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Graduate Retention in the Region: Best Practices, International examples, Thematic Case Studies and Comparative Insights

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1. Introduction

This report identifies, analyses and explores international examples, policy initiatives and practice-based interventions related to graduate retention, labour-market integration and regional talent attraction. The purpose of this report is not only to identify "best practices" that could be directly transferred to the Jönköping context, but also to develop a broader understanding of how different regions, universities and public actors have responded to similar challenges.

As part of the STAY pilot project, financed by Region Jönköpings Län and the European Regional Development Fund, our team developed a series of thematic case studies examining initiatives, support structures, and policy approaches related to graduate retention across different national and regional contexts. This report focuses particularly on how regions outside major metropolitan areas seek to retain graduates and international talent, how transitions from higher education to employment are managed, and how coordination between actors influences long-term retention outcomes. To enhance reader orientation, key insights are marked in bold throughout the text.

For this report, we drew on academic literature, policy reports, project documentation and examples from ongoing European initiatives. The findings contributed to the broader analytical development of Project STAY and helped frame discussions on labour-market integration, ecosystem coordination and long-term establishment in the region.

One of the clearest insights from this report is that **graduate retention is shaped by a combination of factors rather than any single issue: Employment opportunities matter, but so do housing conditions, a sense of belonging, migration-related conditions, quality of life, and how well different actors work together.**

Several influential insights emerged through engagement with the Swedish national initiative 'Work in Sweden' and related activities organised by Tillväxtverket. Workshops and webinars connected to Work in Sweden provided practical perspectives on labour-market integration, support systems, migration processes and employer engagement linked to retention of international talent in Sweden. These discussions reinforced many of the patterns later identified through interviews and ecosystem mapping within Project STAY, particularly regarding transition points, fragmented support systems and the importance of coordinated support structures.

2. Thematic Findings and Comparative Case Studies

2.1. Place-Based Retention in Peripheral and Non-Metropolitan Regions

A recurring theme across the case studies is that **smaller and non-metropolitan regions face a shared challenge: attracting students is often easier than retaining them after graduation.** Several of the reviewed initiatives, therefore, focused less on student recruitment and more on creating the conditions necessary for long-term establishment after studies.

A particularly relevant example was the ***StayInNorth*** project, led by Nord University and the University of Eastern Finland within the Interreg Aurora framework. The initiative approaches graduate retention as a regional development challenge rather than as a university issue alone. The project emphasises the importance of cooperation between universities, municipalities, employers and regional actors in smaller northern university towns such as Bodø and Joensuu.

A key insight from the project is that **retention depends on ecosystems rather than isolated interventions: Students' decisions are shaped by a combination of employment opportunities, housing, transport, social integration, cultural life and perceived long-term life possibilities**.

This perspective is highly relevant for Project STAY: Jönköping Region shares several characteristics with the regions examined within StayInNorth, including strong local identity, SME-dominated labour markets and limited visibility of graduate career pathways. The case reinforced the importance of understanding retention as a regional ecosystem issue shaped by multiple actors rather than by universities alone.

Key activities observed in the reviewed examples included:

- Building formal cooperation structures between universities, municipalities and employers
- Mapping existing initiatives and studies to avoid duplication
- Treating retention as a regional development issue rather than an educational issue alone
- Improving visibility of career opportunities and everyday life conditions in smaller regions
- Cross-border learning between similar university towns

Taken together, these examples highlighted that smaller regions cannot rely solely on labour-market pull. Without stronger coordination, universities risk functioning primarily as exporters of talent toward larger metropolitan areas.

2.2. Labour-Market Integration Matters More Than Graduation Itself

Across the thematic case studies, labour-market access consistently emerged as one of the most important factors influencing long-term retention. Several cases demonstrated

that graduation alone does not lead to retention if graduates struggle to enter the labour market.

A Finnish longitudinal study following more than 20,000 international students found that retention was more strongly associated with employment opportunities and social integration than with graduation itself. Master's and PhD graduates were, in some cases, even more mobile than bachelor's graduates. Employment and family formation proved to be stronger predictors of long-term establishment than educational attainment.

The ***Mobile Talent?*** project, coordinated through Stiftung Mercator across five European countries, reinforced this finding. The project showed that **while many international students initially intend to stay temporarily after graduation, longer-term decisions are primarily shaped by employment opportunities, career prospects and personal relationships**.

