



LUT
University



SAIMAAN
ammattikorkeakoulu
Saimaa University of Applied Sciences

Employment experiences of international students of LUT and Saimia

The research was funded by ELY Centre

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Centre for Economic Development,
Transport and the Environment

The aim of the research

- Hearing international students' ideas and experiences about entering the work market during their studies in Finland and at the time of their graduation.
- Getting familiar with the aims and ambitions of international graduates in relation to employment.
- Getting to know the challenges the students faced as well as successful practices that worked for them.
- Getting recommendations about improving the employability of international graduates in Finland and retaining international talent.

Summary

The survey results have mainly shown what we already knew about the struggles and challenges the international students face. Finnish working life is made for natives, and it is very difficult to penetrate by internationals. However, getting employed as a foreigner in Finland is not completely impossible. There are many successful examples who got a permanent contract, some of them even without Finnish knowledge.

The majority of LUT and Saimia students are willing to stay in Finland after graduation for at least a few years. The area where they want to settle down is not significant, as they are willing to move to any place where they find an interesting job offer. When that job offer cannot be found in Finland, they move on.

It is very important to change the attitudes of Finnish companies to be more welcoming and open for foreigners. They need to be aware that there is a big pool of international talent available that has a knowledge of Finnish culture and developed ties to the country thanks to staying here for the duration of the studies. They just have to connect with these talents and make use of their skills and value they can bring to the company.

Research methods

Webropol survey

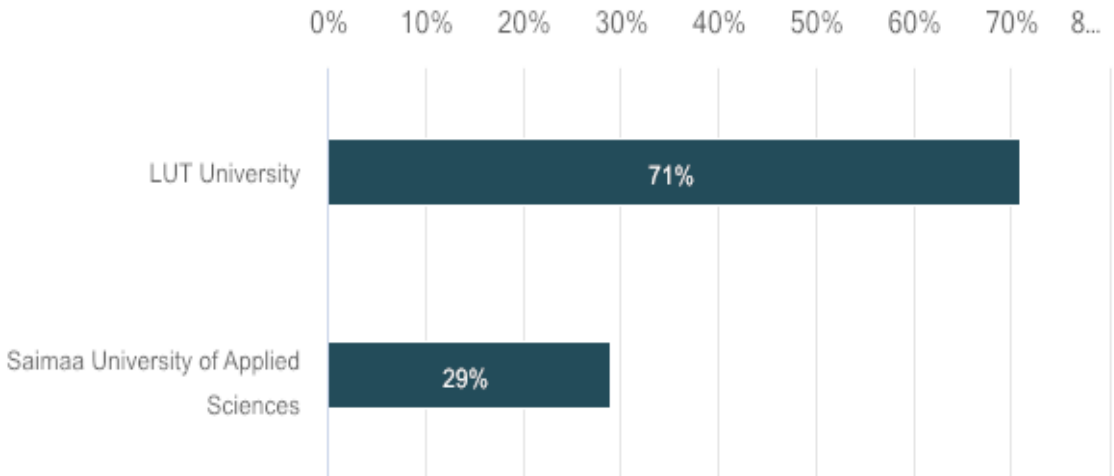
- Sent to international students of LUT and Saimia:
 - Who have started their studies in 2017 or earlier
 - Who graduated in spring 2019 or earlier
 - Degree levels: Bachelor, Master, PhD
- 168 answers, open from 23.5. until 24.6.2019.

Interviews

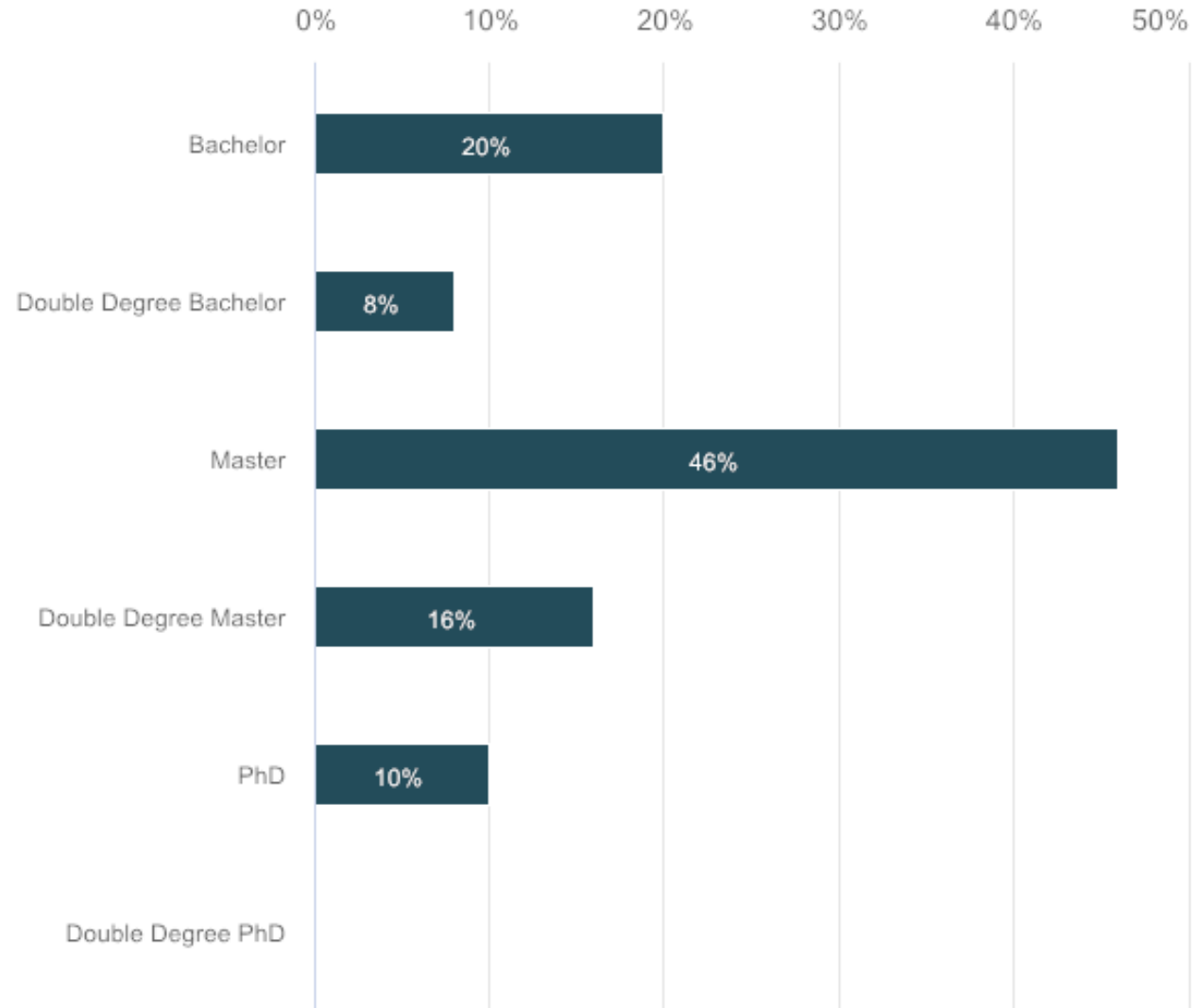
- 12 interviews conducted face-to-face or via phone

