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# 5. Tenure track in Finland – from closed vacancy-based recruitment to more diverse tenure track recruitment in Finnish universities

**Taru Siekkinen, Emmi-Niina Kujala, Elias Pekkola and Jussi Kivistö**

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## INTRODUCTION

In Finland, as in other European countries, higher education reforms – together with other changes in university organisation – have had a significant impact on academic work and academic careers. Universities are evolving in many ways as they compete on many levels. At the global level, they compete for their status (Brankovic et al., 2018) and for the best available staff since academic careers have become international (Huang, 2013), while they are also expected to function efficiently at the national level (Bleiklie et al., 2017). In addition, universities are expected to meet other important policy objectives, such as those related to gender equality. Nordic universities have been pioneers in formulating and implementing policies on gender equality in research (Lipinsky, 2013), but Finland has lagged behind other Nordic countries in the implementation of gender balance and diversity among professors, especially in science and technology (Jousilahti et al., 2022; Pietilä et al., 2021).

Academic work has been characterised as precarious, which is an important factor in reducing its attractiveness (Aarnikoivu et al., 2019; OECD, 2021; Kallio & Kallio, 2023). It is also clear that there is a significant source of inequality. It is evident that some positions and career paths are more precarious than others, and that academics from certain groups are more likely to be in precarious positions (e.g. women in Finnish academia, see Jousilahti et al. 2022). The position of women in academic careers has traditionally been more challenging than that of men for many reasons, for example related to the prevailing masculine culture of universities and academic work, and family

leaves that are still held mainly by women (Pietilä et al., 2021; Huopalainen & Satama, 2019; O'Connor, 2018).

For Finnish universities, the tenure track career model has been seen as a natural change as they have followed the trends in European universities. With tenure tracks, universities aim to achieve various goals related to internationalisation, diversity, competitiveness and efficiency by developing their human resource management (HRM) (Chapter 2). In this chapter, we focus on describing the shift of Finnish universities from traditional recruitment of professors to tenure track recruitment, and how the diversity of academic staff in terms of gender and nationality has developed through tenure tracks. We also discuss the changes and trends that have taken place in recruitment within Finnish universities, and how the tenure track model has gained importance in the recruitment of professors in Finnish universities.

The chapter is structured as follows. First, based on previous studies, we provide a brief summary of the history of recruitment in Finnish universities in the twenty-first century. Then, we focus on tenure track recruitments, analysing how different universities have utilised this model. Third, we pay special attention to the trends in the internationalisation of applicants and recruited professors, as well as changes in the proportions of male and female applicants and selected individuals.

The empirical part of this report is based on documentary and statistical data collected for a commissioned study by the Finnish Union of University Professors in 2020. In 2022, we continued to explore this theme and conducted a second round of data collection from universities. In this chapter, we leverage these results and describe the changes in the recruitment of professors in Finnish universities. It should be noted that the study is subject to certain limitations. In addition, there is a clear need for further in-depth knowledge about the themes that are inherently complex.

## REVIEW OF TENURE TRACKS IN FINLAND

### **Academic Careers and Recruitments – From a Vacancy-Based Model to Tenure Tracks**

In the twenty-first century, the Finnish university system underwent significant systemic reforms. The most noteworthy occurred in 2010 when the Universities Act was revised, ushering in a comprehensive overhaul of university governance, including legal status (Aarrevaara et al., 2009; Siekkinen et al., 2016). Prior to 2010, Finnish universities were integral to the government body and functioned as state accounting agencies. In the legislative reform, universities were granted the status of independent legal entities, a change that was accompanied by increased financial and administrative autonomy. As part of

this legislative reform and the enhanced staffing autonomy granted to universities, the employment status of university personnel shifted from civil servants to private employees (Niinikoski et al., 2012; Pietilä, 2018; Siekkinen et al., 2016; Välimaa, 2011). This reform aligned with the broader European trend of bestowing greater institutional autonomy upon universities, compelling them to adopt more strategic, goal-orientated approaches to their operations while simultaneously assuming greater responsibility for managing their own staff. This development also empowered Finnish universities to exercise more autonomy in personnel-related matters and formulate human resources (HR) policies independently of state and central government HR policies. (Pietilä, 2015, 2018; Siekkinen et al., 2016).

