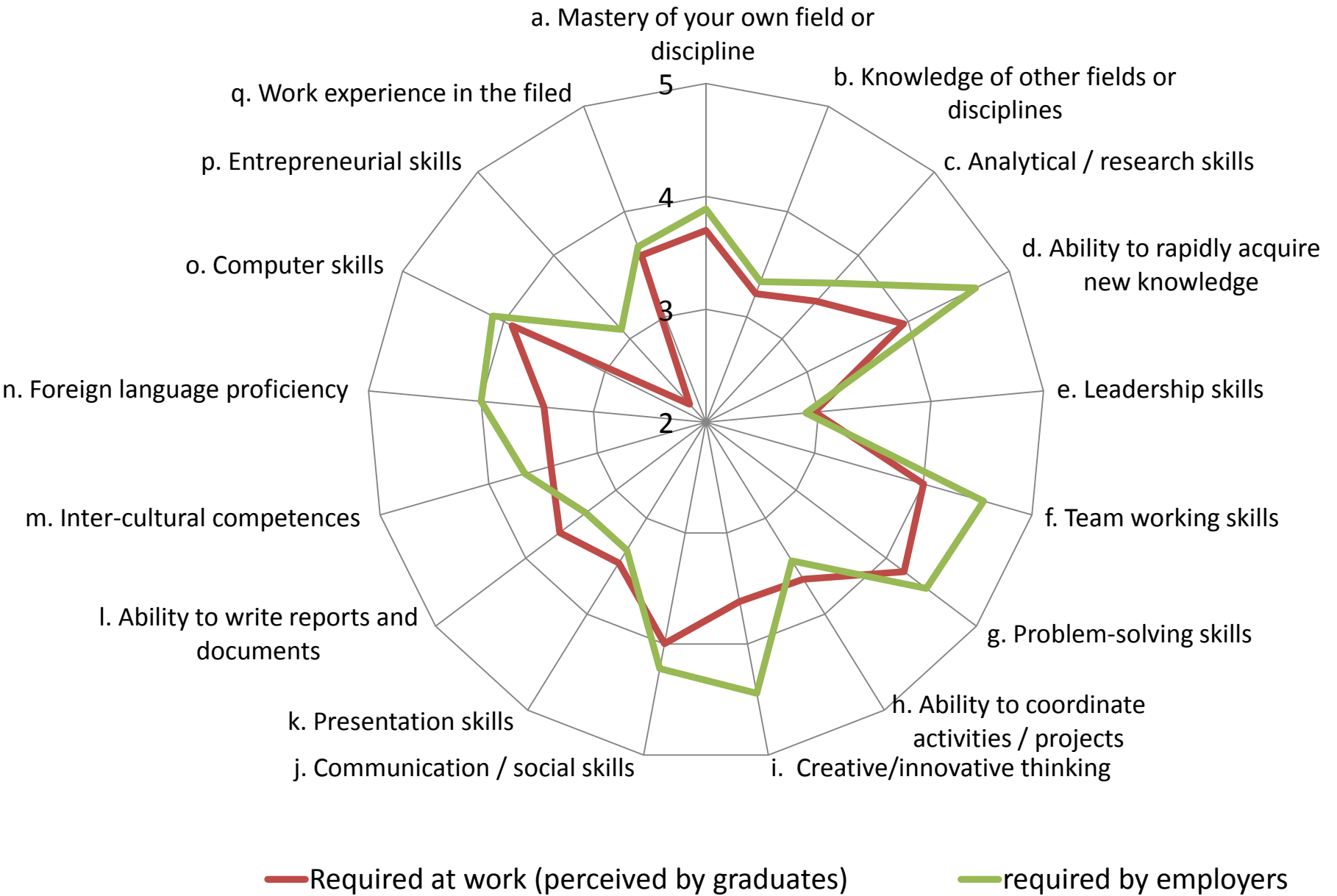


# Skills that significantly matter

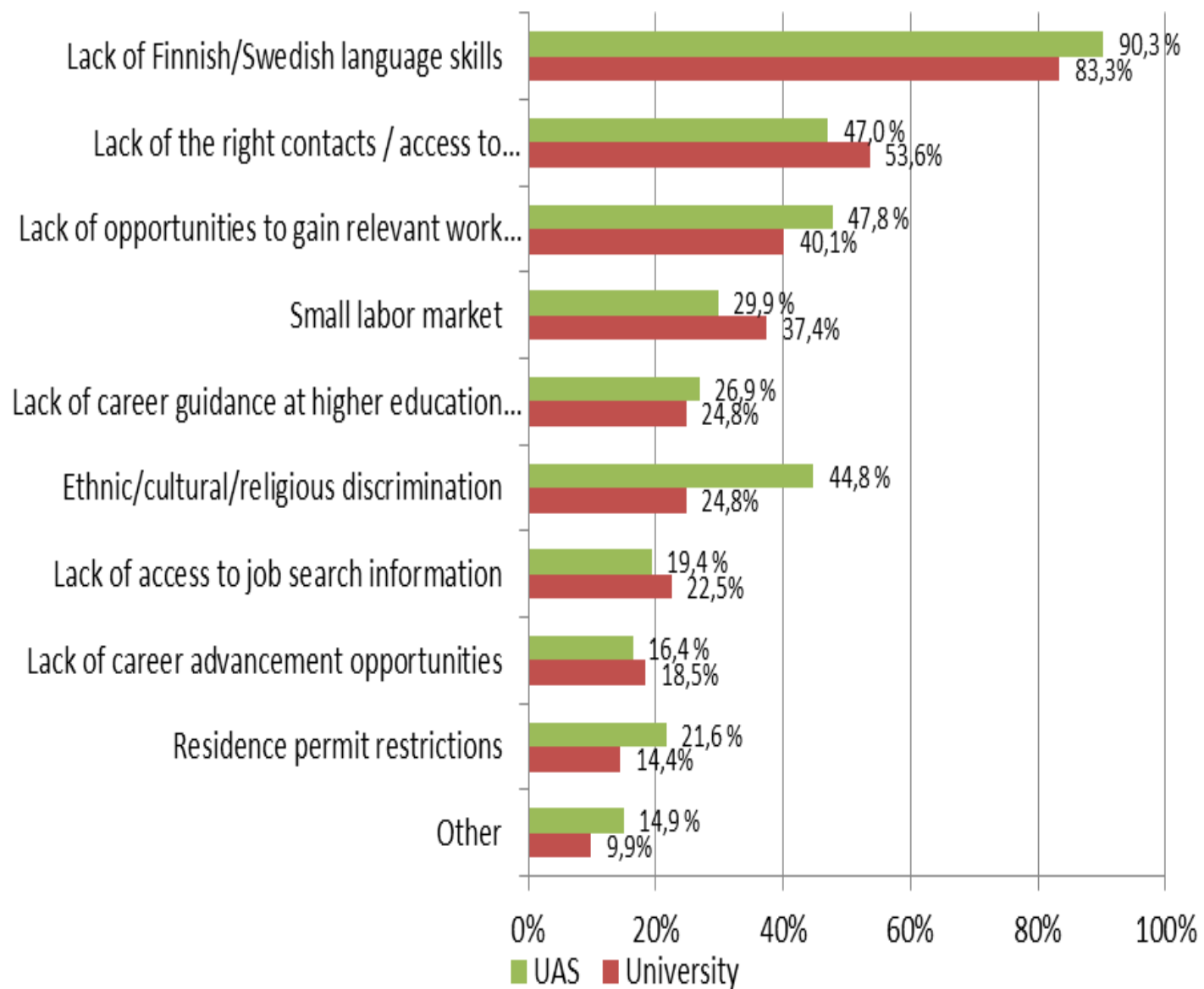
- \* a. Mastery of one's own field or discipline
- \* b. Knowledge of other fields or disciplines
- \* c. Analytical / research skills
- \* d. Ability to rapidly acquire new knowledge
- \* e. Leadership skills
- \* f. Team working skills
- \* h. Ability to coordinate activities / projects
- \* m. Inter-cultural competences
- \* o. Computer skills
- \* q. Work experience in the<sup>19</sup>field

# Skills needed by employers (Valoa interviews)

- \* Employers requirement is generally higher than those perceived by the graduates
- \* Employers highlight the importance of generic/transferable skills (apart from subject-specific knowledge):
  - \* *“Energy, ambition, ... evidence of being an achiever, and goal minded person. Self-motivated characteristics and attitude”*  
*“negotiation & presentation skills”* (engineers sometimes lack these) (E1)
  - \* *“fluent social skills, understanding of economic matters”* (E2)
  - \* *“innovativeness and the independent research skills”* (E3)
  - \* *“good team working skills and communication skills”* (E5)



# Obstacles to finding a job for international graduates in Finland



# Recommendations for HEIs 1

- \* High quality of education can attract international students
  - \* However, the quality cannot easily be measured,
  - \* in practice students are inclined to judge the quality by its international reputation ([Marginson, 2006](#)) and the career success of graduates ([Teichler, 2009, p. 15](#)).
- \* More help and guidance with finding internships, jobs and networking
  - \* Internship experience is often considered by employers as equivalent to work experience
  - \* The university career centres were the least used when searching for a job
  - \* Students simply don't know where are the potential employers

# Recommendations 2

- \* Enhance the labour market relevance of higher education studies
  - \* Universities need to pay more attention to the needs in the labour market and have more cooperation with potential employers in curriculum design and teaching.
  - \* Filling in the gaps between skills of graduates and needs of labour market does not only need students' commitment but it is a responsibility of universities too.