Survey results

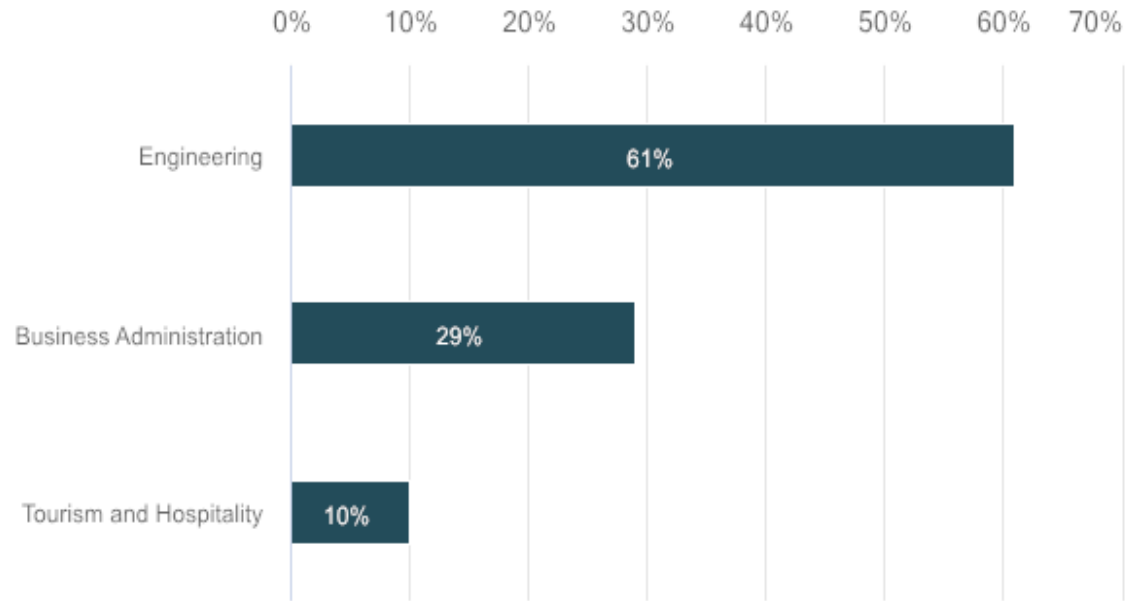
Place of study



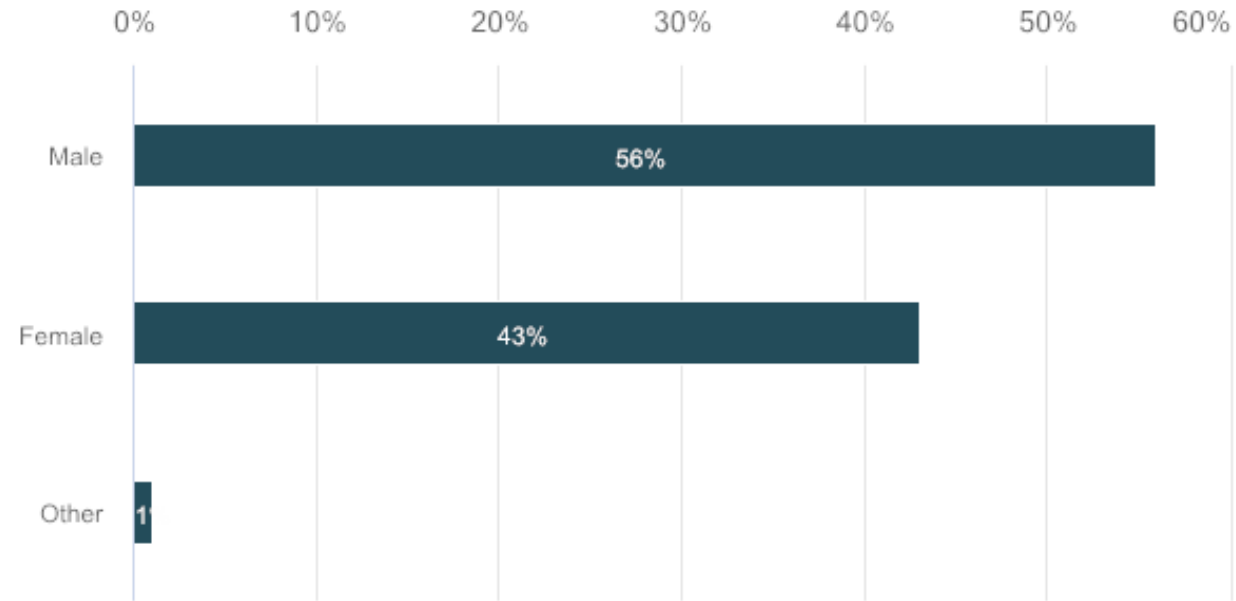
Degree level



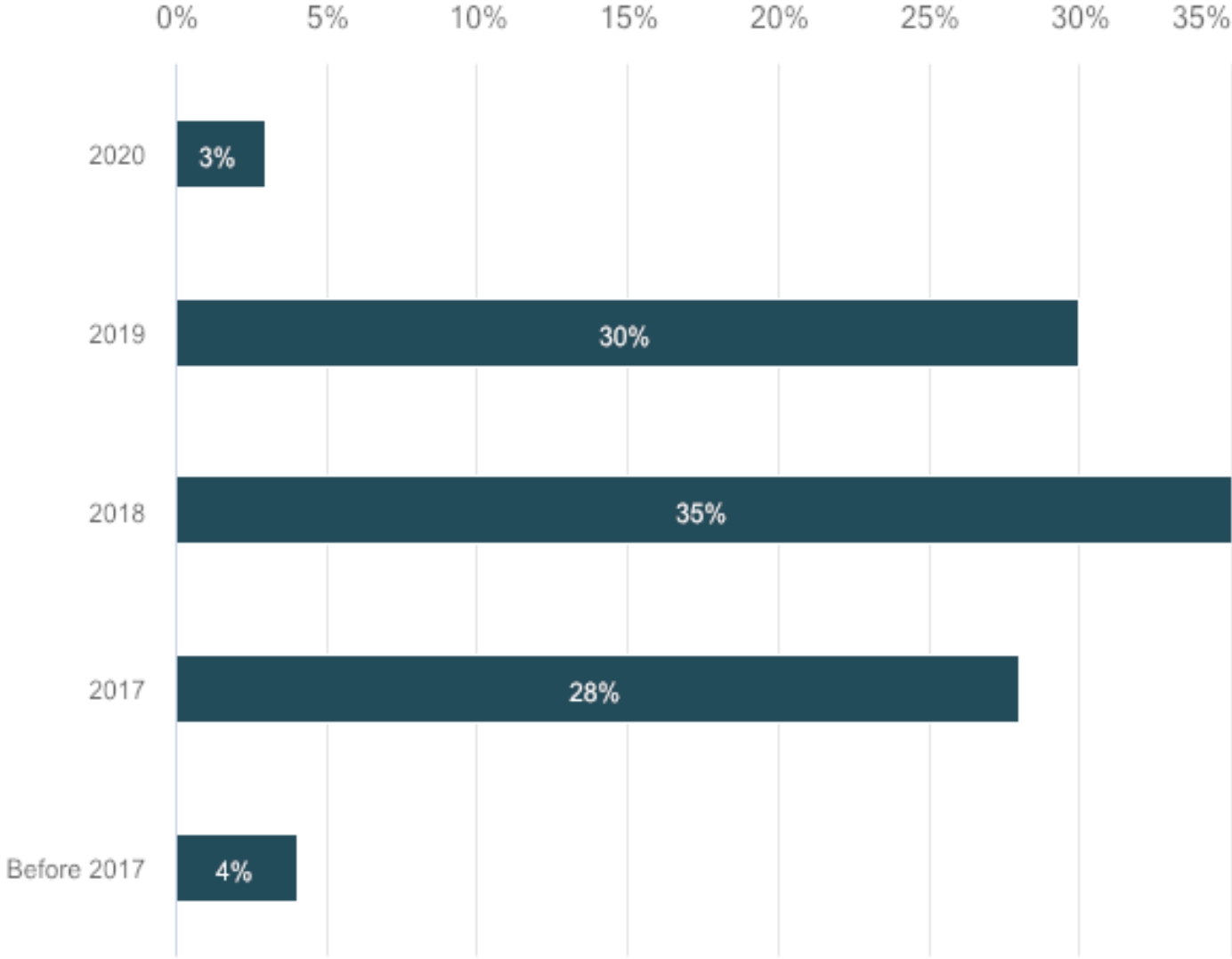
Field of study



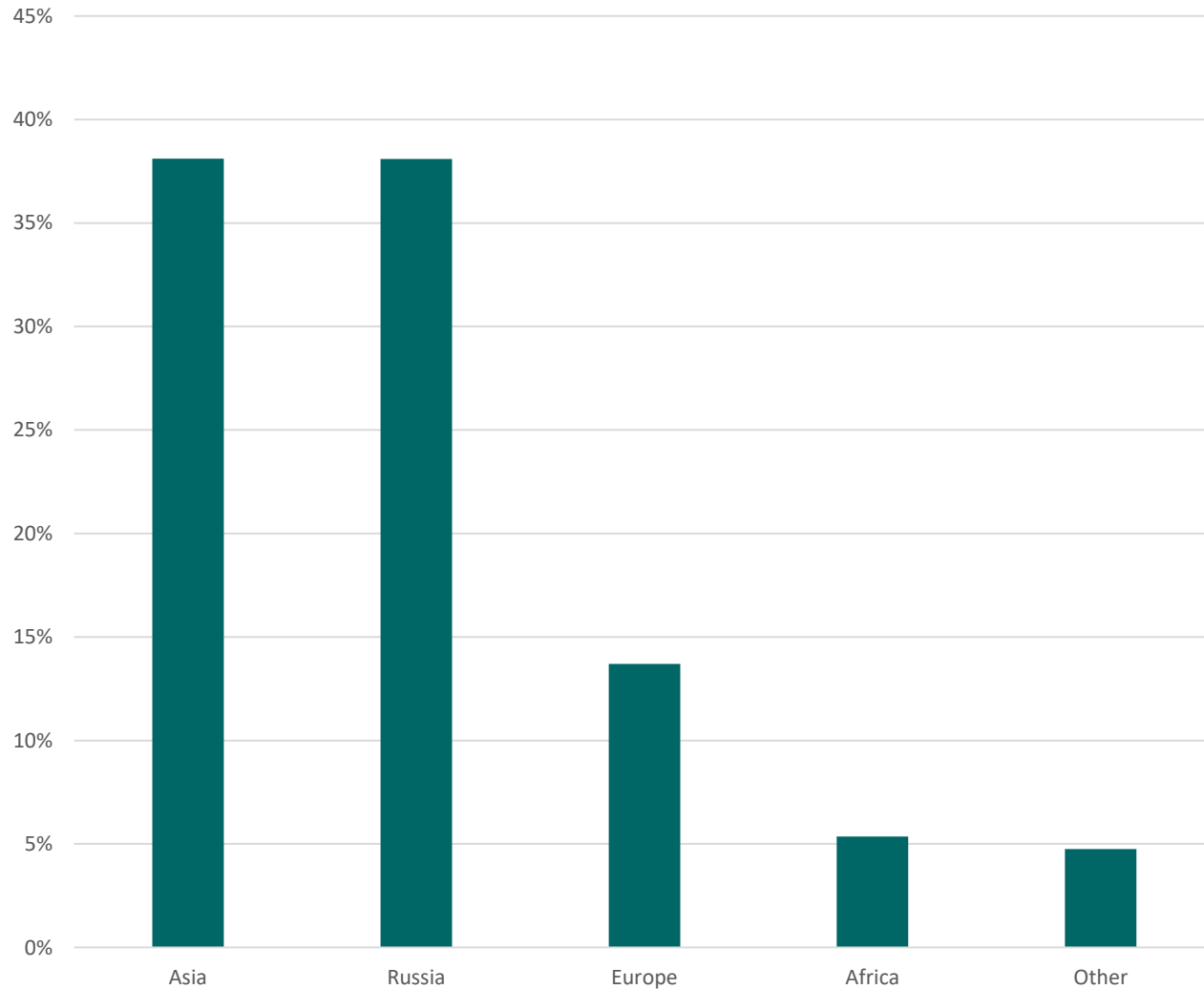
Gender



Year of graduation

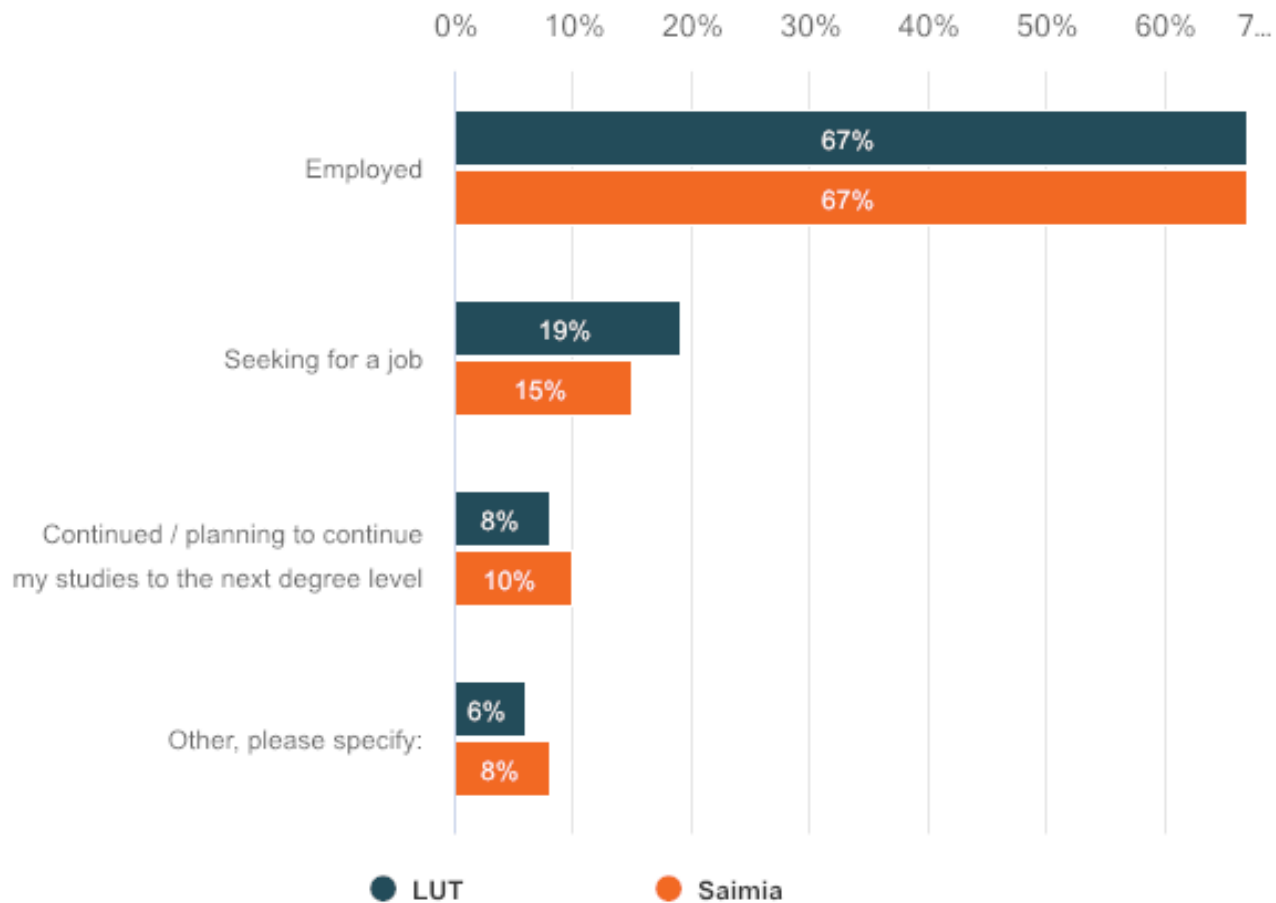


Country / continent of origin



	n	Percentage
Russia	64	38,09 %
Europe	23	13,69 %
Asia	15	8,93 %
Bangladesh	11	6,55 %
India	9	5,36 %
Iran	9	5,36 %
Vietnam	9	5,36 %
Africa	9	5,36 %
Nepal	7	4,17 %
North America	5	2,97 %
China	4	2,38 %
South America	3	1,78 %
Australia	0	0 %