Before the reform, recruitments in Finnish universities primarily relied on open vacancies (Siekkinen et al., 2016). In 2007, the Ministry of Education and Culture (MoE) established a working group to devise a new four-stage career model aimed at enhancing the comparability, transparency and predictability of research careers in Finnish universities. This model encompassed four successive ‘career steps’ delineating the hierarchy of vacancies (MoE, 2008), and progression from one step to the next occurred when individuals applied for vacant positions (Pietilä, 2018). The four-stage model was not intended to be a tenure-type career model because it was not designed to facilitate career advancement: its purpose was to clarify and standardise the titles of academic staff (Välimaa et al., 2016). Nevertheless, the model was still based on open vacancies, which was the prevalent method for recruiting professors in Finnish universities in the early 2000s and 2010s, but it hinged the idea of having tracks for promotions from one step to another (Pekkola et al., 2020).

It is apparent that the Universities Act of 2010 empowered universities to develop their strategies and recruitment practices more independently than before, allowing them to establish and refine their own tenure track recruitment processes — often applicable to the four-stage career model but having a more progressive idea of tenure track positions as a new type of recruitment and set of titles. Since 2010, the use of tenure track positions in recruitments has gained popularity within universities. Between 2010 and 2014, only approximately 5–12 per cent of academic recruitments were tenure track positions (Välimaa et al., 2016). By 2019, however, over 80 per cent of the professorship vacancies were designated as tenure track positions (Pekkola et al., 2020). In 2019, a large-scale shift from open vacancy-based recruitments to tenure track recruitments occurred in almost every Finnish university (Pekkola et al., 2020).

Alongside these reforms of Finnish higher education and organisational changes, the academic working and management culture changed in universities; here, because of the influence of international trends on public management. New Public Management (NPM), which emerged in the UK in the

1980s as a way to make public organisations function in a more efficient way, widely impacted European and Finnish universities. Managerialism, on the other hand, pushed universities towards the management culture of private organisations (Deem & Brehony, 2005; Evetts, 2009; Siekkinen et al., 2020). These trends, together with continuing challenges in the public economy, impacted academic work and careers such that the performance of academics was being monitored more strictly (Kallio et al., 2015). It can be inferred that Finnish universities felt isomorphic pressures (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983) to apply tenure track, as European universities started to develop their career structures and Finnish universities wanted to be part of that ‘trend’ to raise their profile in the international academic labour market. The reform of academic career structures was also a tool to reach their many own organisational goals (Chapter 2).

### Tenure Track Models in Finnish Universities

Tenure track career structures first emerged in Finland in the 2000s at the University of Helsinki and Aalto University, from where they gradually spread to most universities (Välilmaa et al., 2016). Although universities have somewhat differed in the design of their tenure track models (Pietilä, 2018; Välilmaa et al., 2016), each model has followed the same basic idea: individuals are given the opportunity to advance in their careers to reach the final career stage of full professor (*professori*) if their performance within a specific time period justifies it (Siekkinen et al., 2016). Although there are no national tenure track guidelines in Finland, most Finnish universities’ tenure track models consist of three different levels: assistant professor, associate professor and full professor. Some universities have also introduced a fourth tenure track stage for distinguished professors (Pekkola et al., 2020). In the early stages of development, in some universities, the postdoctoral position was also included as the first step of four in the tenure track model, but, currently, all universities have changed their practice in this regard.

In 2020, we studied tenure track models and processes within Finnish universities, finding numerous similarities. The main differences in tenure track models between the universities are related to the evaluation processes during the recruitment phase and during the promotion stages (see Table 5.1). As the table illustrates, there are no nationwide practices or criteria for using external evaluation and ranking between the associate and full professor levels.

There is no one tenure track model in Finnish universities, and, currently, even inside each university there have been differences between recruitment and evaluation practices. To have more unified and clear instructions and criteria, universities are continuously developing their recruitment and career models. One central aspect of having an internationally attractive career model

*Table 5.1 Main similarities and differences in the tenure track recruitment's evaluation processes within Finnish universities*

	<b>Similarities</b>	<b>Differences</b>
<i>External evaluation process of the candidates (when recruiting for open positions for the first time or when promoting to the next tenure track stage)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All the universities use external evaluation and experts, both when recruiting for open positions and when making a decision on tenure</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some universities ask the evaluators to rank the candidates</li> <li>• Some universities ask the evaluators to comment on which of the possible tenure track stages the candidate would be most suitable for instead of evaluating the candidate's merits for some specific tenure track stage</li> </ul>
<i>Criteria of the evaluation (for open positions and promotions within the stages)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The criteria for evaluation has been agreed with the candidate beforehand</li> <li>• Candidates are evaluated not only on research merits, but for teaching and societal impact</li> <li>• Evaluations focus on the performance of the candidates and are meant to create an overall assessment of performance</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Specifying the criteria: some universities have broader and universal criteria for all of the evaluations, whereas some create and define separate criteria for each recruitment and promotion</li> <li>• Emphasising the different criteria: some universities have created specific patterns for emphasising different criteria in overall assessment (i.e., 60% on research, 30% on teaching, 10% on societal impact)</li> </ul>

Source: Pekkola et al., 2020.

is its clarity and comparability with other universities' and countries' career models.

