

# Internationality Action Plan For Student Organisations

*Made by CISSI in collaboration with Kannunvalajat  
University of Helsinki, 2016*



**Written by: Maria Luhtaniemi, Integration representative of CISSI 2016**  
**[maria.luhtaniemi@helsinki.fi](mailto:maria.luhtaniemi@helsinki.fi)**

## **What is this?**

This action plan gives student organisations tools to improve the integration of international students at the University of Helsinki. There are international students in every faculty and their voices should be heard within the subject organisations, faculties and the student community in general.

International students can join the boards of their subject organisations the same way as a Finnish student can. They also have some organisations of their own, such as CISSI, Tsemppi and Isha. These organisations do great work in representing international students at the university. At the same time, they often face similar problems and moments of exclusion as international students individually, which is an issue this document aims to solve.

This action plan gives student organisations few guidelines on a few things: 1) how to consider international students better 2) how to make a more inclusive student community 3) how to improve communication and integration between international and Finnish student organisations.

## **Background**

This action plan is based on the discussions had on 27.9.2016, when CISSI and together Kannunvalajat organised an integration information event. The aim of the event was to come up with ways to improve the integration of the international students. All student organisation from the Faculty of Social Sciences were invited, and finally, the organisations present were Taso, Stydi, Kontakti, VOO, ISHA, Tsemppi, Keho, Kannu, Stigma, KTTO, Status and Mana.

To prepare for the discussion, CISSI had made a questionnaire for international students, asking them about their experiences of exclusion at the university. This was made to collect real experiences from the students instead of trusting on hearsay. We received 15 responses to the questionnaire, which wasn't scientific by any standards, but gave some idea about how the situation is. The student union (HYY) has also made similar questionnaires in the past with more respondents but similar results. There is, in other words, a real need to improve integration.

This document is written by the integration specialist and events coordinator of CISSI, Maria Luhtaniemi. Special thanks to Heidi Ahola for organising the integration information event, commenting the draft and giving ideas, and to Keshia D'silva for the idea of writing up an integration action plan in the first place and commenting on the draft. Also, special thanks to

everyone in the student organisations listed above who have shared their ideas with this matter.

## **Action Plan - Four ways to improve integration**

In this section, we introduce the problems that international students currently face at the university, and present you with a solution (or two!) The first point has to do with the language of communication, second and third on reaching the international students better. The third point presents some ways to improve international students' chances at the labour markets.

### **1. Language of communication**

#### **Problem: The use of Finnish is excluding international students**

Language was mentioned as one of the most excluding things in the questionnaire. Only speaking in Finnish when there is an international student present is very excluding and impolite. It gives the international student a message that they are not wanted, and has led to some international students moving away from student organisation activities.

Many student organisations have had a system where they hold the meetings in Finnish and translate the important parts in English to the international students present. There are positive and negative sides to this practice: on one hand, it doesn't exclude the Finnish students who are uncomfortable speaking English, on the other hand, international students don't really get the full picture of what's going on from the short translation.

The use of both Finnish and English is complicated and time-consuming for all parties. International students don't get the full picture from the short translation. This practice also gives the international student the message that their presence is a nuisance.

#### **Solution: Deciding on using English**

In the beginning of the term at the first meeting of boards, committees and other student groups, the group should discuss and decide what their language of communication is. If there is an international person present who doesn't speak or understand Finnish, English should be chosen as the language of communication. This choice should be respected throughout the term.

If there is an issue with some of the members not being comfortable speaking English, the group can discuss an alternative solution. If the use of English would absolutely prevent a Finnish person from taking part in the group, thus excluding them, the option of translating relevant parts to the international student can be considered. This option should be used only if there is a real consensus that it is the only solution. This option requires much more work from the group, as it requires that everything is translated at all times. It should be noted that an international student might vote for using Finnish just for the sake of pleasing others, so one should have enough sensitivity in these situations to see which practice is actually the best.