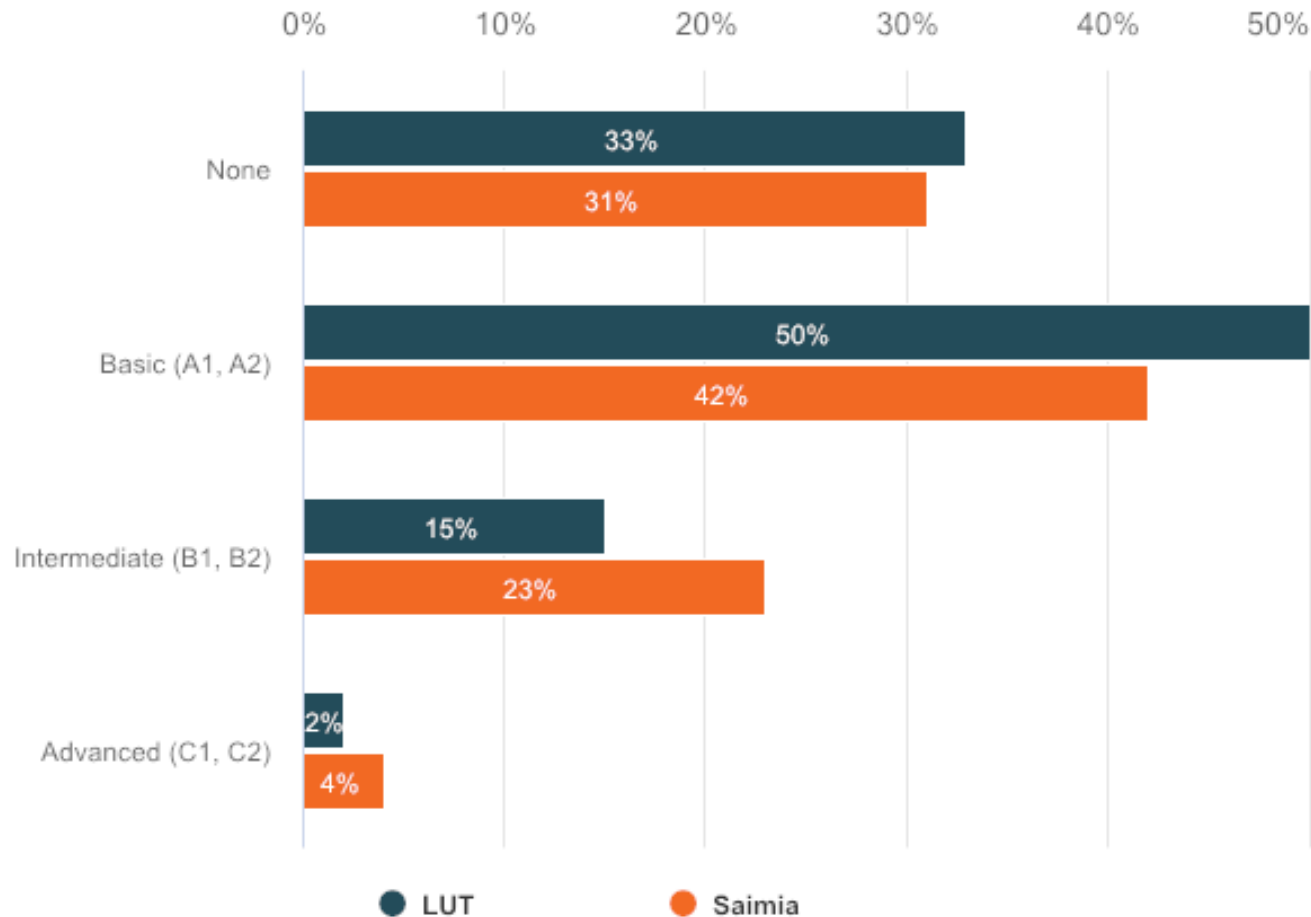
Employment situation



The same amount on LUT and Saimia students are employed at the moment. More LUT students are currently seeking for a job. A bit more Saimia students are continuing their studies on the next degree level.

The “other” section includes answers like: studying with a part-time job, part-time job, temporarily employed, maternity leave.

Finnish skills



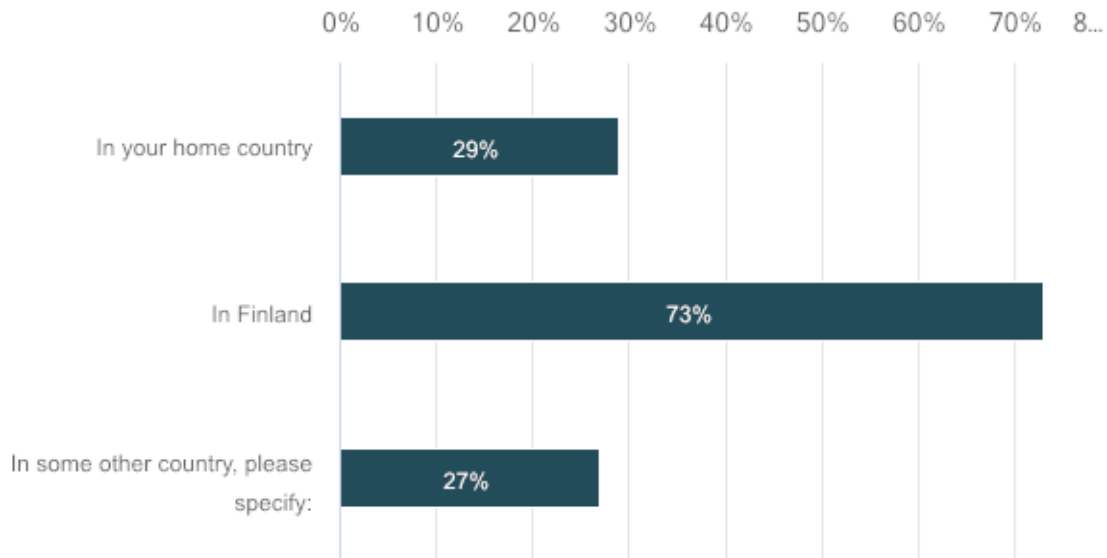
More LUT students have basic Finnish skills than Saimia, in turn more Saimia students speak intermediate Finnish.

An explanation for this can be the length of stay in Finland. Saimia students stay in Finland for 3,5-4 years, therefore they have more time and opportunities to master the Finnish language. Meanwhile LUT Master students stay for about 2 years. PhD students usually stay for 4 years.

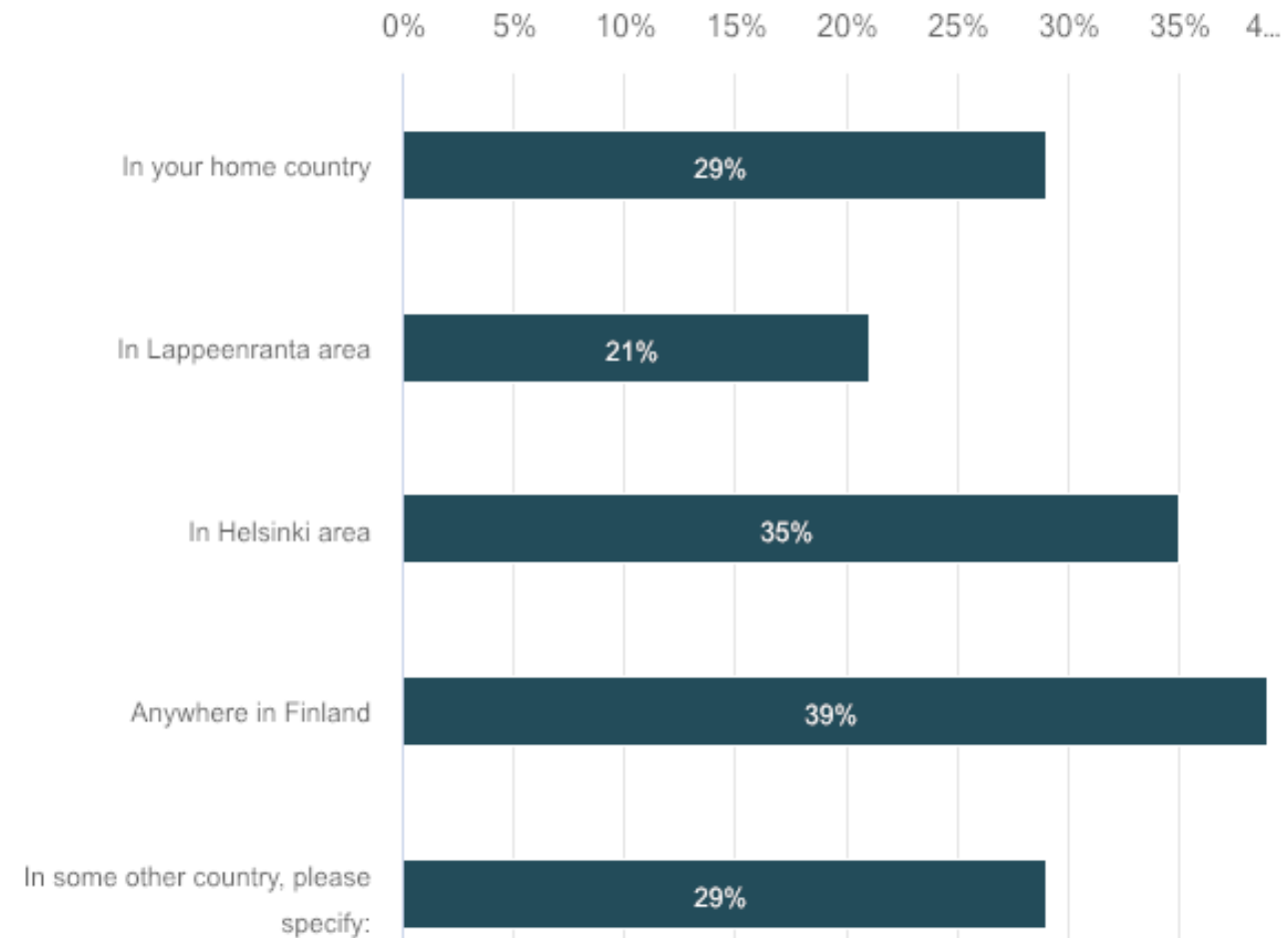
Saimia students also have 10-15 credits of compulsory Finnish studies included in their curriculum. LUT students have up to 6 credits of language studies in their curriculum, where they can study Finnish optionally.