### **Diversity in Finnish Academia**

In Finnish academia as in the Finnish working life in general, diversity has traditionally been understood as the number of women in the highest positions. More recently, the position of international academics and the inequalities they face in Finnish academia have attracted more public research interest (Jousilahti et al., 2022). Historically, Finnish society and academia have been characterised by a high degree of homogeneity with regards to nationality and ethnicity of people.

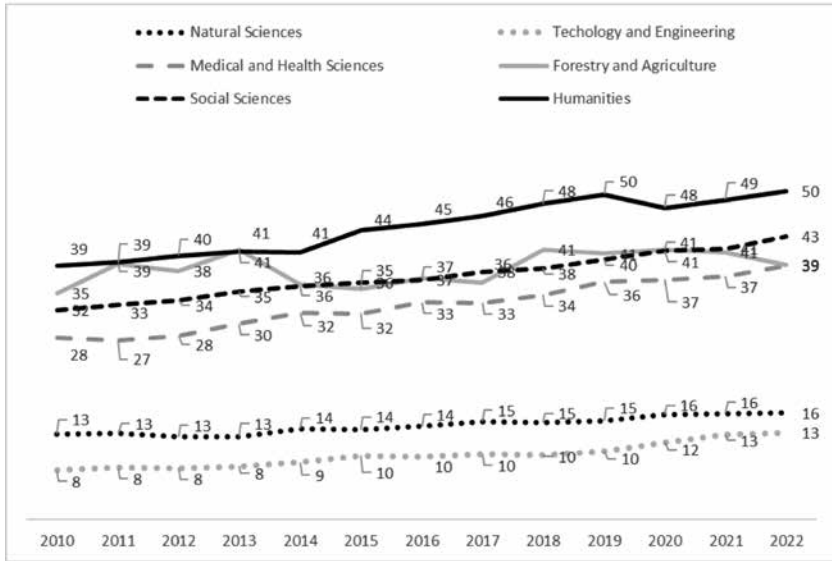
Finnish universities have taken steps to improve the position of women in academic careers. However, as Pietilä's (2021) research shows, the universities have not implemented many measures aimed at women, such as positive discrimination, which is used particularly in Norway and also in Sweden. For international academics, precarious careers and lack of research funding (Kallio & Kallio, 2023) drive people away from universities and Finland, in addition to the Finnish language requirements for administrative and teaching roles that create barriers for many (Hokka, 2016).

In general, meritocratic principles have been seen as an important way of focusing on applicants' performance rather than on networks and other qualifications (Castilla & Bernard, 2010). However, these principles take a very narrow view of academic work, focusing on the documents that emphasise quantified outputs of academic work (which are supposed to provide objective evidence of the individual's performance). Networks also continue to be a fairly important aspect of recruitment, with the 'potential' of candidates being evaluated and highly valued (Jousilahti et al., 2022; Pekkola et al., 2020; Vellamo et al., 2022). In addition, as Nielsen's (2015) research shows, the process of assessment and selection may occur in a highly nuanced way even before the formal recruitment process. Furthermore, as some activities in academia are valued more than others, for example research over teaching, and academic mobility is still a requirement for many positions (but not possible for all, see Vabø et al., 2014), we should critically acknowledge how subtly inequalities in academic careers manifest and grow. Thus, behind meritocratic principles, discrimination can be invisible in many ways (Castilla & Bernard, 2010; Nielsen 2015).

In Finnish academia, the number of female professors has been steadily increasing (Figure 5.1).

The number of female professors has increased in Finnish universities; however, the disciplinary differences are still significant. In humanities, half of the person-years every year are performed by women professors. In social sciences, over 40 per cent of person-years done by professors are from women, and in medical and health science, it amounts to 39 per cent. Natural sciences and technology and engineering clearly have fewer women in professor positions (Figure 5.1). The trend in which women are rather well represented in the lower career stages but not in the highest is called 'gender scissors' and exists very strongly in Finnish universities. Compared with the EU-27 countries, in Finnish universities, female professors are clearly under-represented in professors' positions in technology and engineering and natural sciences (EU-27: natural sciences 21.9 per cent, technology and engineering, 17.9 per cent) (Jousilahti et al., 2022; Pietilä et al., 2021).

