Guide to Enhancing the International Student Experience for Germany

How to improve services and communication to better match expectations
This report is published as part of a series of publications by the Consortium for international Higher Education Marketing ‘GATE-Germany’, a joint initiative of HRK and DAAD, supported by the Ministry of Education and Research.

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**FOREWORD**

With this most recent version, GATE-Germany presents its fourth marketing guide with practical and accessible recommendations for universities. It aims to enhance international marketing efforts in order for universities to adapt themselves to their international target audiences.

Each marketing guide highlights a different aspect: The first guide showcases the use and wide range of instruments helping to recruit international students; the second guide analyses one of the most important marketing instruments: the international websites of universities; the third guide highlights marketing regionally for a special focus area: the United States; the present and fourth guide focuses upon student perceptions.

To better understand the expectations of international students regarding German universities, GATE-Germany conducted a nation-wide survey in partnership with i-graduate: 45 German universities have accepted the invitation to join the International Student Barometer™ (ISB), an international benchmarking and risk management tool for higher education institutions. This report covers the data collection of the ISB’s ‘Entry Wave’ from autumn 2009. Thanks to 12,326 responding international students in Germany – among 87,015 at other universities abroad in total – GATE-Germany and i-graduate can present a wealth of data in this report, in order to improve services and to enhance marketing effectiveness according to the needs of different study types, nationalities and subjects. The survey has been repeated in 2010 with another 47 universities and more than 17,055 foreign students. Due to the ongoing analysis, the data of 2010 will not be part of this report.

The intention of this guide is to support universities in better understanding the motivation and priorities of their target audiences. To achieve this goal, we changed the perspective towards the eye of the consumer: What are the perceptions of international students? Why did they choose Germany as a study destination? Who or what convinced them to select a certain university or study programme? How do they perceive the quality and range of services of German universities? How satisfied are they with the chosen institution in the highlighted areas of learning, teaching, living and support services? What are their experiences in the sensitive early phases of their study, such as the application and arrival process?
In the growing competition for young talent regarding international students and academic staff worldwide, it is becoming more important for universities to market themselves efficiently and effectively. This can either be through different study programmes, or through highlighting research and career opportunities. It is also important to accurately target foreign students and to communicate the strengths of German universities in order to attract the desired target audience. To build sustainable relationships with one of their key target groups, the foreign student, universities have to know what these students value and require in successfully starting and finishing their studies. If their academic experience was positive, they will recommend their study destination to others.

With the national participation at the ISB survey, GATE-Germany wants to help universities to better understand expectations of international students. Universities can request advice according to their desired depth: The results of the participating institutions can either be individually and confidentially analysed by i-graduate or anonymously presented on an aggregated national level in form of this report. Through juxtaposing the ISB survey results with the national and international index, German universities can identify which areas they are performing successfully in or where they could use improvement.

We have no doubt that you will find this guide of great help in understanding the demands and behaviours of international students.

Marijke Wahlers  
Leitern der Internationalen Abteilung, HRK

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Leiterin der Gruppe Kommunikation und Marketing, DAAD
OVERVIEW

The GUIDE TO ENHANCING THE INTERNATIONAL STUDENT EXPERIENCE FOR GERMANY is a project undertaken through the practical application of data gathered by the International Student Barometer™ (ISB), conducted by i-graduate. It represents the opinions and ratings of international students in a multitude of aspects, allowing the voice of international students in Germany to be heard, and thus representing a valid point of reference for Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs). ‘International students’ in this guide refers to both EU and non-EU students, unless specified otherwise. As a partnership between GATE-Germany (the joint initiative of the German Academic Exchange Service – DAAD and the German Rectors’ Conference – HRK for HEI marketing) and i-graduate, this project uses data from the ISB and highlights areas of strength and weakness. This study can thus aid HEIs in the formation of strategy in decision making and planning, allowing informed choices to be made over institutional practice with the aim to improve their educational service. Furthermore, this guide includes examples of good practice already utilised in Germany through using specific case studies.