Employment plans

In the beginning of studies



At the end of studies



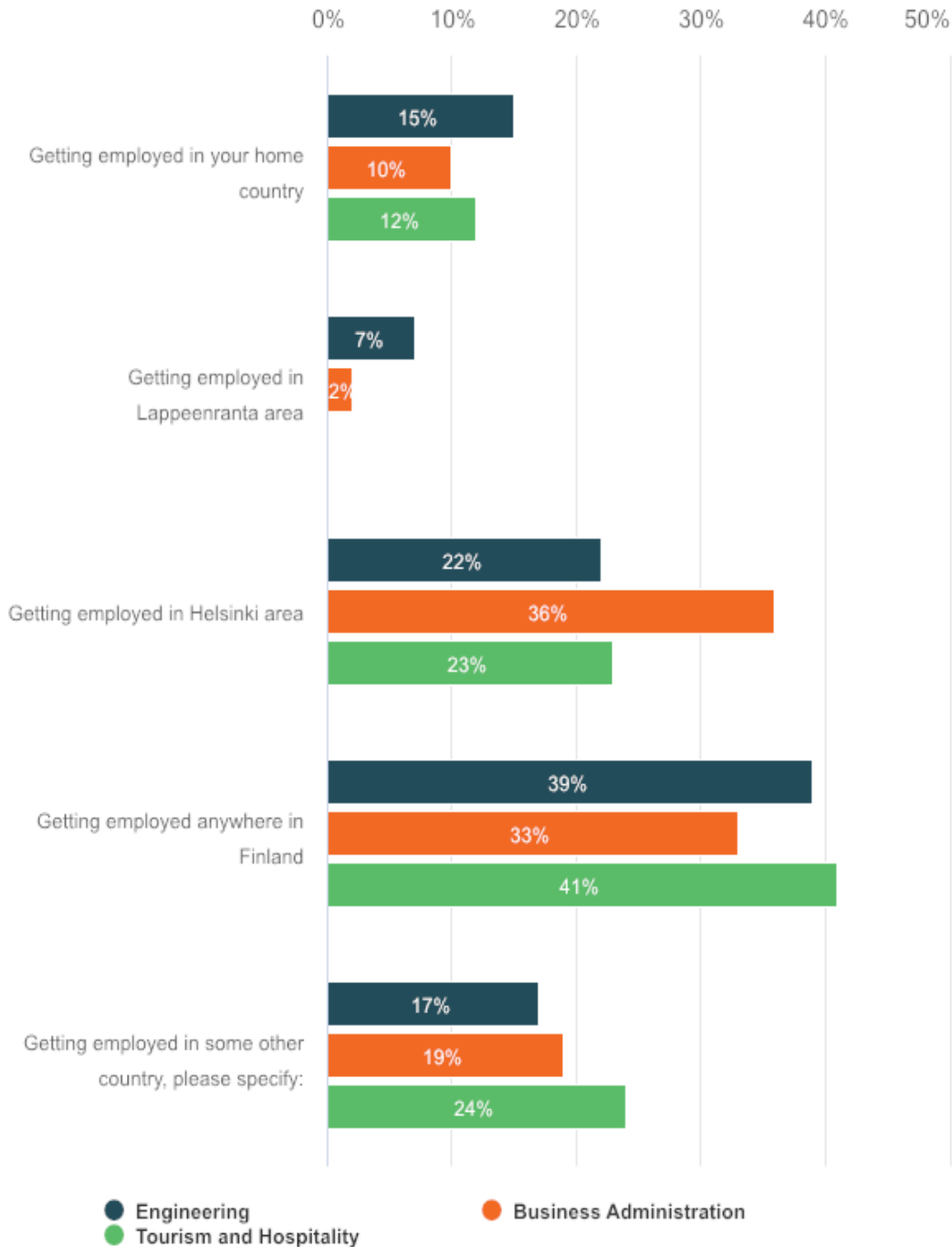
Employment plans

The same amount of people are planning to return to their home country in both phases, and a little bit more are planning to move to a third country.

When it comes to options in Finland, already in the beginning of their studies around 3/4 of students are willing to stay and get employed in Finland. This willingness still prevails at the end of studies. The majority is ready to work anywhere in the country, closely followed by the Helsinki area. 21% also chose Lappeenranta area as a place to get employed.

The conducted interviews confirm this, even those who are currently employed in Lappeenranta are ready to move if there is an interesting job opportunity.

Main choice



Around the same amount of business students want to get employed in the Helsinki area as well as anywhere in Finland. The engineer students are more flexible, they are more willing to get employed anywhere in Finland. This might be explained with more employment opportunities for engineers outside the capital area. Some of the students had Lappeenranta as their main choice, however none of the tourism students chose it.

The Helsinki area as a destination is more important for LUT students as opposed to Saimia students, who are more focused on getting employed anywhere in Finland. This might be explained that Master level workplaces are most likely to be found in the capital area, especially for business students.

When it comes to continent of origin, for half of the African students the most important choice was going back to their home country.

Other background factors did not have significant effects.

Reasons for change of plans

Positive

- Getting attached to Finland
- High living standards
- Good working conditions, high salary
- Personal / family reasons
- Skills were appreciated

Negative

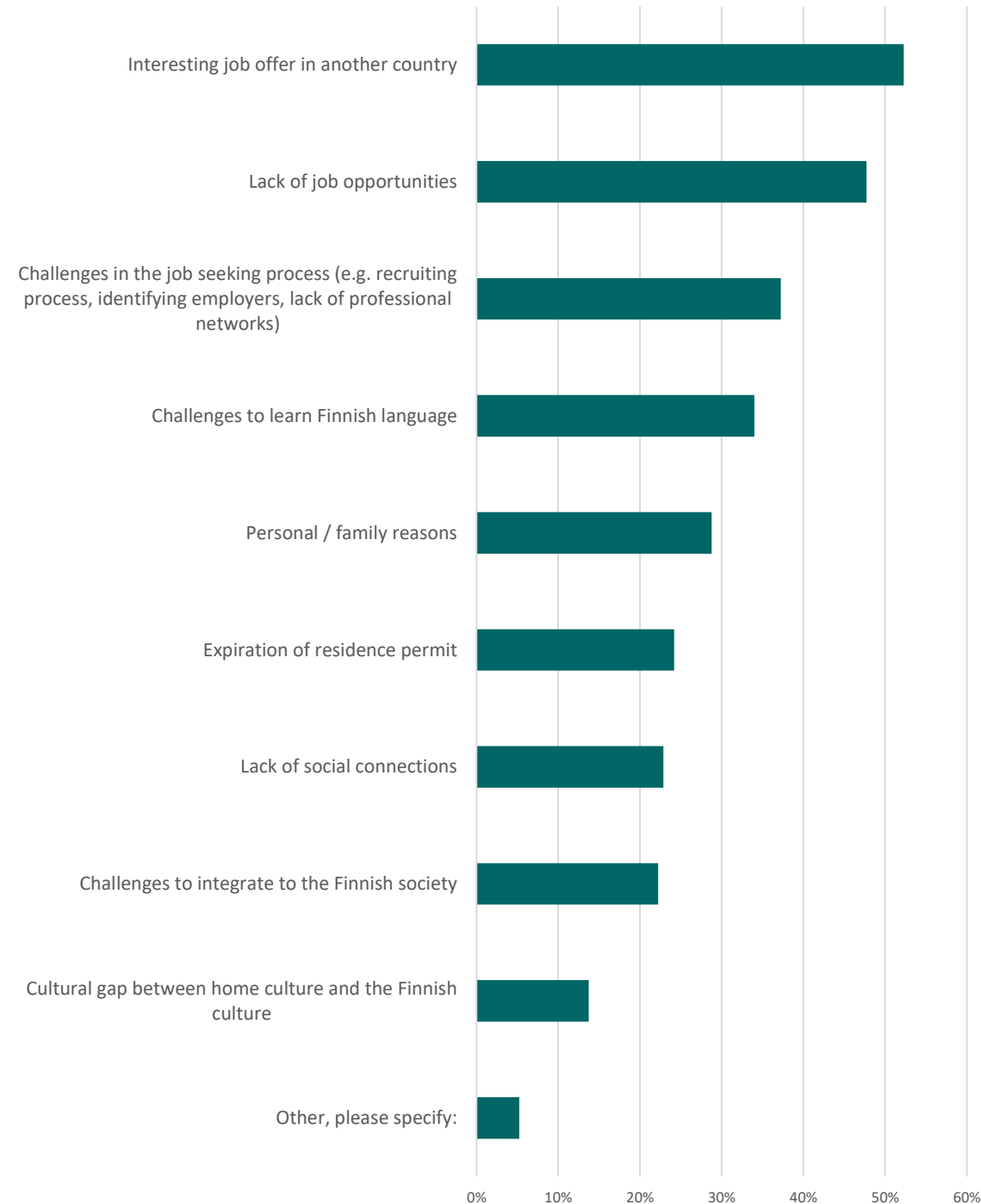
- No employment opportunities in Finland
- Difficult to find proper job in Finland as a foreigner and without good Finnish skills
- Competition between other international and Finnish students / job seekers
- Companies do not reply to or consider international applicants
- Interesting job opportunity elsewhere
- Racism
- Residence permit problems
- Homesickness, loneliness

Altogether there were more negative than positive change of plans. People deciding to stay in Finland mainly mentioned things like getting attached to the country during their stay, high living standards, and personal or family reasons. Negative change of plans mostly happened because of lack of employment opportunities in Finland, realizing how difficult it is to find a job without good Finnish and as a foreigner, when companies do not consider international applicants.

Main reasons for leaving Finland

1. Interesting job offer in another country
2. Lack of job opportunities
3. Challenges in the job seeking process
4. Challenges to learn the Finnish language
5. Personal / family reasons

	n	Percentage
Interesting job offer in another country	80	52,29 %
Lack of job opportunities	73	47,71 %
Challenges in the job seeking process (e.g. recruiting process, identifying employers, lack of professional networks)	57	37,25 %
Challenges to learn Finnish language	52	33,99 %
Personal / family reasons	44	28,76 %
Expiration of residence permit	37	24,18 %
Lack of social connections	35	22,88 %
Challenges to integrate to the Finnish society	34	22,22 %
Cultural gap between home culture and the Finnish culture	21	13,73 %
Other, please specify:	8	5,23 %



Main reasons for leaving Finland

It was interesting to see that 50% of Saimia students chose “challenges to learn the Finnish language” as opposed to 28% of LUT students, even though more Saimia students have intermediate and advanced Finnish skills compared to LUT students.

Significantly more business students have challenges in the job seeking process (59%) as opposed to tourism (25%) and engineer students (29%). Also significantly more business students chose the lack of job opportunities (67%) as opposed to tourism (31%) and engineer students (41%).

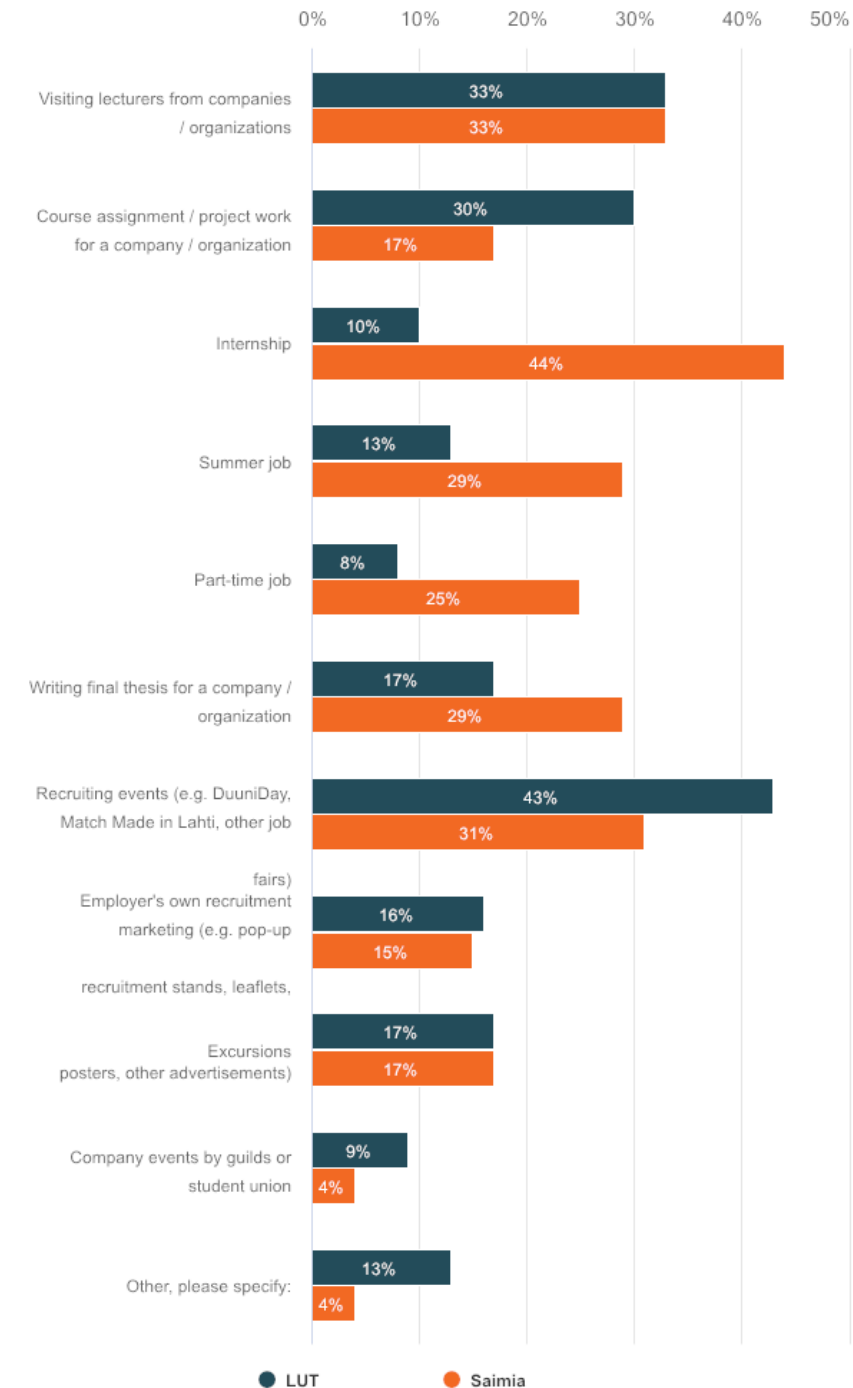
For women (44%), personal and family reasons played a more important role than for men (17%).