Among other interests, internationalisation has been a strong motivation for Finnish universities to change their career models to be more attractive to



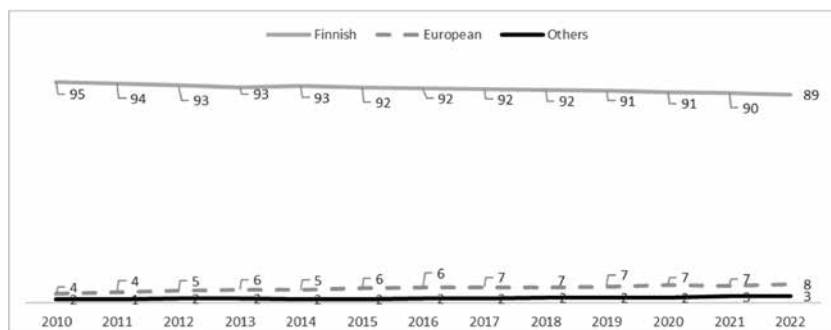
Source: Vipunen.

Figure 5.1 Proportion of female full-time equivalent Finnish professors in different disciplines, 2010 to 2022

international academics (Pekkola et al., 2020). Here, the public discourse has often been related to having a competitive edge, attracting the ‘best’ academics and having more international networks. International collaboration is also valued in funding applications, particularly in high-prestige funding such as the Academy of Finland or Horizon. The number of international professors in Finnish universities has been slowly increasing in the Finnish academia (Figure 5.2).

The phenomenon of ‘ethnic scissors’ also exists in Finnish academia. Most international academics are PhD students or postdoctoral researchers, but only a few progress in their careers to the highest academic position (Jousilahti et al., 2022). There are many reasons why motivated academics with an international background are excluded from university careers. Some of these reasons are similar to those experienced by women and are related to the specific university culture, which may not be inclusive, but other structural reasons exist as well (see e.g. Ndomo 2024). The inequalities that international academics experience in their careers, as well as in Finnish society, are still very much under-researched.





Source: Vipunen.

Figure 5.2 Proportions of Finnish, European and others of full-time equivalent years in Finnish universities, 2010 to 2022

## DATA AND METHODS

In 2020 and 2022, we gathered quantitative data from all Finnish universities. We requested that universities provide us with information regarding the number of vacancies and positions they opened for recruitment, the quantity of applications they received and how many positions they filled between 2019 and 2021.

We collected data from both traditional vacancy-based recruitments and tenure track recruitments to examine the frequency of using the tenure track recruitment model. Additionally, we analysed the gender and nationalities of applicants and those hired to assess the potential differences between vacancy-based recruitments and tenure track recruitments in this regard.

We received statistical data from almost every Finnish university ( $n = 11$ ). The data have some limitations. It is important to note that the recruitment processes in universities can extend for over a year. Consequently, the data for 2021, especially in terms of received applications and number of filled positions, are somewhat incomplete. Other important points to consider are the percentages of genders and nationalities among applicants and those hired. Some universities were unable to provide precise and specific information about the genders and nationalities of all recruits. Therefore, the percentages were calculated from incomplete data, which may have resulted in slightly lower figures than the total number of applicants or hires. In addition, one of the biggest universities sent only very limited data that we could not utilise in the present study. Nevertheless, the data and results can still represent the overall and general situation of professorial recruitment in Finland.

## TENURE TRACKS IN FINLAND – EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

**Opened Positions**

Within less than a decade after university reform, the universities recruited academic staff using either the traditional vacancy-based recruitment model or tenure track models (see Table 5.2). The use of traditional recruitments for professors remained quite stable throughout the three years under investigation, with Finnish universities opening approximately 30 to 40 positions using this model. In contrast, the number of tenure track recruitments steadily increased between 2019 and 2021. The prevailing trend in Finnish universities has been to recruit professors using the tenure track model, with over four times more tenure track recruitments than traditional recruitments.

When comparing the years 2019 and 2021, we can observe a clear development of recruitment practices. In 2019, two universities did not use the tenure track model at all, and three universities exclusively recruited professors via the tenure track. By 2021, all the universities had adopted the tenure track as a recruitment model, with four of them using it exclusively in their recruitment. Half of the universities employed both recruitment models, but most of those universities that recruited professors through both methods used the tenure track model more frequently than the traditional one.