## **2. Reaching international students within the student community**

### **Problem: International and Finnish students are separated and do not know about each other's activities**

Many international students are unfamiliar with the Finnish system of student organisations. It is difficult for international students to gather all the necessary information during the orientation week, when they at the same time have to deal with getting settled in the country in general. Students might not know which subject organisation is theirs and thus find it difficult to attend their events and take part in their other activities.

Finnish student organisations have difficulties in getting the international students to attend their events, even when they write their event descriptions on Facebook in English. Similarly, international student organisations have difficulties getting Finnish students to attend their events. There is an obvious gap between these organisations that decreases interaction and isolates Finnish and international student organisations further from each other.

### **Solution: More collaboration with student organisations**

Organising collaborative events is a great way of getting both Finnish and international students more familiar with each other's activities. At collaborative events, the names of other organisations and the people behind them open up to new students. They also give organisations a good opportunity to advertise each other's events.

With collaborative events, it is good to remember to encourage interaction between international and Finnish students at the event itself. It is very easy for international and Finnish students to form their own groups and not really interact with each other despite being in the same room. Organisers can encourage people to mingle with introducing their friends to new people and organising activities where people naturally mix.

All communication in collaborative events, with the organisers and at the event itself, should be in English or in the language that everyone understands. The event descriptions of the

events should explain who the organisers are, as many international students are not familiar with the Finnish student organisations.

Collaborating outside events is also a good solution. Student organisations can share each other's events on Facebook whenever there is a time when they don't have an event to advertise themselves. Student organisations can ask other organisations for help in advertising when they want to reach a certain group (i.e. CISSI to reach more international students, Kontakti to reach sociology students etc.) The organisations in question can decide what kind of level of promoting is best to their situation.



CISSI shared their event.

Published by Maria Luhtaniemi [?] · 9 November at 18:00 · Helsinki · 🌐

Thank you all for coming today! Because of a certain political event, today probably wasn't the best day for celebrating but we hope our rave made everyone's grim day a bit better ❤️

When are our next events?

For CISSI:

The Autumn International Food Event, Monday 21.11. Sign-up for cooking is open now: <https://www.facebook.com/events/1756922284570053/>

For Kontakti:

Kontakti & Stigma goes Uutisvuoto (suitable for those who understand Finnish) Friday 11.11 <https://www.facebook.com/events/586160654927335/> and

Keho & Kontakti's trip to the Rush Trampoline Park (also for international students) Wednesday 16.11, sign-up is open now:

<https://www.facebook.com/events/317302861982543/>

For Habitus:

Discussion night about privileges, Monday 14.11

<https://www.facebook.com/events/759748090829569/>

Check these out and stay posted for future events!

*An example of a way to promote other students organisations' events on Facebook*

### 3. Reaching international students from outside the student organisations

#### **Problem: Some international students don't get the information from different student organisations in the first place**

At the beginning of their studies, many international students do not get the information about student organisations even if they would like to. Much of the information given during the orientation week can fly by because there are so many things to remember. Some students are not available during the orientation week, which makes them lose track on many

important things. Currently, communication is largely based on Facebook and students find out about things from one another. However, there are people who are not on Facebook. Especially in the beginning of their first semester students might not yet know enough people to find out about events.

**Solution: Improving communication and sharing information with the help of tutors**

Reaching international degree students is currently very complicated, because their contact information is only given to their tutors. As of now, tutors are encouraged to share information about student organisations to the international student group that they tutor. The student union is working on a way to give student organisations access to degree students' information.

Different Facebook groups are a great way of reaching people and sharing information. Members of student organisation boards should join groups that are relevant to them and follow the discussion in these groups. International students can be reached for example from the groups International Students, Faculty of Social Sciences and Kumpula Science International (KSI).

Tutors have a central role. They should invite their tutees to different Facebook groups and events and encourage them to take part in the student. In the best situation, especially at the beginning of the semester, a tutor could invite their tutees to parties and go to the first ones with them. It should be noted, however, that not every student wants to join student activities or go to parties.