Other background factors did not have significant effects.

The interviews confirmed these reasons. The participants talked about interesting job offers in other countries, lack of job opportunities in Finland, challenges in the job seeking process and the difficulty of learning Finnish. Only one of them mentioned personal reasons for possibly leaving the country.

Contacts to potential employers during studies

	n	Percentage
Recruiting events (e.g. DuuniDay, Match Made in Lahti, other job fairs)	67	39,88 %
Visiting lecturers from companies / organizations	56	33,33 %
Course assignment / project work for a company / organization	44	26,19 %
Writing final thesis for a company / organization	34	20,24 %
Internship	33	19,64 %
Summer job	30	17,86 %
Excursions	28	16,67 %
Employer's own recruitment marketing (e.g. pop-up recruitment stands, leaflets, posters, other advertisements)	26	15,48 %
Part-time job	22	13,10 %
Other, please specify:	17	10,12 %
Company events by guilds or student union	13	7,74 %



Contacts to potential employers during studies

Both LUT and Saimia students had the same amount of visiting lecturers from companies during their studies. LUT students did more course assignments and project work for companies. However, significantly more Saimia students had internships, summer jobs or even part-time jobs at potential employers, and they were also more likely to write their thesis for a company. LUT students were more likely to attend recruiting events.

Tourism students were the most likely to have internships, summer jobs or part-time jobs, and they were the least likely to attend recruiting events. Business students had the most visiting lecturers. Engineering students had the most excursions.

None of the PhD students had an internship, summer job or part-time job. Significantly more Bachelor students had internships (47%), summer jobs (30%) or part-time jobs (25%) compared to Master students (10%, 15% and 10%). The explanation for this is that the Bachelor students answering the survey were from Saimia, where internship is compulsory during their studies, while for Master students it's only optional.

African students did not have internships or summer jobs at all.

Other background factors did not have significant effects.

Interview participants also mentioned visiting lecturers, recruiting events, internships, summer jobs and writing their thesis for a company, which resulted in permanent employment.

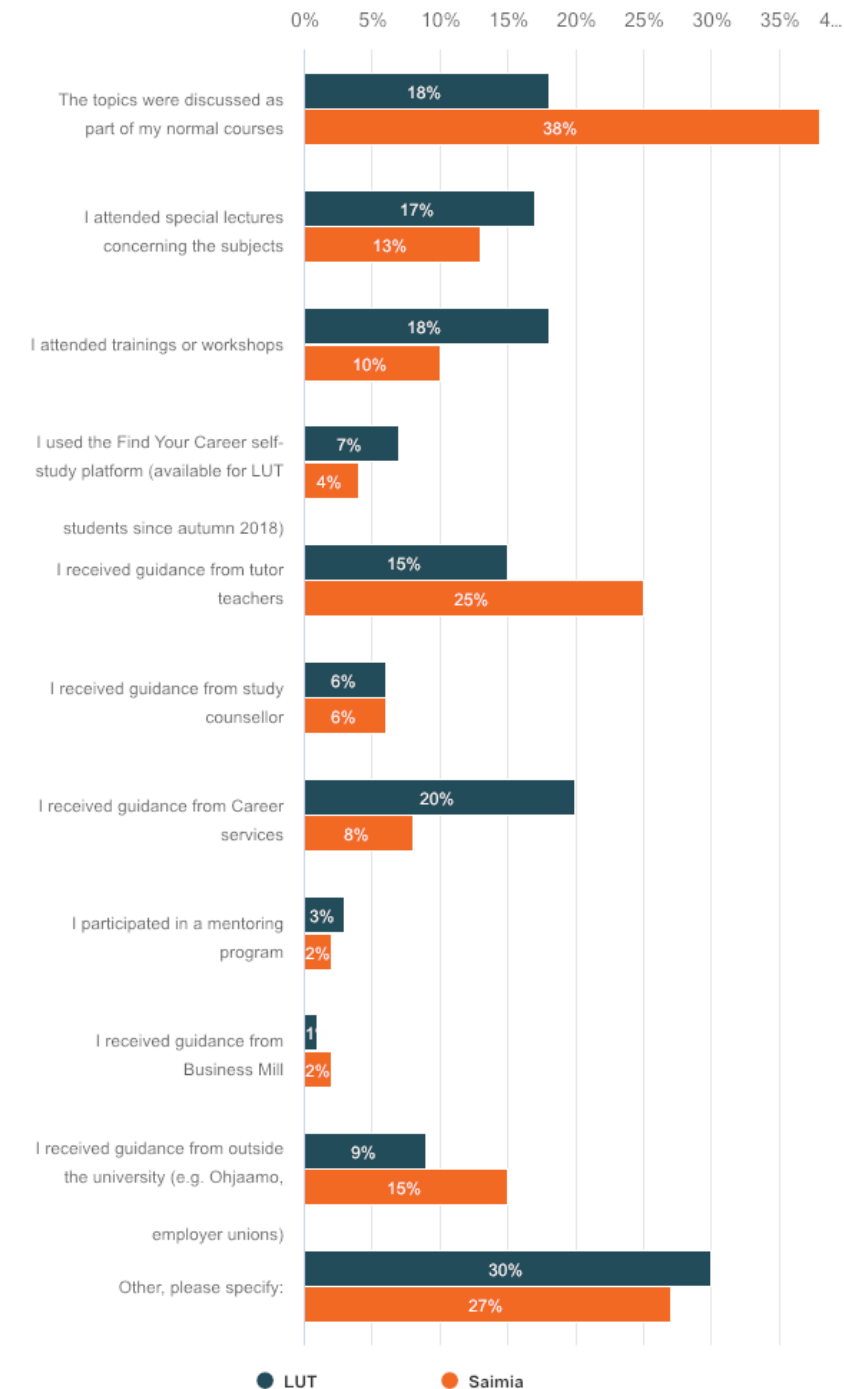
The survey results clearly show that the number of international students' contacts to possible employer companies and organizations is very low and these contacts are not enough to develop professional networks needed in the job seeking process. All the existing methods could be improved and development of new methods are also needed.

Ways to find project work, final thesis, internship, part-time job or summer job for a company in Finland

- Through a portal: LinkedIn, Highered, Rekrynet, mol.fi, company's own website
- Through a professor
- Through personal network
- At a recruiting event, industry networking event

Support used concerning career planning and job seeking

	n	Percentage
Other, please specify:	49	29,17 %
The topics were discussed as part of my normal courses	40	23,81 %
I received guidance from tutor teachers	30	17,86 %
I received guidance from Career services	28	16,67 %
I attended trainings or workshops	27	16,07 %
I attended special lectures concerning the subjects	26	15,48 %
I received guidance from outside the university (e.g. Ohjaamo, employer unions)	18	10,71 %
I used the Find Your Career self-study platform (available for LUT students since autumn 2018)	10	5,95 %
I received guidance from study counsellor	10	5,95 %
I participated in a mentoring program	5	2,98 %
I received guidance from Business Mill	2	1,19 %



Support used concerning career planning and job seeking

Saimia students discuss these topics as part of normal courses more often (38%) than LUT students (18%). Saimia students also received more guidance from their tutor teachers. LUT students are more likely to attend training and workshops and getting help from the Career Services. Saimia students were more likely to use help from outside the university.

Bachelor students were most likely to discuss these topics during courses, which is again explained by the fact that the Bachelor students are from Saimia. PhD students were most likely to participate in a mentoring programme.

Tourism students discussed the topics the most during normal courses (35%), while engineering and business students had a similar 22-23%. Business students were most likely to attend special lectures concerning these subjects.

Those who are currently unemployed were more likely to try and use all of the available help.

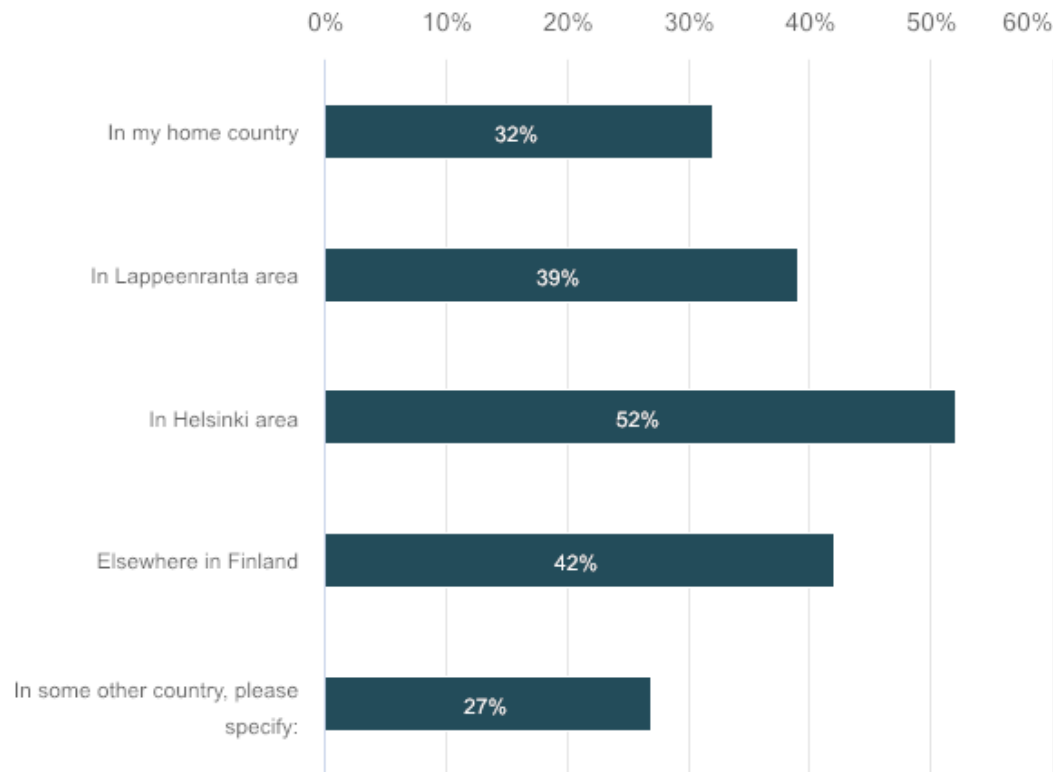
Other background factors did not have significant effects.