**Applicants**

The proportion of applicants for recruitments, both in traditional recruitment and tenure track recruitment, remained quite steady over the years (Table 5.3). When comparing traditional recruitment with tenure track recruitments, tenure track positions attracted more applicants than traditional positions (Table 5.3). Unfortunately, we do not have statistics on how many applicants were considered relevant in these recruitments.

*Table 5.2 Opened positions in Finnish universities*

	2019	2020	2021
Traditional recruitments*	45 (19.2% of total)	32 (20.5% of total)	35 (19.7% of total)
Tenure track recruitments*	189 (80.8% of total)	124 (79.5% of total)	143 (80.3% of total)
Total*	234	156	178

*Note:* \* See the limitations of the data.

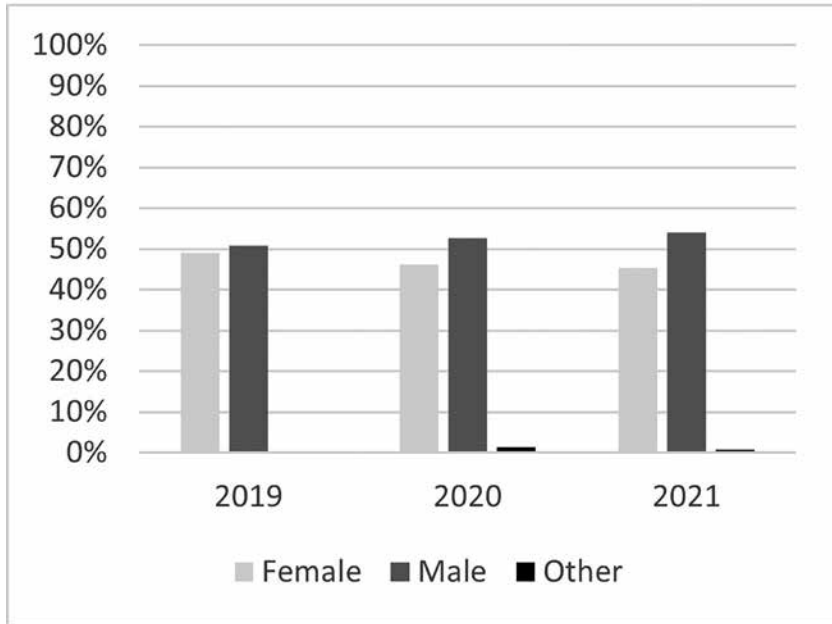
Table 5.3 Applicants for opened positions

	2019	2020	2021
Traditional recruitments – applicants	109	268	241
Applicants/position	2.2 (49 open positions)	8.4 (32 open positions)	6.8 (35 open positions)
<i>Female</i>	49.1%	46.1%	45.3%
<i>Male</i>	50.9%	52.6%	54.0%
<i>Other</i>	0.0%	1.3%	0.7%
<i>Finnish</i>	85.0%	61.2%	64.2%
<i>International</i>	15.0%	38.8%	35.8%
Tenure track recruitments – applicants	5,729	3,133	3,275
Applicants/position	(189 open positions) 30.3	(124 open positions) 25.3	(143 open positions) 22.9
<i>Female</i>	28.2%	26.1%	24.4%
<i>Male</i>	70.4%	73.7%	74.9%
<i>Other</i>	1.4%	0.2%	0.7%
<i>Finnish</i>	43.4%	24.5%	20.8%
<i>International</i>	56.6%	75.5%	79.2%

As shown in Figures 5.3 and 5.4, the distribution between women and men is more equal in traditional recruitment, where the representation of both genders varies between approximately 45 and 55 per cent. Over the three years studied, the number of female applicants decreased slightly and the number of male applicants increased slightly. Tenure track recruitment appeared to be less gender balanced, with over 70 per cent of applicants being male in all three years. Similarly to traditional recruitment, tenure track recruitment attracted a steadily increasing number of male applicants each year, although the annual increase was not very significant. Disciplinary differences were significant.

We can only speculate on how many applicants in these open calls were relevant and how many were not, as there are no statistics or previous studies on this. Based on our own experience (without empirical evidence), in some international open calls, as many as half of the applicants may not be relevant to the specific position being advertised.

Figures 5.5 and 5.6 show whether applicants for the positions to be filled were Finnish or international. Traditional recruitments attracted mainly



Source: Authors' own.