These findings reinforced the importance of examining how experiences during studies, labour-market exposure and everyday life influence decisions over time. They also highlighted the importance of earlier intervention, stronger employer engagement and more coordinated support structures during the transition from studies to employment.

The reviewed initiatives repeatedly highlighted the transition from studies to working life as a decisive phase. Where graduates successfully entered the labour market, retention increased significantly. Where labour-market integration failed, graduates left despite positive experiences during their studies.

2.3. The Intention–Outcome Gap and the Need for Early Intervention

Several initiatives reviewed within Project STAY highlighted a recurring gap between students' intentions to stay after graduation and the lower number who ultimately remain in the region or country long term.

The Swedish Institute's study on international students demonstrated this particularly clearly. While a large majority of students expressed interest in remaining in Sweden after graduation, substantially fewer succeeded in establishing themselves professionally.

The ***Switch to Sweden*** initiative, led by Linköping Science Park together with Future Place Leadership and Swedish universities, directly addressed this issue. The project focused on **improving matches between international graduates and Swedish employers through data analysis, employer engagement and targeted interventions**.

Switch to Sweden identified three recurring bottlenecks:

1. Retention and integration
2. Language and culture
3. Migration and the connected administration

From the reviewed initiatives, it is clear that **retention efforts often begin too late**. Many barriers accumulate gradually over the course of studies and become visible only during the transition into employment. This includes language barriers, weak employer contacts, limited understanding of Swedish recruitment culture, unclear migration pathways and insufficient access to networks. These findings highlight the **importance of earlier intervention, stronger employer engagement and more coordinated support structures during the transition from studies to employment**.

2.4. Quality of Life, Housing and Everyday Retention Factors

The reviewed case studies also demonstrate that **graduates' decisions are shaped by more than employment opportunities alone. Everyday life conditions strongly influence whether individuals can imagine building a future in a place after graduation**. The case of ***Nuffic*** in the Netherlands highlighted the importance of quality of life, work–life balance and housing conditions in shaping retention outcomes. Among graduates who remained in the Netherlands after graduation, quality of life and work–life balance were reported as among the most important reasons for staying. At the same time, housing shortages, financial pressures and lack of suitable employment contributed to decisions to leave. The findings demonstrated that even where employment opportunities exist, retention can weaken if everyday living conditions are perceived as unstable or unattractive.

These findings also show the **importance of considering housing, transportation, social integration, cultural participation and family circumstances when analysing long-term establishment in the region**.

2.5. National Policy Frameworks and Structural Conditions

Several reviewed examples demonstrated how national policy frameworks shape the conditions for regional retention work.

The ***EMN Lithuania*** case showed that changes to migration rules and post-study residence permits improved opportunities for graduates to remain in the country after studies. However, despite these policy improvements, **long-term retention remained limited where labour-market integration and coordinated support structures were weak**. Across multiple European examples, **migration regulations, administrative complexity, and uncertainty regarding residence permits repeatedly emerged as structural barriers affecting international graduates**. These findings reinforced the importance of distinguishing between barriers that can be influenced locally and those dependent on national policy frameworks. They also highlighted that **regional and university-based initiatives often operate within constraints they cannot fully control**, and that expectations should be realistically framed so that local and regional actors can have meaningful influence.

2.6. Graduate Tracking and Evidence-Based Retention Work

The ***EUA TRACKIT*** initiative demonstrated that many universities collect student and graduate data, but that the value of such systems depends on how the information is used in practice. The project highlighted the **importance of combining surveys, administrative data and feedback mechanisms to support decision-making**. The case also reinforced the **value of continuous learning processes and evidence-based approaches to graduate retention**. **Retention challenges evolve over time and require ongoing monitoring rather than isolated project-based interventions**.

For Project STAY, these findings supported the importance of integrating ecosystem mapping, interview analysis and stakeholder engagement into a broader analytical framework, and supports the importance of the parallel pilot study PLACE conducted at Jönköping University (project leader Professor Lucia Naldi, lucia.naldi@ju.se).