In the “other” section many students said that they did not receive any help at all, or that they received guidance from other international classmates.

Some of the interview participants mentioned guidance from the Career Services and attending training or workshops.

It seems that there is still a lot to develop concerning the support processes in both organizations. It can also be seen that a lot of students are still unaware of the available services.

Job applications sent



The most applications were sent to the Helsinki area. It is interesting to see that almost as many applications were sent to jobs in Lappeenranta than elsewhere in Finland. It is important to note that around 40% of international students sent applications in Lappeenranta area, however this potential workforce remained unused in the area.

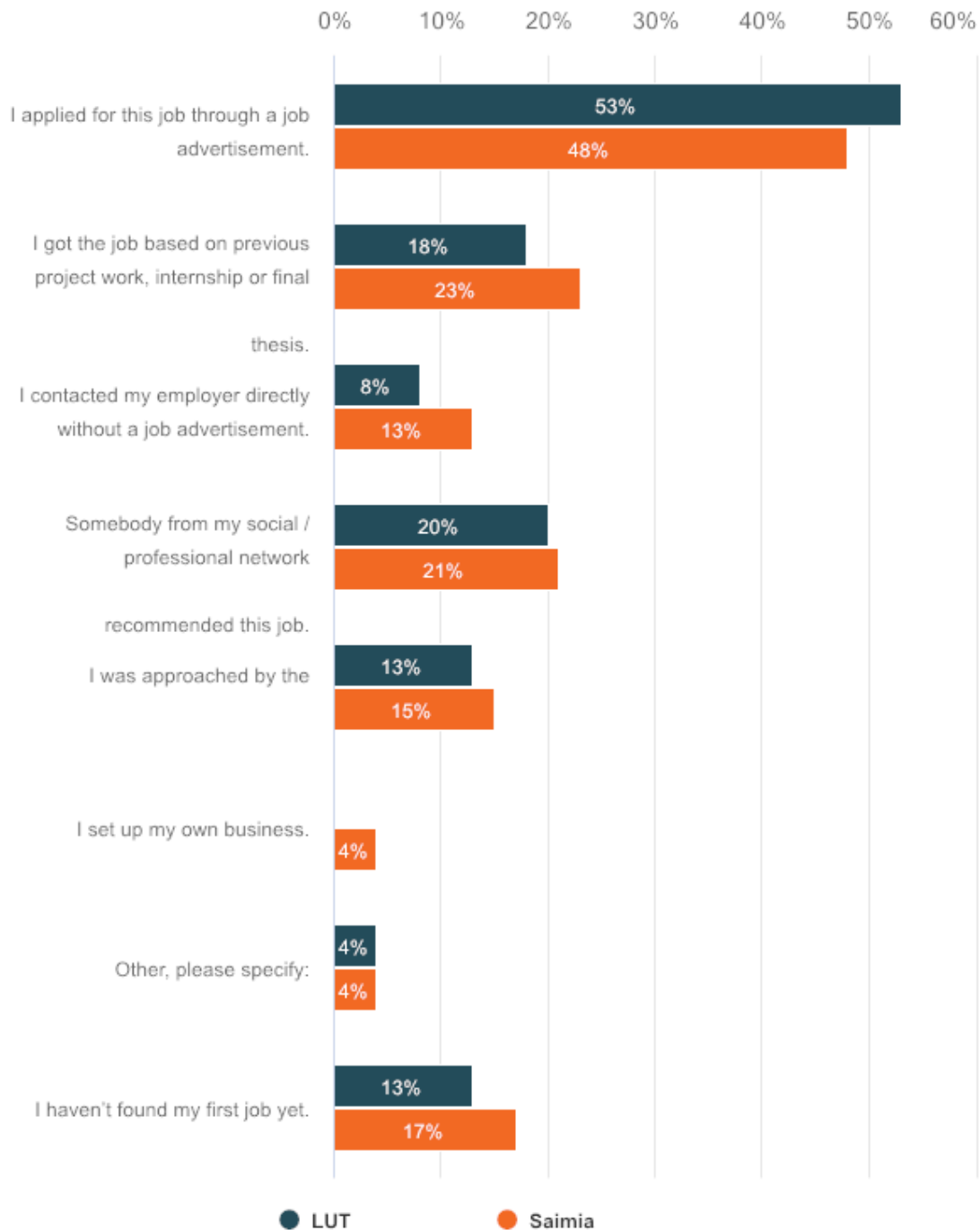
The majority of Bachelor and Master students' applications were sent to the Helsinki area (both 53%) More Bachelor students applied for jobs in their home country (40%) as well in Lappeenranta area (47%) as opposed to Master students (27% and 34%), In turn more Master students sent applications elsewhere in Finland. PhD students sent most of the applications to their home country and Lappeenranta area.

Business students have sent the least applications to Lappeenranta area and to third countries, and they sent the most applications to Helsinki area.

Those who speak advanced Finnish only sent applications to Lappeenranta area and Helsinki area, but none to other areas of Finland. Those with intermediate Finnish were more likely to send applications to Helsinki, Lappeenranta and elsewhere in Finland compared to those with basic Finnish, and they sent less applications to their home country and to third countries.

Other background factors did not have significant effects.

First job after graduation



	n	Percentage
I applied for this job through a job advertisement.	87	51,79 %
Somebody from my social / professional network recommended this job.	34	20,24 %
I got the job based on previous project work, internship or final thesis.	33	19,64 %
I haven't found my first job yet.	23	13,69 %
I was approached by the employer.	22	13,10 %
I contacted my employer directly without a job advertisement.	15	8,93 %
Other, please specify:	7	4,17 %
I set up my own business.	2	1,19 %

First job after graduation

The amount of students that got their first job through traditional job advertisements is the highest. The explanation for this is that the international students are not so familiar with the concept of "hidden workplaces". This is the same for both LUT and Saimia students. It is important to notice that none of LUT students have become entrepreneurs, and only 4% of Saimia's students set up their own business. As an interview participant recommends, entrepreneurship should be promoted more to students.

The majority of Bachelor students (49%) as well as Master students (57%) applied to their first job after graduation through a job advertisement. However, only 25% of PhD students used this, the majority of them (31%) found their first job through their social / professional network.

The majority of those who speak advanced Finnish got their jobs through their networks and it was also common for those with intermediate Finnish.

Other background factors did not have significant effects.

These results show the importance of discussing "hidden workplaces" with international students. This way the competition will not be so tough and they will have access to larger amount of possible positions. For recruiting organizations and companies this will open the possibility to access this potential workforce at an early stage through educational cooperation.

Number of applications sent before getting the first job after graduation

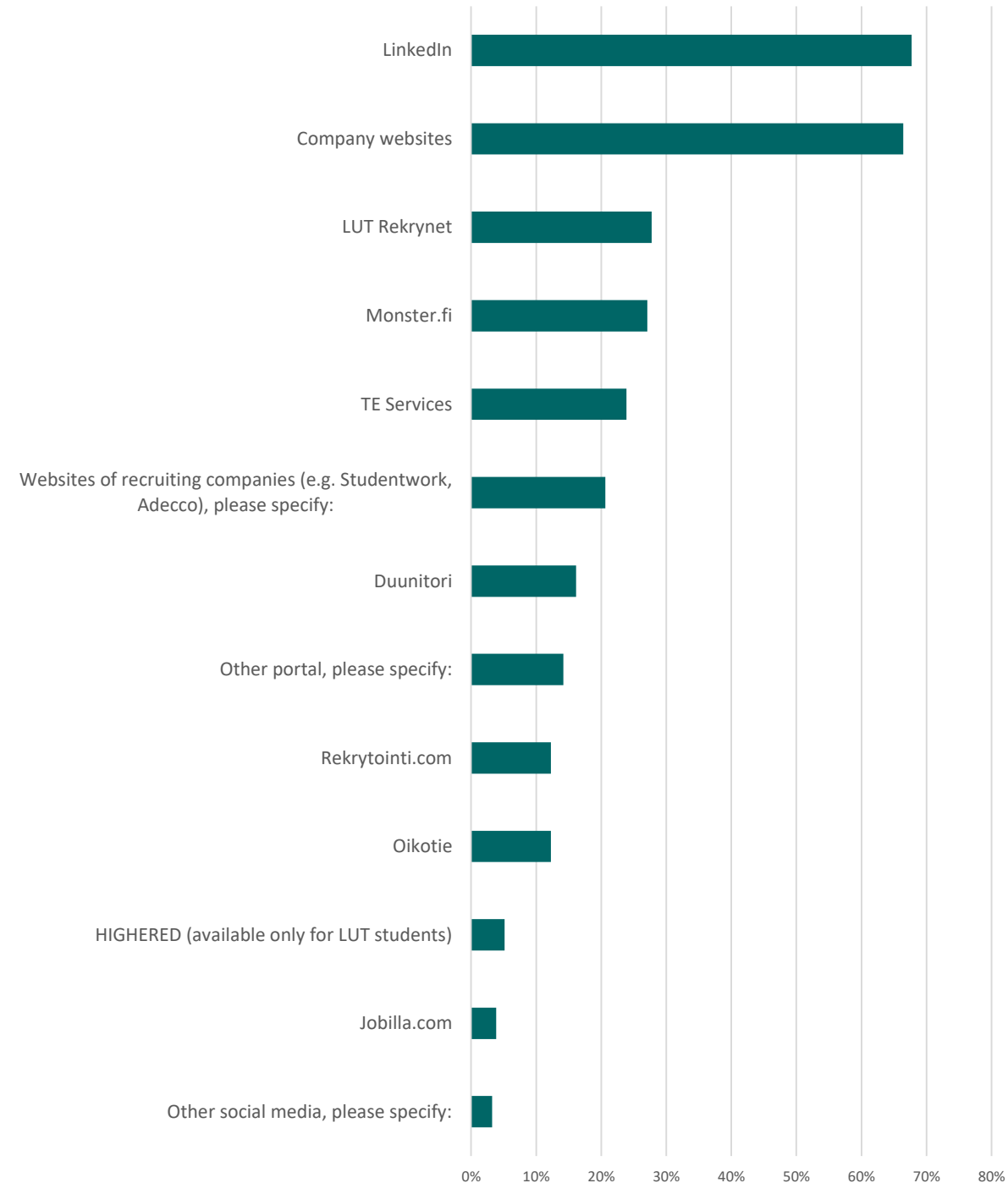
	n	Percentage
1 to 10	61	47 %
11 to 50	37	28 %
51 to 100	17	13 %
More than 100	16	12 %

The international students sent applications diligently, and the majority (47%) got their first job after sending 1 to 10 applications. The amount of applications sent before getting the first job is around the same as Finnish students.

Websites and social media used for job seeking

1. LinkedIn
2. Company websites
3. LUT Rekrynet
4. Monster
5. TE Services

	n	Percentage
LinkedIn	105	67,74 %
Company websites	103	66,45 %
LUT Rekrynet	43	27,74 %
Monster.fi	42	27,10 %
TE Services	37	23,87 %
Websites of recruiting companies (e.g. Studentwork, Adecco), please specify:	32	20,65 %
Duunitori	25	16,13 %
Other portal, please specify:	22	14,19 %
Oikotie	19	12,26 %
Rekrytointi.com	19	12,26 %
HIGHERED (available only for LUT students)	8	5,16 %
Jobilla.com	6	3,87 %
Other social media, please specify:	5	3,23 %



Websites and social media used for job seeking

The top choices for students to find job applications is LinkedIn (68%) and companies' websites (67%). It is followed by LUT Rekrynet (28%), Monster (27%) and TE services (24%). However, LUT students (74%) use LinkedIn more than Saimia students (52%). Monster is more popular with LUT students, meanwhile Duunitori and TE services is more used by Saimia students. LUT Rekrynet is also mainly used by LUT students.