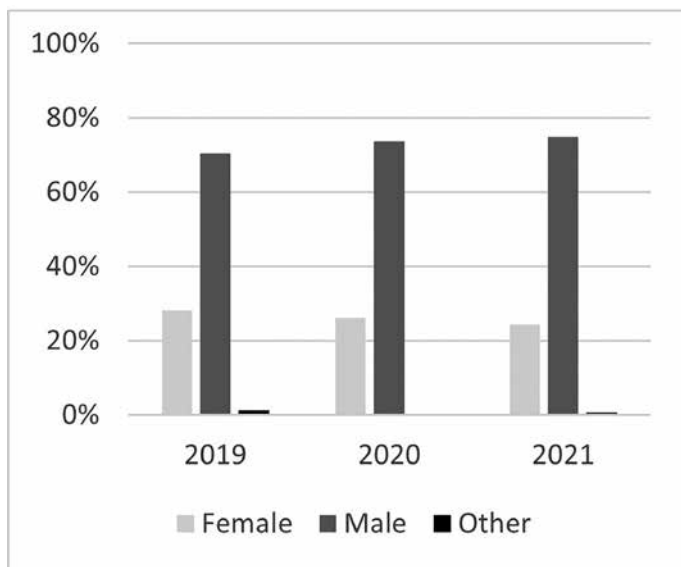
Figure 5.3 Gender of applicants in traditional recruitments in Finland

Finnish applicants, but the number of international applicants doubled from 2019 to 2021. Tenure track recruitments attracted a large number of international applicants, and the number increased fairly steadily from 2019 to 2021. In 2021, almost 80 per cent of tenure track applicants were international.

Based on the available statistics (which have limitations), we can generally conclude that tenure track calls attracted more international and male applicants. However, as mentioned, we should have more information on recruitment, how many relevant applicants there were among all applicants and how many applications went on to the next stage of the recruitment process.

### Recruited People

There was a slight difference between traditional and tenure track recruitment in terms of the number of people recruited compared with the number of posts advertised. The difference between these two factors was smaller for traditional recruitment than for tenure track recruitment, which could indicate that



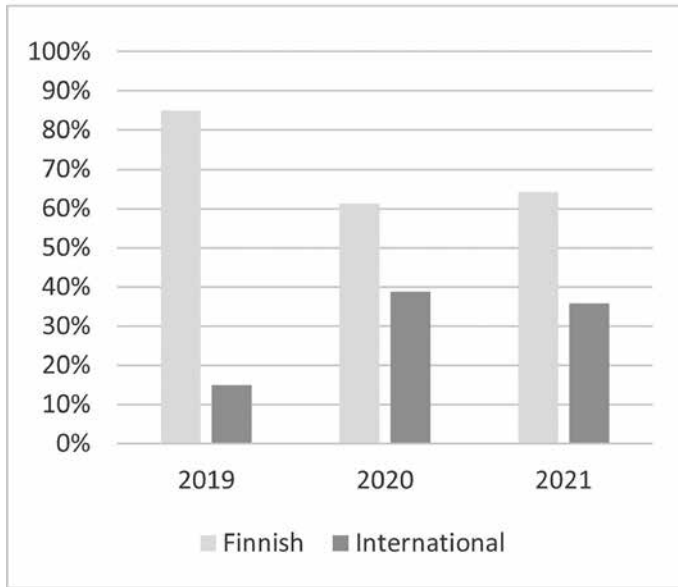
Source: Authors' own.

Figure 5.4 Gender of applicants in tenure track recruitments in Finland

the tenure track recruitment process took longer or that tenure track posts were more difficult to fill.

Over the three years, the number of positions filled and the number of people recruited in the traditional professorial recruitment model decreased because universities opened fewer positions in the traditional professorial recruitment model. The tenure track model did not show a similar trend, as the number of hires remained the same over the years.

According to our statistics, which have limitations, approximately the same number of women and men were recruited between 2019 and 2021 (see Figures 5.7 and 5.8). In 2020, traditional recruitment tended towards more females, whereas, in 2019, more males were selected for tenure track recruitment. Here, we should have information on disciplines to conduct further analysis. However, the years 2019 and 2021 (traditional recruitment) and 2020 and 2021 (tenure track recruitment) were more gender balanced. These yearly differences could also be partly explained by disciplinary differences: in technology and engineering and natural sciences (male-dominated fields), tenure track recruitment was more common than in social sciences and humanities (female-dominated fields).



