



LEHTIKUVA / MARKKU ULANDER

Being able to speak Swedish is a huge advantage when working in some Finnish healthcare facilities.

Language skills made easier for nurses

HELSINKI TIMES

HELSINKI-BASED language specialists Learnwell Oy have just launched an innovative new website called Vårdsvenska to help non-Finnish healthcare personnel to learn the Swedish language.

Svenska Kulturfonden (Swedish Cultural Foundation) have funded this learning website which, as well as a very user friendly online learning platform, includes information and tools for employment seeking, information about Finland and networking.

Vårdsvenska is mainly intended for Russian nursing personnel and contains self-study online material, Swedish pronunciation and grammar explanations, downloadable vocabulary and grammar exercises.

Veronica Granö-Suomalainen, Education Ombudsman at the Swedish Cultural Foundation in Finland, explains that though the project initially came about with the idea of helping Russian-speaking nurses to learn Swedish, the concept has now grown and expanded.

"Presently there is a shortage of healthcare profession-

als in Finland and we need to bring these personnel from outside. When people come to Finland they think about learning Finnish, but there is also the Finland-Swedes who need healthcare," explains Granö-Suomalainen.

"The great thing about the website is that nurses can start to learn the language online even before they come to the country. It's possible now, with the broadening of the idea, to learn Swedish and Finnish through Russian or English on the site."

"We've got 422 users on Vårdsvenska since the launch last week – the quite a good early result," explains **Veronica Gilhooly**, MD at Learnwell Oy.

Learnwell have a good track record in language training – providing intensive training in languages such as Arabic, Chinese, Danish, English, Finnish, French, Romanian and Swedish, as well as their online platforms.

They also tailor-make their business and corporate courses to include specialised modules like negotiations, contracts and body language, so when they designed this website, on top of the day-to-day vocabulary, there is a comprehensive healthcare dictionary section – for example a search for heart shows results from heart problem to arrhythmia irregular heartbeat, in either Swedish, Finnish, Russian or English.



LEHTIKUVA / MINTTU LEHTOVAARA

Non-EU citizens must now apply for a worker's residence permit themselves, without the involvement of their employers.

Workers' rights enshrined

DAVE DUNNE
HELSINKI TIMES

THERE IS a marked difference in the ways in which EU and non-EU citizens must approach gaining employment in Finland. The main differences relate to permits for, and registration of, those working in Finland.

According to the Employment and Economic Development Office, "The right to perform gainful employment in Finland is determined according to citizenship." This essentially means that citizens of the EU member states, and those of Norway, Iceland, Liechtenstein and Switzerland, are entitled to

work in Finland without a worker's residence permit.

However, in most cases, citizens of countries outside the EEA need a worker's residence permit for work in Finland. These permits are usually restricted to one or more fields of work – EU citizens can work in any field in which they can gain employment – and the permit may be continuous or temporary.

Since the beginning of this year non-EU citizens must apply for a worker's residence permit themselves. Previously, an employer could initiate this process, but this is no longer allowed. EU citizens can, should their employer offer the service, have their residency permit, social security number, bank account set-up and dealings with immigration police and magistrate's office (*maistraatti*) dealt with by the company.

The same terms and conditions of work and occupational safety and health requirements apply to all workers in

Finland, regardless of their nationality. Union membership is encouraged and every worker should familiarise themselves with the collective agreement to which their employer must adhere – these collective agreements usually determine salary, at least for 90 per cent of the work force. Finland does not, however, have a minimum wage law.

A trial period of up to four months is not unusual in Finland, but must be agreed on between employee and employer. During this period, either party can terminate the contact, but only where there are appropriate grounds. Additionally, an employer must give all employees sufficient training and guidance in their tasks.

When making an employment contract, the contract must be continuous/indefinite or fixed term. An employer must give a good reason for a contract being fixed – for example, covering maternity leave or seasonal work.

Discrimination based on gender, age, ethnic origin, religion or political activities is banned and an employer must treat all workers equally. Though discrimination in the workplace is forbidden, whether there is large-scale discrimination in the job market is debatable.

Workers' rights in Finland are amongst some of the best in Europe. The government does not tolerate the abuse of workers and endeavours to protect those who might be mistreated by unscrupulous employers.

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Advisory Board on Immigration and Integration declares an application process for The grant for immigrant associations'

Capacity building

The associations can apply for grant in order to purchase trainings, consultations and services for the following purposes: Training the staff, the board members and/or the volunteers

- on voluntary work, organizational democracy or developing participation skills
- on development of the association's working methods and strategy
- on development of communications and working with media.

The grant can be applied for by an association with more than a half (50%) of its members of immigrant background. The association should be registered and by definition, should promote active citizenship

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More information on the grant and the application form:

www.hel.fi/heke/maahanmuutto > Avustus järjestöille > Information in English.

Enquiries:

Immigration division's planning officer Miriam Attias, tel. 09 310 37982.

Application period and submitting applications:

Applications with necessary attachments in English, Finnish or Swedish should be submitted by 2.5.2011 at 16:00 to the following address: Registry of the City of Helsinki, Personnel centre, P.O. Box 10, 00099 CITY OF HELSINKI. Street address: City Hall, Pohjoisesplanadi 11-13.

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