PhD students did not use websites of recruiting companies at all.

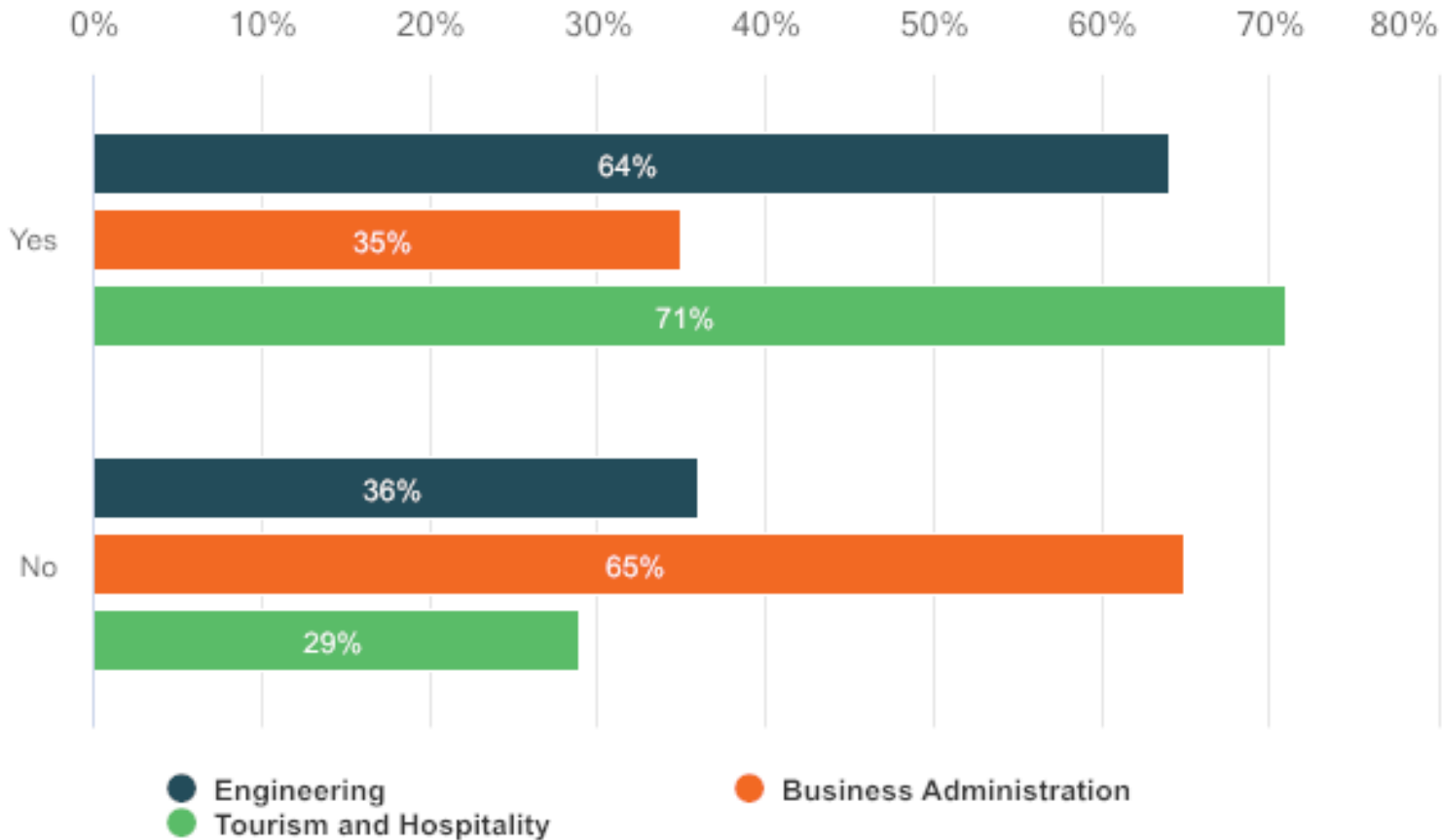
Both LinkedIn and company websites were the most popular with business students. Engineer students benefit the most from LUT Rekrynet.

Those who speak intermediate Finnish were more likely to use the website of TE services (55%) than those with basic Finnish (22%). The majority of Finnish job portals, including TE Services, do not offer service in English.

Other background factors did not have significant effects.

It is a positive thing that the international students are able to make use of LinkedIn and company websites in the job seeking process.

Attending a job interview in Finland



57% of all students have attended a job interview in Finland. The majority of them (82%) attended 1 to 5 interviews.

Students of LUT attended more job interviews (57%) than Saimia students (54%).

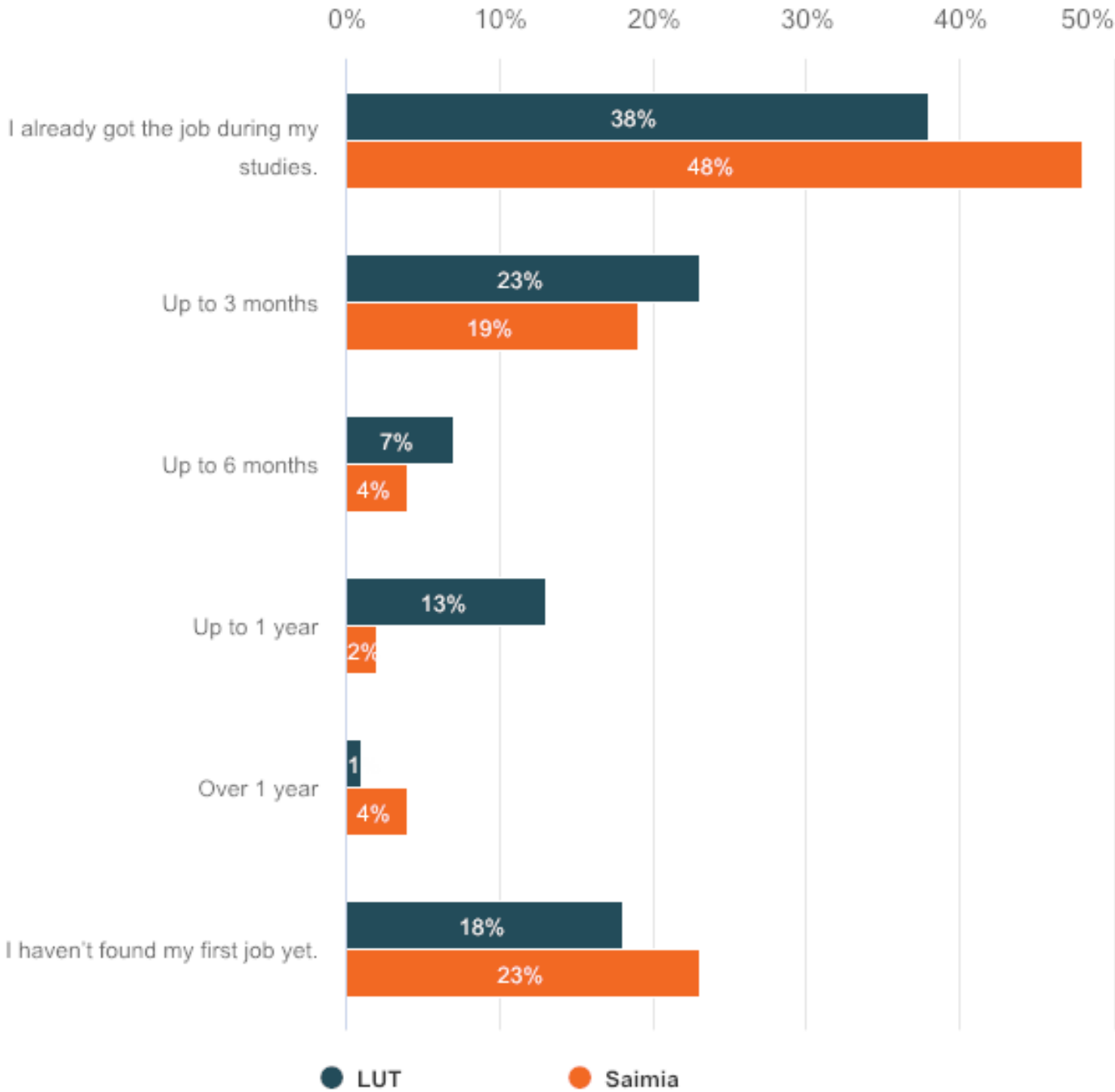
Master students attended the most job interviews (62%), followed by Bachelor (53%) and PhD students (31%).

Tourism students attended the most interviews (71%). Engineering students attended more interviews (64%) than business students (35%).

Every student with advanced Finnish skills attended an interview, as well as 83% of the intermediate speakers.

Other background factors did not have significant effects.

Getting employed after graduation



41% of all students got their first job already during their studies. Many students got their first job within 3 months after graduation.

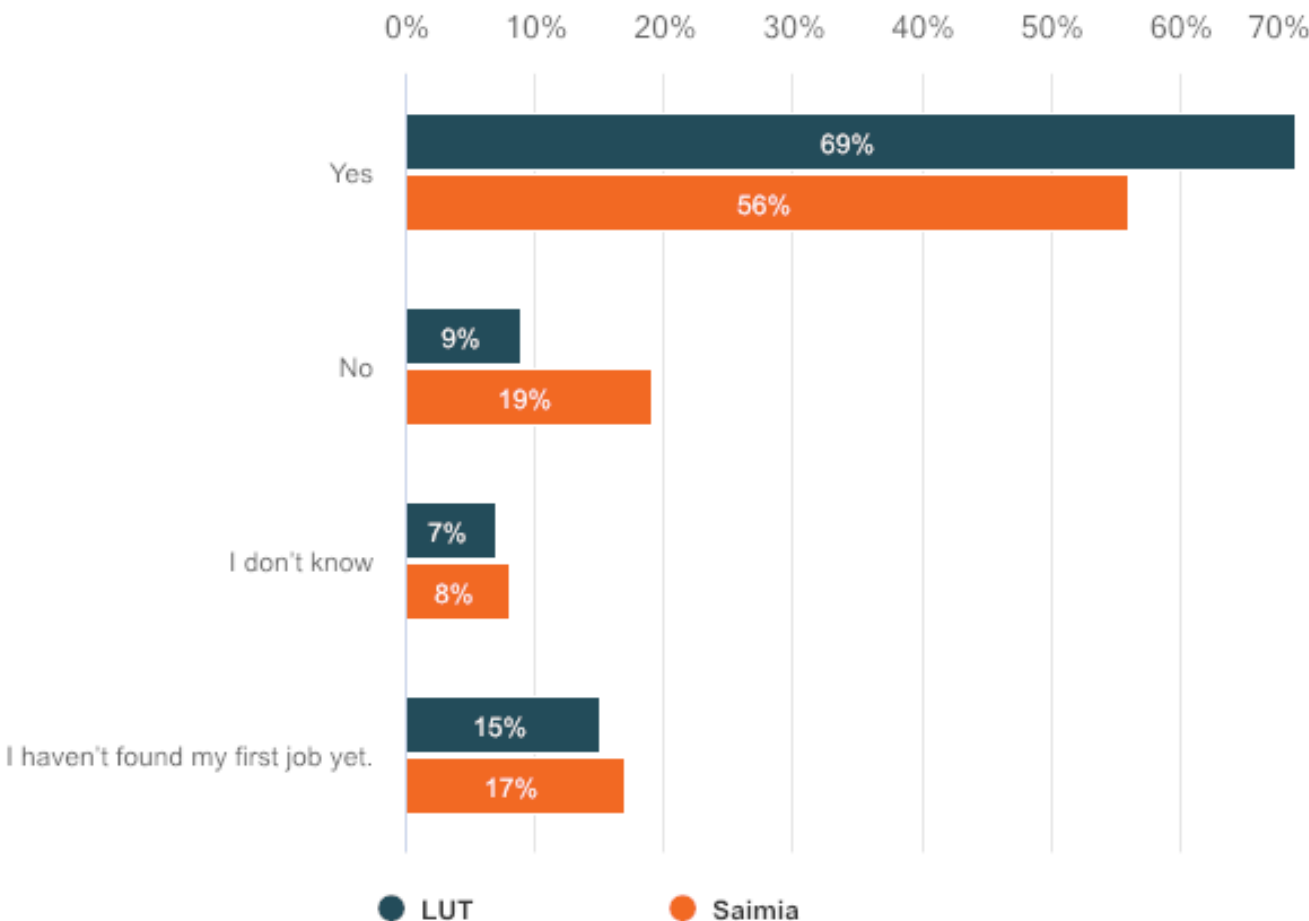
More Saimia students got the job during their studies (48%) than LUT students (38%). This can be explained with the fact that more students from Saimia are doing their thesis for a company or doing an internship or a summer job.