2.7 One-Stop Shops and Coordinated Reception Structures

Another recurring theme across the case studies concerned the importance of coordination and accessibility within the support system itself. Examples such as ***International House Gothenburg*** and ***Move to Gothenburg*** illustrated how coordinated reception structures can reduce uncertainty for international graduates and employees. These initiatives provide visible entry points where newcomers can access support related to employment, housing, administration, language, schools and social integration. The reviewed examples highlighted that **retention problems are often not caused by a lack of services, but rather by fragmentation among actors and systems**. **Individuals are frequently required to navigate multiple organisations independently during critical transition periods.**

A webinar organised within the Work in Sweden initiative reinforced this perspective by emphasising that **retention should be understood as a user journey across multiple phases rather than as a single decision point**. **Failures often emerge through the accumulation of smaller barriers over time.**

2.8 Targeted Integration Support within Universities

The ***DAAD FIT*** programme in Germany demonstrated how universities can develop structured support systems linked to both academic integration and labour-market transition. Rather than relying on isolated support activities, the programme integrates language training, study support and career preparation throughout the student lifecycle.

The reviewed examples showed that **retention improves when support structures are coordinated, visible and continuous rather than reactive and fragmented**. The findings highlighted the **importance of strengthening labour-market visibility, employer engagement and clearer pathways between education and employment**. They also reinforced the potential r**ole of universities as active integration actors rather than solely educational institutions**.

2.9 Bridging International Graduates into Employment

A closely related theme concerned the importance of targeted support during the post-graduation phase. The ***DAAD Profi Plus*** programme focused specifically on helping international graduates transition into the German labour market through **profession-specific language training, employer engagement, networking opportunities and career coaching**.

Similarly, the ***International Trainee Programme*** developed by Mittuniversitetet and BRON Innovation in Västernorrland demonstrated how regional partnerships between universities, SMEs and public actors can strengthen retention by **combining employment pathways, language training, social integration, and structured support**. A central insight from these initiatives was that even highly qualified graduates often struggle to enter the labour market due to lack of networks, labour-market familiarity and workplace integration.

These examples reinforced the **importance of profession-specific language support, stronger SME engagement, employer education, and clearer transition pathways between studies and employment**. They also demonstrated that **retention initiatives become more effective when employers actively participate in programme design and implementation**.

3. Overall Reflections

Overall, the thematic case studies reinforced the importance of understanding retention not as a single decision, but as a gradual process shaped by experiences across education, labour-market integration, social belonging and everyday life. The examples showed that successful retention work rarely depends on isolated interventions alone. More effective approaches generally involve stronger coordination between universities, employers, municipalities and regional actors together with clearer pathways between studies and employment.

Several **recurring patterns** emerged consistently across the initiatives:

- The transition from studies into employment represents the most critical phase
- Labour-market integration matters more than educational attainment alone
- Retention is influenced by housing, social integration and quality of life alongside employment
- Fragmented support systems create uncertainty and friction during transition periods
- Universities can play an important role as integration actors beyond education itself
- SME engagement and employer openness are central for long-term establishment
- Retention strategies require coordination across institutional boundaries

4. Sources and Further Information

4.1. International and Comparative Projects

StayInNorth (Nord University)
https://www.nord.no/en/about/faculties-and-centres/nord-university-business-school/centres-and-collaboration/high-north-center/projects/stayinnorth/

Interreg Aurora – StayInNorth
https://www.interregaurora.eu/approved-projects/stayinnorth/

Switch to Sweden
https://linkopingsciencepark.se/project/switch-to-sweden/

Future Place Leadership – Switch to Sweden case
https://futureplaceleadership.com/cases/switch-to-sweden-data-driven-solution-to-improve-international-student-retention-in-sweden/

Work in Sweden / Tillväxtverket
https://tillvaxtverket.se/tillvaxtverket/omtillvaxtverket/varauppdrag/allauppdrag/workinsweden.7098.html

International House Gothenburg / Move to Gothenburg
https://www.movetogothenburg.com

Business Region Göteborg
https://www.businessregiongoteborg.se

DAAD FIT and Profi Plus programmes
https://www.daad.de

International Trainee Programme – Mittuniversitetet & BRON Innovation
https://www.miun.se/Forskning/forskningsprojekt/avslutade-forskningsprojekt/internationellt-traineeprogram/