  - \* Relevant soft skills are expected to be developed during students' study in the universities.



# Recommendations 3

- \* Universities should strive to make the curriculum offered in English equal to that of offered in Finnish
  - \* Many important courses are available only in Finnish or Swedish.
- \* More opportunities to learn Finnish and Swedish language
  - \* Essential in the Finnish labour market.
  - \* The language study is not enforced and the teaching methods are criticised being too grammar oriented.

# Recommendations 4

- \* Promote graduates to employer
  - \* Most employers' perception of the skills of international graduates are intuitive
  - \* More information and channels to be developed for the employers to have a true picture of the graduates.

# Recommendations 5

- \* Recruiting most gifted or relevant students is also a guarantee for the quality of the graduates.
  - \* Little attention is paid in recruitment strategies.
  - \* Wisely use financial incentives (fee paying programmes).
  - \* Study the targeting student markets.

# Recommendation to HEIs - 6

Finally...

- \*Keep the e-mail database of your graduates and collect feedback from them on the relevance of HE to the world of work
- \*Track their employment situation for QA and marketing purposes!

# Publications 1

- \* Y. Shumulova, Y. Cai, & E. Pekkola, Employability of international graduates educated in Finnish higher education institutions (VALOA Report), to be released in June 2012
- \* Shumilova, J., & Cai, Y. (2011, 22-23 September). Factors influencing the employability of international graduates. Paper presented at the DEHEMS International Conference--Employability of Graduates & Higher Education Management Systems, Vienna, Austria.

# Publications 2

- \* Cai, Y. (2012). International graduates from Finland: Do they satisfy the needs of Finnish employers abroad? *Journal of Research in International Education*, 11(1), 19-31.
- \* Cai, Y. (In review process). Employment prospects of Finnish-educated Chinese graduates in Finnish companies in China—employers' perspectives. Tampere University Press

# Thanks!

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