Bachelor students are more likely to get employed during their studies (49%) compared to Master students (34%). This can be explained by the same statement as above, as Bachelor students are from Saimia. For PhD students it's 62%.

More engineer students got employed during their studies (42%) than business students (31%). This can also be explained by the fact that engineer students are more likely to write their thesis for a company. Tourism students are the most successful, 65% got employed during their studies.

Other background factors did not have significant effects.

Requirements of the first job corresponding the degree



For 66% of all students their first job corresponded to their degree level. For students of LUT (69%) their first job was more likely to correspond with their degree level compared to students of Saimia (56%). Saimia students are more willing to take jobs that might be below their degree level.

When it comes to degree levels, with higher levels correspondence increases, from Bachelor at 53%, through Master at 69% to PhD at 81%.

Engineer students have jobs that correspond the most to their degree level (70%), followed by business (62%) and tourism students (47%).

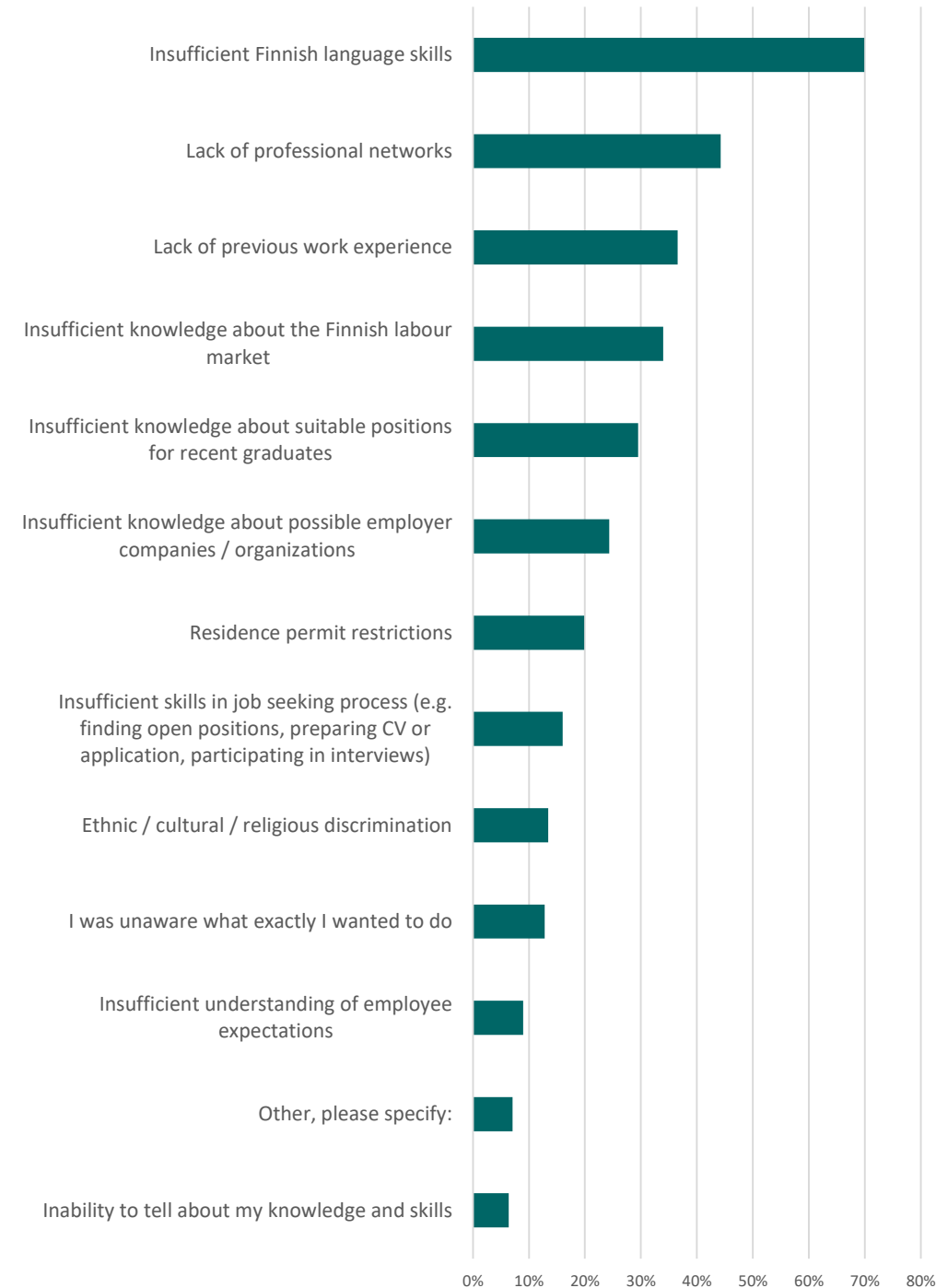
Other background factors did not have significant effects.

During the interviews, students of Saimia said that their job fully corresponds their degree, however most LUT students claimed that their job does not fully correspond, only mostly. A participant said that their thesis work was much more complicated than the job they are doing now.

Main challenges the graduates face during job seeking in Finland

1. Insufficient Finnish language skills
2. Lack of professional networks
3. Lack of previous work experience
4. Insufficient knowledge about the Finnish labour market
5. Insufficient knowledge about suitable positions for recent graduates

	n	Percentage
Insufficient Finnish language skills	109	69,87 %
Lack of professional networks	69	44,23 %
Lack of previous work experience	57	36,54 %
Insufficient knowledge about the Finnish labour market	53	33,97 %
Insufficient knowledge about suitable positions for recent graduates	46	29,49 %
Insufficient knowledge about possible employer companies / organizations	38	24,36 %
Residence permit restrictions	31	19,87 %
Insufficient skills in job seeking process (e.g. finding open positions, preparing CV or application, participating in interviews)	25	16,03 %
Ethnic / cultural / religious discrimination	21	13,46 %
I was unaware what exactly I wanted to do	20	12,82 %
Insufficient understanding of employee expectations	14	8,97 %
Other, please specify:	11	7,05 %
Inability to tell about my knowledge and skills	10	6,41 %



Main challenges the graduates face during job seeking in Finland

Insufficient knowledge about the Finnish labour market, insufficient knowledge about possible employers and insufficient knowledge about suitable positions for recent graduates are more common for LUT students. This can be explained by the fact that Saimia students discuss these topics a lot more during their normal courses and with tutor teachers. Saimia students have more challenges with the lack of experience.

After Finnish language, the most challenging factor for PhD students is the insufficient knowledge about the Finnish labour market (54%), while for Bachelor and Master students it's the lack professional networks.

Insufficient knowledge about possible employer companies is the most common with engineering students (31%), followed by tourism (19%) and business (11%). Lack of previous work experience is also the most challenging for engineering students (42%).

Other background factors did not have significant effects.

Interview participants also mentioned the Finnish language, lack of knowledge about the Finnish labour market and lack of knowledge about employer companies as their main challenges. They did not mention the lack of professional networks, as the majority got their job through recommendation by their professional network (professors). A participant told that they had a lot of challenges with racism and discrimination. Many participants talked about how the employers' attitudes towards foreigners should be changed.

Suggestions for LUT

- More and higher level language courses (especially in the evening)
- Convince the companies to hire the international students, push them to give internationals a chance
- Partnerships with companies, improved connections to the market
- More assignments/courses/thesis work with the companies
- Promoting local companies and job opportunities in Lappeenranta
- More visits from companies to the university
- More recruitment events on campus, with companies that actually willing to hire internationals
- Introducing more, smaller companies where one can apply according to their field of study
- Promoting entrepreneurship
- Contact person helping with internships
- Providing internship possibilities
- Publishing more internships and entry level positions
- Career workshops to realize own strengths and working identity
- Workshops on CV writing
- Workshops on cover letter writing
- Workshops on LinkedIn
- Promoting events of Career Services to get more coverage
- Networking events
- Job center on campus
- Introduction to Finnish labor market and work culture
- Information about the summer job tradition in Finland
- Introduction to Finnish labor laws
- Lectures or materials about rights of employees
- Trainings on what the Finnish job market is expecting from an employee
- Trainings on how to present yourself in a nice format to get employed, how to communicate with companies
- More and help with career planning and job search
- More excursions to companies in English
- More information translated to English
- Information on the support opportunities after graduation for staying in Finland (Kela support, TE support)

Recommendations for new international students

- Learn Finnish from the beginning
- Do not learn things only from lectures, also learn by yourself
- Learn to write a good CV
- Make direct contact with companies, call them
- Specialize your skills
- Get good grades
- Learn specific programs future employers need
- Do an internship, even if unpaid
- Do your thesis for a company if possible
- Be open for any position in any city in Finland
- Be open for positions outside of Finland
- Get Finnish friends
- Pay more attention to extracurricular activities
- Build networks with students and professors
- Work hard to find jobs, send applications every day
- Start looking for jobs as early as you can
- Don't give up!
- "Run away as fast as possible"

Suggestions for Lappeenranta and companies

Suggestions for Lappeenranta

- More job opportunities
- Promoting local companies and job opportunities available in Lappeenranta
- Website with local companies' profiles
- Workshops to get to know the city and available job opportunities
- Promoting entrepreneurship
- More language courses (especially in the evening)
- More international events, cultural events and networking events in English
- More sports activities

Suggestions for companies

- Employers should change their attitudes towards internationals, give them a chance
- More internships and entry level positions
- More projects for students during courses
- Pay attention to international students resumes and applications
- More visits to the university
- Making agreement with employee to learn Finnish language to a certain target level in a given time
- Explain better on their website what they are doing in Lappeenranta

Interviews

About the Finnish working life

Positive

- Flexible working time
- No massive pressure
- No stress
- People are helpful and friendly
- Good office equipment
- Respect from other employees
- Appropriate work-life balance
- Respectful, nearly equal relationship between employer and employee
- High quality requirement for the job done
- Open working culture

Surprising

- Work done should be “good enough, not best of the best”
- 6 months’ probation period (compared to 2-3 in home country)
- People were not talking
- Video application in the recruitment process

Challenging

- Winter and darkness
- Earlier start of working hours (compared to home country)
- Coffee room talk is in Finnish
- Independence for the employee
- Colleagues afraid to talk in English

Opinions about Lappeenranta

Positive

- Good place to live
- Beautiful scenery
- Clean
- As there is nothing to do, there are no distractions, so it's possible to focus on studies / research job
- Good bus services
- Good service in English in shops
- Good connections to Helsinki
- Good infrastructure

Negative

- Very small, there's nothing to do, boring
- Very few job opportunities
- Salary not as good as it would be in Helsinki or Tampere
- Roads are not in good condition
- Taxi service is too expensive
- Bus connections are not good

Future plans concerning Lappeenranta

- Would come back / stay if there were more job opportunities
- Dream is to buy a house in Lappeenranta
- Plans to live here for the next 4 years
- Plans to stay here for the next 3 years until residence permit is valid