4.2. Reports and Studies

EMN Lithuania report
https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu

EUA TRACKIT
https://eua.eu/projects/trackit.html

Mathies, C. & Karhunen, H. (2021). International Student Migration in Finland: The Role of Graduation on Staying.
https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1324556.pdf

Nuffic – Staying after graduation
https://www.nuffic.nl/en/news/this-is-why-international-students-stay-or-leave-after-graduating-in-the-netherlands

Nuffic – Stay rate and labour-market position of international graduates
https://www.nuffic.nl/en/onderzoek-en-cijfers/onderzoeken/stay-rate-and-labour-market-position-of-international-graduates

Stiftung Mercator – Mobile Talent? The Staying Intentions of International Students in Five EU Countries
https://www.stiftung-mercator.de/en/publications/mobile-talent-the-staying-intentions-of-international-students-in-five-eu-countries/

Swedish Institute – International student retention studies
https://si.se

Work in Sweden webinar – Statens Servicecenter
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jMRlokUN7aw

5. Further background information on the initiatives presented above (section 2)

5.1. Theme: Place-Based Retention in Peripheral and Non-Metropolitan Regions

Core examples:

- **StayInNorth** (Northern Norway / Finland, 2025)
- Nordic Council of Ministers talent-retention work

What the case shows
The EU-funded ***StayInNorth*** project explicitly addresses graduate retention as a *regional development challenge* in sparsely populated university towns. Led by Nord University and the University of Eastern Finland, the project maps existing research and case studies, builds cooperation networks among universities, municipalities, and businesses, and identifies concrete measures to make smaller northern student cities more attractive to graduates.

A central insight is that retention depends on ecosystems, not single interventions. The project focuses on cross-sector partnerships in cities such as Bodø and Joensuu, recognising that students' decisions are shaped by employment prospects, social integration, housing, mobility and long-term life opportunities.

Why this matters
Peripheral regions cannot rely solely on labour-market pull. Without coordinated action,

even strong universities risk functioning as "exporters" of talent to metropolitan centres. It strongly supports AP3 (system mapping) as a *necessary* step, not an administrative exercise.

Relevance for Project STAY
Jönköpings län shares several characteristics with StayInNorth regions: strong local identity, SME-dominated economies, and limited visibility of graduate career paths. The case supports treating retention as a **place-based, multi-actor process**, directly aligning with AP2–AP3.

Key activities observed

- **Mapping existing studies and cases** to avoid reinventing solutions (StayInNorth).
- **Building formal cooperation networks** between universities, municipalities, regional authorities, and businesses.
- **Joint problem framing**: retention treated as a *regional development issue*, not a university problem alone.
- **Identification of "student city attractiveness" measures**, including housing, transport, cultural life, and employment visibility.
- **Cross-border peer learning** between similar university towns (e.g. Bodø, Joensuu).

What these activities address

- Structural disadvantages of small labour markets
- Fragmentation between actors
- Weak visibility of long-term life prospects in the region

Sources

- StayInNorth overview (High North News): https://www.highnorthnews.com
- Nord University – StayInNorth project: https://www.nord.no
- Interreg Aurora programme: https://www.interregaurora.eu

5.2. Theme: Labour-Market Integration Matters More Than Graduation Itself

Core examples:

- International Student Migration in Finland: The Role of Graduation on Staying (2021)
- Mobile Talent? – Value Migration (2011–2012)

What the case shows
A large-scale Finnish longitudinal study tracking 20,522 international students shows that higher degrees do not increase retention. On the contrary, master's and PhD graduates are more mobile than bachelor's graduates. Roughly two-thirds of international graduates were still in Finland three years after graduation, but staying was strongly associated with employment and family formation, not degree completion.

The earlier Mobile Talent? – Value Migration project supports this finding across five European countries. It shows that while most international master's and PhD students intend to stay temporarily, long-term decisions are shaped by career opportunities and personal relationships rather than formal study outcomes.

Why this matters - Retention policies that focus narrowly on graduation or education quality miss the decisive phase: entry into working life and family stability.

Relevance for Project STAY
This evidence strongly supports AP4's focus on *decision processes* and *customer journeys*. It also underlines why SME labour-market access and partner/family considerations must be included. This case justifies focusing AP4 on decision points and life situations, not only academic milestones. It also supports including partners/family and early employment in interview guides and journey mapping.