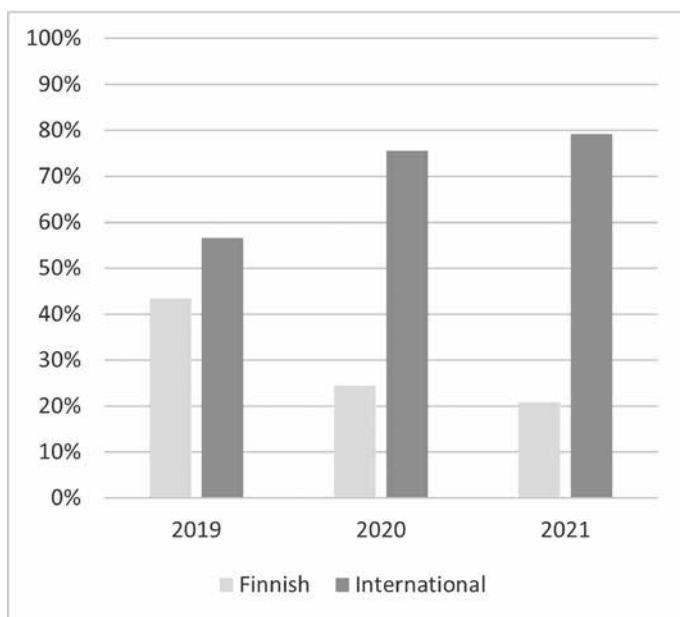
Source: Authors' own.

*Figure 5.5 Nationality of applicants in traditional recruitments in Finland*

The nationality of those recruited was Finnish in almost 90 per cent of cases using traditional recruitment procedures, and this percentage remained stable over all three years. Tenure track recruitment also emphasised Finnish hires, at about 70 per cent (See Figures 5.9 and 5.10). It seems that international talent found it easier to enter the Finnish higher education system through tenure track recruitment. This is in line with the motivations of universities to use the tenure track in their professorial recruitment (see Chapter 2). These findings are summarised in Table 5.4.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

After gaining more autonomy from the 2010 legislative reform, Finnish universities have been able to develop their own recruitment and HR practices and processes more individually and free from traditional vacancy-based thinking. As the employment status of university staff has changed from civil servants to private employees, it has been easier for universities to adopt different practices in recruitment and promotion. As a result of this change, the tenure track



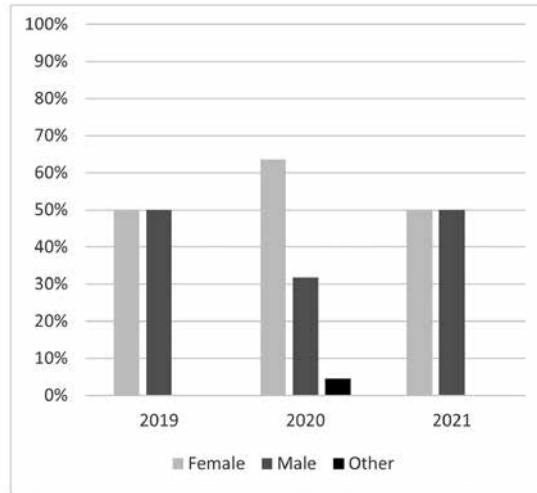
Source: Authors' own.

Figure 5.6 Nationality of applicants in tenure track recruitments in Finland

model has become more widespread in Finnish universities and is now used in all universities for professorial recruitment; in some universities it is the only model used. This has changed Finnish academic recruitment and career practices, making career advancement possible. Previously, career progression was only possible by applying for an open position.

Our data show that an increasing number of universities in Finland have started to recruit new professors using the tenure track model, and that the frequency of using the traditional vacancy-based model has decreased each year. This decline has been rather slow, however, which may mean that Finnish universities will not abandon the traditional recruitment model in the near future. On the other hand, it seems that every year more and more universities use only the tenure track model for recruitment.

In terms of attracting applicants, tenure track positions attract many more applicants than traditional positions, especially international applicants. One possible explanation for this discrepancy is that tenure-track recruitment is more attractive to international candidates because the process is more widely



*Note:* Female, male and other, from the survey background information.

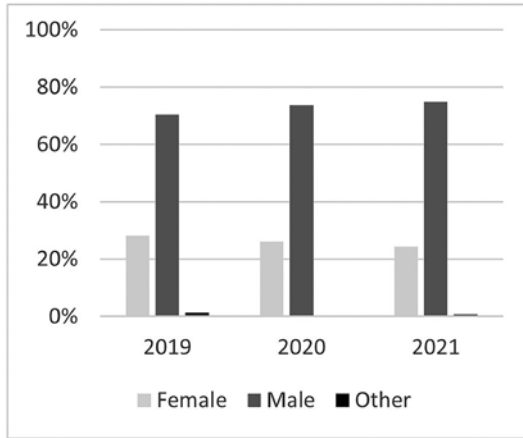
*Source:* Authors' own.

