

## Internationality in event organisation

In an international university community, organisations should consider how they can make their events suitable for international students, too. Should you organise separate international events or events that are simply aimed at all students? The challenge with events aimed only at international students is often the lack of Finnish students attending them, which, of course, prevents Finnish and international students from meeting one another. Encounters between international and Finnish students are valuable to both, which is why organisations should strive to encourage these encounters at their events.

You should also remember that international students are not a homogenous group. Some of them are on student exchange, typically lasting for the autumn or spring term or one academic year. International degree students, on the other hand, have arrived in Finland to complete an entire degree, usually at the master's level. A significant portion of the students coming to Finland to complete a degree are also planning on staying in Finland after their studies.

Connecting with Finnish culture and creating networks is often important to international students, especially if they are planning on staying in Finland after their studies. Finnish students, on the other hand, benefit from international encounters through networking and by accumulating international competence. International skills will be increasingly needed in future working life, while meeting international students also helps develop language skills and intercultural understanding.

One of the most important factors in reaching international students – as well as one of the greatest challenges with it – is linguistically accessible communication. Multilingual communication ensures that information about organisations' activities reaches everyone interested in them regardless of language proficiency. However, we recommend that you always mention the language of an event when advertising it – multilingual communication can easily make people assume that taking part in the event itself is also possible multilingually. If the event can only be organised in domestic languages, it is important to let people know of this in advance.

When communicating about events, you should remember that international students do not always have the same prior knowledge as local students. For this reason, it is a good idea to clearly explain terms such as *sitsit* (academic dinner parties) and *freshers'* parties. With mass events, you can help by organising a meetup in a familiar location before the event to go to it together. This makes participation easier, especially to those who are not familiar with the city yet.

Getting in touch with international students may seem challenging. However, there are many ways to reach them:

- Contact the tutors of international students and ask for an opportunity to introduce your organisation. If you decide to do this, your organisation should already have an upcoming event to which you can invite the international students.
- Come and showcase your organisation at the Welcome Fair. The Welcome Fair is an event organised for international students at the beginning of each academic term (in January and August), similar to the Opening Carnival. All organisations

operating under HYY may participate in the Fair. Follow the Student Union's communication and sign up.

- Cooperate with [international organisations](#). There are several international student organisations operating under HYY. Contact them to co-organise an event or ask for their help with marketing your organisation's events to international students, for instance.
  - Communicate about your organisation and events in international students' Facebook groups. For example, HYY manages the [International Students](#) group.
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## Internationalisation guide

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International students are potential members of organisations, too. International students enrich organisations' operation and make internationalisation at home possible for Finnish students. Society and the labour market have long been moving towards an increasingly international future. However, everyone is not able to go on exchange during studies or complete an internship abroad. By including international students in the organisation's activities, Finnish students can learn the same skills they would learn abroad.

Organisational activities also help international students become integrated into Finnish society. A lack of social relationships and networks along with problems getting employed are the biggest reasons for the difficulties international students have staying in Finland after their studies. Organisations have a key role in responding to these challenges, as organisational activities allow international students to learn about Finnish culture and meet Finnish students.

Getting exchange students and degree students from abroad included in your organisation's activities may seem challenging, but it is possible to make the organisation's activities more international by small steps. The following guide features different ways of adopting an international perspective in the organisation's events and operating methods. The guide is divided into three sections: the first one **(A)** includes measures that are easy to implement, while the second one **(B)** contains changes that require a bit more effort. The third and final section **(C)** features internationalisation methods that affect the organisation's activities in a more holistic and comprehensive manner.

### A

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- Appoint a person in charge of international affairs, whose duties include taking the international perspective into account in the organisation's activities. This person does not need to do everything themselves – the point is for them to ensure that internationality is taken into account in the organisation. If needed, you can also establish an international committee to support the person in charge of international affairs.
- Attend the opening events of the academic year that are aimed at international students, such as the Welcome Fair. You can reach potential members at these events as well as make your organisation known among international students.
- Translate the main points of your communication into English, too. If the matter only concerns Finnish-speaking students, it is still polite to acknowledge international students with a text such as 'This article/event about x is only in Finnish/Swedish'. However, if your resources allow it, the best option is to let international students decide what they are interested in themselves.
- Follow the international activities of other organisations and note down the best practices.
- Add English sitsi songs in your song printouts and songbooks. Well-known English sitsi songs already exist, but there is nothing stopping you from making your own translations either.

## B

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- Organise low-threshold events in English. For example, you could hold an opening event for the academic year for international students, providing them with the opportunity to learn about the organisation's activities and meet its members.
- Expand your English communication. Translate event invites, news and statements into English. If you have an organisation paper, write articles for it in foreign languages, too. The articles could deal with an exchange student's experiences or cover the area of responsibility of one of the members of your board.
- Organise joint events with several organisations. Contact the person in charge of international affairs in another organisation or one of the international organisations operating under HYY.
- Remember to take cultural differences into account in your communication and activities. For example, international students are not necessarily familiar with academic dinner parties and the related traditions. You should also be careful with humour to avoid offending anyone.
- Look after the international students who attend your events. You do not need to hold the entire event in English, but you can ensure that the international students have people to chat with and someone acting as an interpreter for them.
- Encourage people to use different languages side by side so that each participant can use the language they are the most comfortable with. Remember that all international students do not want to only speak English – they may also want to learn and develop their Finnish skills. It is always polite to ask which language a person wishes to use in conversation.
- Take international perspectives and the needs of international students into account in your advocacy work.

## C

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- Ensure that people who do not speak Finnish can take part in running the organisation's operations, attend meetings and act in its Board or as an official.
- Translate all the organisation's documents into English.
- Hold all events bi- or trilingually if needed.
- Appoint international support persons who are each responsible for their own international students. The support persons take part in the organisation's events together with the international students, describing what happens at the events in advance and explaining matters discussed in the organisation's meetings, for instance.
- Recruit people returning from exchange as international tutors or for other international activities.