German HEIs are known for their strong educational standards, and this guide aims to continue and improve this concept through highlighting new and improved ideas already established in some institutions.

AIMS

This guide aims to highlight trends in the experiences of international students and in doing so, give an idea of how best to support and advise students with the goal of enhancing their experience.

Key trends from the ISB:
- The most frequently highlighted areas of (dis)satisfaction;
- The most severe cases of areas of strength and weakness;
- Recommendations of best practice and areas of improvement;
- Suggestions as to how these improvements can be achieved.

Through using case studies from German HEIs that excel in their respective fields, this guide highlights useful examples of best practice already carried out in Germany. Through this sharing of knowledge, it is hoped that the nation as a whole can improve its standard of educational experience for international students.
ABOUT I-GRADUATE AND THE INTERNATIONAL STUDENT BAROMETER™

i-graduate is an independent benchmarking and research service that delivers comparative insights for the education sector worldwide. i-graduate’s consultants and advisors are experienced professionals in international education, recruitment and market research.

i-graduate’s flagship research service, the International Student Barometer™ (ISB), is the largest annual study of international students in the world. The ISB is an independent and confidential feedback process for education providers. It tracks the decision-making, perceptions, expectations and experiences of international students. The ISB has been continually refined through 14 cycles of the process and is considered the industry standard for tracking the international student experience.

Data from the ISB are used throughout the sector to target resources and investment in order to improve services, teaching and support for international students.

Since the conception of the ISB in 2005, i-graduate has gathered feedback from more than 800,000 students in 22 countries through a standardised questionnaire that captures key information and allows for national and international benchmarks. To date, over 700 institutions worldwide have engaged i-graduate’s research. The ISB has run in the USA, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa and in various European countries.

METHODOLOGY

‘International students’ in this guide refers to both EU and non-EU students, unless specified otherwise. This guide interprets data collected through the ISB in Autumn 2009 at 45 German HEIs on a range of issues that impact on the international student experience. The majority of universities engaged with the ISB collect feedback from their non-German cohort. The guide contains numerous comparisons of the German ISB aggregate data against an International Index. The International Index is devised by taking the mean average of the mean scores from the Entry Wave ISB 2009 from universities in Australia, New Zealand, Singapore, USA, the UK, Denmark, and the Netherlands.
The German International Student Barometer (D-ISB) ran from 21 November to 7 December 2009, at 45 institutions in Germany to capture opinions of the international student cohort studying in Germany during the academic year 2009/2010. The survey forms part of a wider ongoing study and is independently administered for GATE-Germany (the HRK and DAAD consortium) by the International Graduate Insight Group (i-graduate.org).

During the initial enquiry by HRK concerning interest in a nation-wide Barometer Survey a large and positive response was received. 45 institutions responded to the second request and showed an interest in taking part in the D-ISB. Of those 45 institutions, 25 institutions opted for a feedback presentation at a cost for the institution. Out of the 45 institutions,
28 institutions have been included in both the national and international benchmark. 17 HE institutions have not made the benchmark; to be eligible for the ranking sheet benchmark, we use 3 criteria:

1. Minimum 100 responses
2. Minimum 10% response rate
3. Minimum 60% of all elements eligible for ranking (base number per element = 30 responses)

**ISB CONTEXT**

The findings for 12,326 international students studying in Germany are set in the context of the experiences of 87,014 international students at 123 institutions taking part in the ISB comparative global benchmark for the Entry Wave 2009.

**PROFILE OF THE D-ISB**

Profile of the D-ISB: 52% of respondents were female, 48% male; among the respondents, students from China are the largest group (11%) followed by Russia (5%) and Turkey (5%). The overall majority were classed as being 'other' nationalities (58%).

