

Vice Rector Pirjo Hakala

Dear Diak students and colleagues,

I warmly welcome all our old and especially our new students and staff members to start this new academic year. I hope that you enjoy your studies and work at Diak, and the life within the large Diak family.

The topic of my speech, International Diak, is manifested in several ways. In our everyday life internationality is most clearly shown on our Helsinki and Järvenpää campuses. In Helsinki we have offered for more than 10 years education for immigrant students. After half a year of orientation studies majority of these students continue in the degree education in social services or health care. In addition to this education, we have offered for years a special programme for the nurses who want to have the qualification to work in Finland. We have at the moment altogether 104 students of non-Finnish origin from 25 countries.

Next autumn we are able to widen the studies also to the field of humanities, when we start a new degree programme in the interpretation of spoken languages. This education is totally new in Finland, and will be offered only at Diak on our Helsinki and Turku campuses. In the first group will study interpreters for Arabic, Somali and Kurd languages. In the future, the languages will vary according to the needs of working life.

In Järvenpää international students in our Degree Programme of Social Services have enriched our community since 2006, when the first DSS group started. At the moment we have 25 Finnish students and 76 foreign students from 22 countries studying social services and community development work in English. From this autumn on

our new students can choose from two options; one focusing on community development work and the other on youth and community development work and diaconia. Our DSS team has worked hard during the last term to revise the curriculum, and now it is ready to be implemented in practise. The structure of the curriculum and contents of the study modules have changed to some extent, when the studies in diaconia and youth work have been integrated in the curriculum. The feedback given by the previous DSS groups has also guided the renewal work. DSS offers the opportunity to study in English also for the students of our Finnish programmes. You are welcomed to take electives from the English programme. Very few have used this possibility so far.

In the future our DSS students will also have the opportunity to get a European double degree. Diak is building up a new English degree programme with Charles University and interdiac in Czech Republic. Interdiac is an international Academy for Diaconia and Social Action, and it has a wide partner network in several countries in Eastern Europe. Our plan is to get the accreditation for this new programme during the ongoing academic year, so that the programme could start latest in the autumn 2012. In order to gain a double degree, Diak students need to take 30 credits of studies in the Czech programme and vice versa.

At the moment, a double degree is already possible on master-level. Diak is a member of the European network of European Universities Involved in Teaching and Research of Diaconia. This network has started a joint master degree in Diaconia and Christian Social Practice. Each partner university offers 30 credits of their national programme in English. The students will get a degree both from their home university and from the partner at which they have taken part of their studies. Three Diak master students were pioneers of this opportunity when they studied this summer term at Heidelberg University in Germany.

There has also been some preliminary thoughts of a full joint master programme in English. This would offer our DSS students in the future the possibility to continue their studies on master level. However, no decisions have been made yet, whether we start to plan this programme.

Last January Diak's board accepted our operational principles of international activity. According to these principles, becoming international means reciprocal mobility for personnel and students and responsibility taken by those returning from exchanges for those coming here. It also means cooperation in teaching, research and development. Diak's educational task and international projects should always support one another.

Diak has created a unique integrative and holistic model for long-lasting co-operation especially in developing countries. One of the key elements in this model is the capacity building together with the local partner universities. Our students co-operate with the local students, teachers and other regional actors during their exchange. Diak's international projects support these activities. For example, in Swaziland, a group of Diak students together with students and teachers of three African universities planned and carried out a study on the quality of life of the elderly people. The aim of this type of co-operation is to reduce poverty and health and social problems. Our international activities also aim at strengthening human rights, democracy and good governance in the health or social sector and in higher education.

Each year about 120 to 130 Diak students are studying or having a practical placement abroad. In our principles of international activities we promise to offer all students an opportunity to complete a part of their studies abroad. Those who choose not to use this

opportunity will face the questions of internationality and multicultural issues as part of their studies here at home.

Diak's emphasis on the co-operation with the developing countries is shown in the large exchange numbers in Nepal and Swaziland, where we have about 20 students each year. Lately the proportion of European Erasmus exchange has been growing to around 50-60 students annually. The teacher exchange varies from 60 – 90 teachers each year. The number of incoming students and teachers is clearly smaller, around 20-30 students and 25-35 teachers each year. In order to have a better balance between incoming and outgoing exchange, we strive to offer more courses in English.

To sum up, Diak already is international on many levels. We are privileged to have so many different nationalities on our campuses, we have a rather active international student and teacher exchange, we have well functioning partner networks both in Europe and in developing countries, we are building up new joint degrees, and run a good number of interesting international projects.

Of course there also is still lot to be done and to be improved. Nevertheless, I think we are on a good way to become an international and multicultural university. I hope that you all will find your place in our international activities.