Sources

- Finnish study (ERIC): https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1324556.pdf
- Mobile Talent? / Stiftung Mercator: https://www.stiftung-mercator.de/en/publications/mobile-talent-the-staying-intentions-of-international-students-in-five-eu-countries/

5.3. Theme: The Intention–Outcome Gap and the Need for Early Intervention

Core examples:

- Swedish Institute – Economic Impact of International Students (2022)
- Switch to Sweden (Vinnova-funded)

What the case shows
The ***Swedish Institute***'s 2022 study shows a clear intention–outcome gap: about 75% of international students want to stay, but only around 30% actually do. Reasons for leaving include complex residence-permit rules, limited labour-market contacts, low wages and insufficient university support.

Switch to Sweden directly responds to this gap. Led by Linköping Science Park with Future Place Leadership and Swedish universities, the project uses surveys, data analysis and employer engagement to increase successful matches between international graduates and Swedish companies. Its "talent map" highlights three critical bottlenecks:

1. retention & integration,
2. language & culture,
3. migration & administration.

Why this matters - Retention efforts that start at graduation are often too late. Barriers accumulate earlier and solidify during the transition from study to work.

Relevance for Project STAY
This case directly informs AP2 and AP4 and validates the project's focus on early, coordinated support and employer engagement in an SME context.

Sources

- Swedish Institute / WSP report: https://si.se
- Switch to Sweden (project): https://linkopingsciencepark.se/project/switch-to-sweden/
- Switch to Sweden Summit (Vinnova): https://linkopingsciencepark.se/switch-to-sweden-the-summit-attracting-international-talent-to-sweden/
- Future Place Leadership case: https://futureplaceleadership.com/cases/switch-to-sweden-data-driven-solution-to-improve-international-student-retention-in-sweden/

5.4. Theme: Quality of Life, Housing and Work–Life Balance as Retention Drivers

Core examples:

- Nuffic – Staying after graduation (2024)
- Nuffic – Stay rate and labour-market position (2025)

What the case shows
Nuffic's graduate survey and registry-based follow-up studies show that retention is multidimensional. Among those who stayed in the Netherlands:

- 84% cited quality of life,
- 82% career opportunities,
- 77% work–life balance.

Reasons for leaving included housing shortages, lack of suitable jobs and financial barriers. Registry data show that 25% of international graduates remain after five years, with non-EU graduates more likely to stay than EU peers.

Why this matters Retention policies that focus solely on jobs overlook everyday-life constraints that push graduates away even when employment exists.

Relevance for Project STAY
This evidence supports including housing, transport, social life and family considerations in AP4's student journeys and reinforces the need for cross-sector coordination (AP3). Validates a cross-sector prism lens.

Sources

- Nuffic (2024): https://www.nuffic.nl/en/news/this-is-why-international-students-stay-or-leave-after-graduating-in-the-netherlands
- Nuffic (2025): https://www.nuffic.nl/en/onderzoek-en-cijfers/onderzoeken/stay-rate-and-labour-market-position-of-international-graduates

5.5. Theme: National Policy Frameworks Enable (or Limit) Retention

Core examples:

- EMN – Attracting and retaining international students in Lithuania (2018)
- Comparative EU policy studies

What the case shows
The EMN Lithuania study shows how policy design directly affects retention. Measures such as extending residence permits and allowing part-time work improved short-term retention, but limited labour-market integration and a lack of a national strategy continued to push graduates away.

Across EU studies, legal frameworks, visa rules and administrative complexity consistently emerge as structural retention barriers.

Why this matters Regional and university initiatives operate within national constraints. Effective retention requires awareness of what can be influenced locally—and what cannot.

Relevance for Project STAY
This case reinforces the importance of clearly distinguishing controllable vs. non-controllable barriers in AP2 and AP3, especially when formulating realistic solutions.It helps STAY clearly distinguish what can be influenced locally vs nationally, which is crucial for realistic recommendations and future project design.

Sources

- EMN Lithuania report: https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu

5.6. Theme: Graduate Tracking as Strategic Infrastructure

Core example:

- **EUA – TRACKIT**

What the case shows
TRACKIT demonstrates that most European systems track students and graduates, but the impact depends on how data are used. The project provides concrete guidance on combining administrative data, surveys and feedback loops to inform institutional and regional decision-making.