In terms of level of study, the sample was split as follows:

- 40% BA level students
- 30% MA level students
- 12% PhD level students
- 18% Other categories of students (respondents mentioned here Staatsprüfung, Diplom, Magister, Bachelor, etc)

In terms of institution profile the split was as follows:

- 21 Research Universities
- 5 Technical Research Universities
- 19 Fachhochschule

**CHOICE OF DESTINATION AND ARRIVAL**

83% of students indicated that Germany was their first choice for an international education and 77% had not applied elsewhere. Other countries they applied to were (in order of popularity) the US (6%), the UK (5%) and France (3%), followed by Switzerland (3%) and Austria (2%). How-
However, whereas they have indicated these other countries as possible study destinations, hardly any of the respondents actually applied for another country. For 50% of students the institution was more important than the country in their study decision. When asked why they chose to study in Germany over other countries, the reputation of the education system scores very well. 97% of international students mention teaching quality as an important reason for studying in Germany. 86% of students indicated that the level of safety in Germany was another important reason. Furthermore, the cost of education was seen as being a positive element for choosing to study in Germany. With 83% of students stating that this was an important reason for their choice of Germany, it is recognised as being of high importance. Respondents were asked which factors helped them to choose a specific institution; it was apparent that the advice of friends was a strong influence, with 49% of students citing it as a factor in their decision. However the most important factor of all in helping students to choose their institution was the institution website (cited by 17% as the most important).

The number of days which international students have to wait for both an initial response from the institution as well as from application to final offer is quite satisfactory according to the students, with a rating between 72-89% of satisfaction. Germany was stronger on the period between application and offer than the period between first contact and response from the institution, and did comparatively well in the application-offer period against the ISB. It fared averagely well against the ISB in the first contact-response period. For several institutions, international students suggested that contact during the arrival process could be improved through using more positive, direct, and frequent communication.
Respondents were asked to rate their overall satisfaction with their arrival experience at their institution in Germany in a single satisfaction question; the results from this were that overall satisfaction upon arrival was 82% satisfied in the D-ISB, compared with 86% satisfied in the ISB.

Students were also asked to rate their satisfaction with regards to specific aspects of the arrival experience:
The formal welcoming in Germany received a high satisfaction rate (85%), and in general the functional aspects of the institutions were sufficiently well-worked, most of which received a satisfaction rate of above 80%. This was let down however by the accommodation office (68%), the finance office (76%), and importantly, the first night of arrival and general welcome (76% and 71% respectively). Despite this seemingly high number however, most of the functional aspects were between 2-8% lower than the ISB average, apart from the bank account aspect, which was 12% higher than the ISB average. In further analysis of the open comments, a few areas were mentioned which could be the cause of the comparatively lower score for Germany: finding low-priced student accommodation and the relatively bureaucratic process in comparison with their home countries.

**SATISFACTION WITH THE LEARNING ASPECTS**

Respondents were asked to rate their overall satisfaction with their learning experience at their institution in Germany in a single satisfaction question; the results from this were that overall satisfaction was 81% satisfied in the D-ISB, compared with 86% satisfied in the ISB.

Students were also asked to rate their satisfaction with other specific aspects of the learning experience. Overall, Germany performed poorly in the learning section of the results and was not above the ISB average in any of the four main sections.

It fared particularly poorly in careers advice (i.e. advice on long term career opportunities given by academic staff – not the careers service as such), scoring only 55% satisfaction, compared to the still-low 66% ISB average. Learning support was also poorly rated, 10% below the average. However, the quality of expert lecturers, research and technology all hovered around the ISB benchmark average. It is not surprising that these more scientific aspects of the learning process score high in a German context, as it is exactly this which is considered the strongest and most important issue for a German Hochschule.
However, to become the first choice in international higher education for internationally mobile students, the learning element needs to incorporate the full spectrum. Thus, the following elements have the most urgent need of attention with regard to ISB benchmark comparison, and are given in their own percentage score with the ISB percentage score next to them in brackets:

- Careers Advice 55% (66%)
- Language Support 65% (82%)
- Learning Support 73% (83%)

**SATISFACTION WITH THE LIVING ASPECTS**

Respondents were asked to rate their overall satisfaction with their living experience in a single satisfaction question; the results from this were that overall satisfaction with living was 84% satisfied in the D-ISB, compared with 87% satisfied in the ISB.