*Figure 5.7 Gender of hired people in traditional recruitments in Finland*

known and advertised internationally. Conversely, traditional recruitment may be perceived as overly bureaucratic and difficult to access from an international perspective. Tenure track is a common academic career model all over the world, so it could be said that more candidates know what to expect when they apply for tenure track positions. Traditional recruitment mainly attracts Finnish applicants, but the number of international applicants also doubled between 2019 and 2021. All in all, it can be said that Finnish universities can attract international interest and applicants in both types of recruitment, but especially in tenure track recruitment. In the past, many recruitments (for professorships and other senior positions) were based on ‘teaching vacancies’ with strict language requirements, which also hindered international recruitment. Tenure tracks tend to emphasise research competence, which may also increase their international applicability.

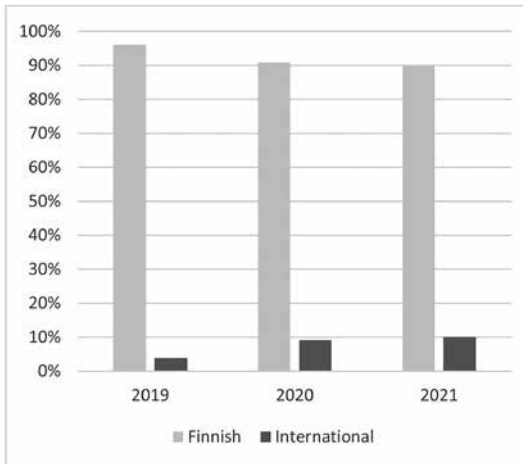
Looking at the statistics, the number of international professors has been slowly increasing (Figure 5.2). Finns account for around 60–80 per cent of applicants and over 90 per cent of hired staff. For tenure track positions, only 20 per cent of applicants are Finnish, but almost 70 per cent of those hired are Finnish. Here, we have to admit that our data have limitations, and we cannot say anything about the relevance of the applications, for example.





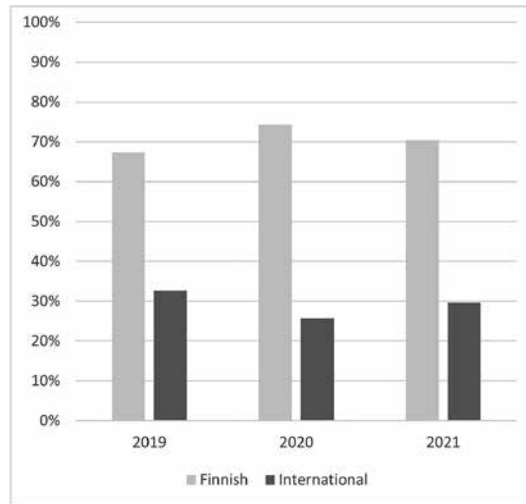
Source: Authors' own.

Figure 5.8 Gender of hired people in tenure track recruitments in Finland



Source: Authors' own.

Figure 5.9 Nationality of hired people in traditional recruitments in Finland



Source: Authors' own.

*Figure 5.10 Nationality of hired people in tenure track recruitments in Finland*

We were also interested in gender equality and whether tenure track recruitment has changed the situation in this area. For tenure track recruitments, the overall trend has been towards more equal hiring in universities over the years, with approximately a 50–50 percentage split between female and male hires in 2022. However, we should have knowledge of the disciplinary differences in our data in order to draw further conclusions based on the statistics described earlier (Figure 5.1).

It is clear that Finnish universities need to focus more on increasing diversity among their professors. More research, particularly qualitative one is needed in this area so that we can better describe the processes and dynamics in academic work and careers that exclude women from the highest positions in certain disciplines and hinder the career progress of international academics in Finnish universities. Perhaps the tenure track has potential here.

Table 5.4 Recruited people and their gender and nationality

	2019	2020	2021
Traditional recruitment	76*	22	10
Female	50%	63.6%	50%
Male	50%	31.8%	50%
Other	0	4.5%	0
Finnish	96.1%	90.9%	90%
International	3.9%	9.1%	10%
Tenure track recruitment	182	105	81
Female	37.8%	51.4%	48.1%
Male	62.2%	48.6%	51.9%
Other	0	0	0
Finnish	67.3%	74.3%	70.4%
International	32.7%	25.7%	29.6%

Note: \*One of the universities did not open positions using traditional recruitments processes, but they listed hired people in the traditional recruitment category when they hired people outside tenure track recruitments, so, in total, the number of hired people was larger than the number of opened positions.

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