Relevance for Project STAY
This case underpins the methodological integration of AP1–AP4 and supports the project's evidence-based and co-creative design.

Source

- EUA TRACKIT: https://eua.eu/projects/trackit.html

5.7. Theme: One-Stop Shops and Coordinated Reception Structures

Core projects:
Move to Gothenburg, International House Gothenburg (comparative: Helsinki, Copenhagen)

Why it's relevant: Tackles a common barrier: newcomers must navigate many systems (work, permits, housing, schools, networks). This model makes support visible and joined-up.

What they do (activities):

- Drop-in advising, events, and programming about Swedish working life, schools, everyday systems, and career support for accompanying partners (often a hidden retention factor).
- Acts as a collaborative reception structure for internationals in the region (employers can refer recruits).
- Employer-facing services (information on recruiting internationals).

Organisational reporting (evidence of activity / measurement approach):

- A Move to Gothenburg / BRG report describes ordering tailored SCB registry extractions to better follow trends and measure effects of initiatives related to international talent in metro labour markets.
- Another Move to Gothenburg document describes International House Gothenburg activities such as tailored advising, welcome events, info sessions, language café, trainings, and notes co-location with a state service centre for practical admin steps.

What these activities address

- Fragmented systems and information overload
- Administrative uncertainty at critical transition points
- Invisible support structures

Why this matters for Project STAY

This case offers a concrete service model that could be partially replicated or adapted in Jönköping County, especially as a coordination or referral function rather than a new organisation. A recognisable "front door" + consistent programming reduces uncertainty at the exact point people otherwise default to leaving.

Links:

- International House Gothenburg (Invest in Gothenburg)
- International House Gothenburg (Business Region Göteborg)
- Move to Gothenburg – "Internationell kompetens i storstadsregionernas arbetsmarknader 2013–2023" (PDF)
- Move to Gothenburg – "Så kan Sverige växla upp…" (PDF)

One-Stop Shops and Coordinated Reception Structures – Statens Service Center webinar (Work in Sweden/ TVV)

The webinar highlighted that retention is not determined by a single factor (such as employment or housing), but by how individuals experience an entire system over time. Even when services exist, retention fails when they are fragmented, poorly coordinated, or difficult to navigate.

A key insight is that organisations often design services from their own perspective rather than the user's journey. As a result, individuals must navigate multiple disconnected actors (e.g. university, housing, employers, authorities), creating friction and uncertainty at critical transition points.

Retention is a cumulative process, shaped by experiences across arrival, integration, and transition to work. Failures are rarely due to a single major issue but rather to the accumulation of barriers over time.

Retention systems that focus on individual interventions (e.g. employability, housing provision) risk missing the core issue: how the system is experienced as a whole. Fragmentation, rather than absence of services, becomes the primary driver of exit.

Relevance for Project STAY

This case strongly supports the focus on student journeys and system mapping, as conducted in our pilot project. It reinforces that improving retention in Jönköping is not only about adding services, but about aligning existing actors around a coherent, navigable experience.

It also validates the project's emphasis on transition points (arrival, during studies, post-graduation) and the need to understand how students experience the system across these phases.

Key activities observed:

- Framing retention as a user journey across multiple phases, not a single decision point
- Identifying points of friction between actors and services
- Highlighting the importance of coordination across institutions
- Shifting focus from service provision to user experience and accessibility
- Recognising the role of belonging and identity alongside practical factors

Source:

Webinar available on YouTube video:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jMRlokUN7aw

5.8. Theme: Targeted Integration Support within Universities

Core example: DAAD – FIT ("Förderung internationaler Talente zur Integration in Studium und Arbeitsmarkt")

The ***DAAD FIT*** programme supports German universities in developing structured approaches to integrating international students into both academic life and the labour market. Rather than treating support as an add-on, FIT embeds targeted services across the student lifecycle.

A key feature of the programme is its focus on early and continuous intervention, beginning at entry and continuing through to transition into employment. Universities develop tailored measures such as language training, study support, and career preparation, often linked directly to regional labour-market needs.

The case shows that retention improves when universities move from fragmented support services to strategically coordinated, programme-level integration efforts.