#### **4. Exclusion outside the university**

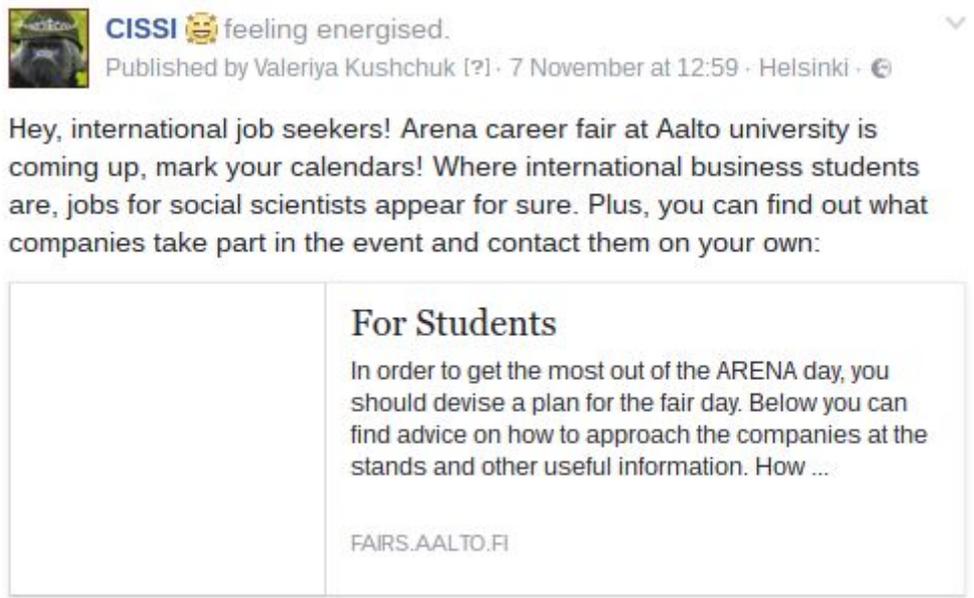
**Problem: International students have difficulties finding jobs in Finland**

The last issue has to do with matters outside the university. International students have a difficult time finding jobs in Finland as many of the jobs require a good knowledge of Finnish. Many of the jobs where the used language is English are often hidden. International students mostly find information about jobs through friends but not through official routes. Job fairs organised by the university rarely have international employers present.

**Solution: More visits, job fairs and networks**

International student organisations are one of the key actors in this situation. Company visits should be encouraged as a way of introducing international students to different possibilities. CISSI is already doing some excursions to companies and other places that hire international students.

Job fairs should include more international companies, and companies that explicitly say they hire also international people. People organising job fairs should aim for diversity with this matter as well. Student organisations should look for job fairs and other chances for international students, even when they are organised by people outside of their faculty.



**CISSI** 😊 feeling energised.  
Published by Valeriya Kushchuk [?] · 7 November at 12:59 · Helsinki · 🌐

Hey, international job seekers! Arena career fair at Aalto university is coming up, mark your calendars! Where international business students are, jobs for social scientists appear for sure. Plus, you can find out what companies take part in the event and contact them on your own:

**For Students**

In order to get the most out of the ARENA day, you should devise a plan for the fair day. Below you can find advice on how to approach the companies at the stands and other useful information. How ...

[FAIRS.AALTO.FI](https://fairs.aalto.fi)

*CISSI advertised a job fair organised for business students*

International students should get together with Finns who already have some networks and knowledge about jobs. Both international and Finnish student organisations could organise a discussion evening about employment in Finland, where students could share their knowledge and give each other tips. Alumni and representatives from the university or the city's employment services could be invited to these evenings to give more concrete examples and stories.

The employment of international students and immigrants more largely is of course a bigger issue than what this action plan can address. As the the University of Helsinki highlights the meaning of thinking about one's employment already while studying, this should include international students as well. Getting a job is also one important steps of integrating to Finland. International students should be given more tools about how to improve their chances after graduation.