Why this matters

International students often disengage or leave not because of a single barrier, but due to accumulated challenges across study and integration. Addressing these systematically—rather than reactively—improves both academic success and retention outcomes.

Relevance for Project STAY

This case strongly supports:

- AP4 (student journey): need for early, structured support across phases
- The role of JU as an active integrator, not only an education provider

It also suggests that embedding support within existing structures may be more effective than creating separate initiatives.

Key activities observed

- Early-stage orientation and integration support
- Embedded language and academic skills training
- Career preparation linked to regional labour markets
- Continuous support across the study lifecycle
- Coordination of services within the university

What these activities address

- Fragmented support structures
- Language and academic integration barriers
- Late or insufficient career preparation
- Weak connection to regional labour markets

Sources

DAAD FIT programme overview: https://www.daad.de

5.9. Theme: Bridging International Graduates into the Labour Market

Core example: DAAD – Profi Plus (Programme for the Integration of International Graduates into the German Labour Market)

Profi Plus focuses specifically on the transition from higher education into employment for international graduates. It provides targeted, practice-oriented support to help graduates enter the German labour market more effectively.

The programme includes measures such as:

- Advanced language training (profession-specific)
- Career coaching and job application support
- Employer engagement and networking opportunities

A central insight is that even highly qualified graduates face barriers due to lack of labour-market familiarity, networks, and context-specific skills. Profi Plus addresses these gaps directly, positioning universities as facilitators of labour-market entry.

Why this matters

The transition phase after graduation is a critical bottleneck in retention. Without targeted support, many graduates leave despite strong qualifications and initial intentions to stay.

Relevance for Project STAY

This case directly supports:

- AP4 (decision and transition phase)
- The need to strengthen JU–employer connections, particularly with SMEs

It also highlights the importance of:

- Profession-specific language skills
- Direct employer interaction

Key activities observed

- Profession-oriented language training

- Career coaching and job-search support
- Networking with employers
- Practical preparation for workplace integration
- Targeted support during the post-graduation phase

What these activities address

- Barriers in entering the labour market
- Lack of professional networks
- Limited understanding of local workplace culture
- Skills mismatch perception by employers

Sources

DAAD Profi Plus programme: https://www.daad.de

International Trainee Programme – Mittuniversitetet & BRON Innovation (Västernorrland) https://www.miun.se/Forskning/forskningsprojekt/avslutade-forskningsprojekt/internationellt-traineeprogram/

Context : Västernorrland faces a skills shortage in IT and digital fields, which risks limiting regional growth. At the same time:

- SMEs struggle to **recruit and integrate international talent**
- International graduates often **leave the region after studies**
- There is a weak **connection between education and employment pathways**

The initiative responds to both labour market needs and student retention challenges.

Project Aim: To develop a structured model for recruiting, integrating, and retaining international talent in the region by:

- Connecting international students/professionals with SMEs
- Supporting employers' capacity to hire globally
- Creating a clear pathway into Swedish working life

Approach:

The programme is designed as a **combined education–employment–integration pathway**:

1. Recruitment of international talent

- Focus on highly skilled individuals (e.g. IT specialists)
- Target group includes international graduates and professionals

2. Trainee placement in SMEs

- Participants are placed in regional companies
- Companies gain access to needed expertise
- Lowers the barrier for SMEs to hire internationally

3. Parallel support structure

The trainee programme is not just employment—it includes:

- Courses at Mittuniversitetet
- Swedish language training
- Social and professional integration activities

4. Co-creation with industry

- The model is developed through workshops with companies
- Employers define:
    - Skills needs
    - Recruitment challenges
    - Integration barriers

This ensures the programme is demand-driven, not university-driven

Key Actors

- **Mittuniversitetet** – education, courses, research
- **BRON Innovation** – coordination, industry interface
- **SMEs in the region** – employers and co-designers
- **Public funding (e.g. ESF, regional actors)** – enabling the model

Expected Outcomes

For students / participants

- Clear pathway into employment
- Improved language and cultural integration
- Stronger likelihood of staying in the region

For SMEs

- Increased ability to:

    - Recruit international talent /graduates
    - Work with diverse teams
- Reduced risk in hiring global talent

For the region

- Improved talent retention
- Strengthened innovation and competitiveness
- A replicable model for other sectors and regions