Students were also asked to rate their satisfaction with specific aspects of the living experience: Germany performed very well in the Living and Accommodation category, with ISB comparison scores against the ISB benchmark higher in the fields of accommodation quality (+1%) and accommodation cost (+6%), living cost (+6%) and internet access (+2%). It seems that finding accommodation is an issue initially, but once students have found a place to stay they are relatively happy. These findings suggest that if German HE institutions would ensure better expectation management from the start (e.g. ensure students are aware of the costs and issues around finding a place to stay) the whole process of finding accommodation could probably become also less troublesome. The German HE institutions also performed well in some aspects of other categories, namely:

- Host Culture (+4%)
- Safety (+1%)
- Transport Links (+2%)

The 92% satisfaction on safety is very positive news for Germany as this seems to be an important aspect in the decision making process, certainly in countries where the role of parents is particularly large in this process. Only two factors in the Living section of the survey show figures more than 5% below the ISB benchmark, both of which were located in the Support Services category:

- Financial Support (-10%)
- Visa Advice (-14%)
SATISFACTION WITH THE SUPPORT SERVICES

Respondents were asked to rate their support service experience in a single satisfaction question; the results from this were that 73% were satisfied with the overall support at their institution in Germany, compared with 86% in the ISB.

Students were also asked to rate their satisfaction with specific aspects of the support services:
Although in general this was not a strong section for Germany, the following elements achieved satisfaction percentage points above the ISB benchmark score, which is then given in brackets:
- Health Centre 91%, (+2%)
- Catering 79% (+3%)

In general the support services at German HE institutions did not receive very positive marks in comparison with the international benchmark, with most aspects falling a few percentage points below the standard. On a more positive note, most of these aspects were between 1-5%, just below the ISB average. The only real causes for attention lay with student advisory services 83% (91% in the ISB) and careers service 77% (85% in the ISB); factors which have not been viewed traditionally as areas in which the HE institutes needs to provide support. However, if 60% of international students expect information, advice and guidance in the area of careers support it will become an area in which HE institutions should start to develop more.
**RECOMMENDATION D-ISB**

Students were asked whether they would recommend their international study experience in Germany. Institutions in Germany would be recommended by an average of 78% of respondents, compared with 82% in the international ISB benchmark. Recommendation percentages for institutions in Germany range from 92% to 68%. Although this is a range of 24 percentage points between the highest scoring and lowest scoring institution, the recommendation is in general very high. 21 German institutions score a recommendation percentage above the ISB average and 12 institutions even have a recommendation percentage of more than 5 percentage points above the ISB average.

**CONCLUSION**

German institutions are clearly on the rise when it comes to the international market share as both figures and international press articles depict. However, it is not yet common to ‘spread the word’, particularly in comparison with other large national markets, although this is starting to change gradually.

Strong marketable areas for Germany are the robust reputation of the German HE qualification in the international arena and the high score on personal safety. However the cost issue of an international study experience requires serious attention. Currently prospective international students seem to lack clarity as to whether tuition fees are applicable. The open comments range from students from Asia and the Americas who are pleasantly surprised at the very low or non existent tuition fees, whereas students from other countries (particularly from countries from
which large groups of immigrants already live in Germany as the 2nd or 3rd generation) are dismayed to find they have to pay tuition fees.

In taking a closer look at the ISB data the German institutions are in general well recommended and highly regarded for the elements in the living area, which constitute a selling point for international higher education in Germany. However, in the learning area some improvements can still be made and these could move Germany as a higher education provider to a next level. The main focus in this area should be in supporting international students to realize their full academic potential. One open comment summed this up stoutly: ‘It is time the university wakes up to the fact that professors are gems but the material they are handling have the potential to become gems too’. The support area is still a little underdeveloped, the facilities seem to be present, but the internationalisation sentiment still needs to spread among the university environment.

Respondents were asked to rate their overall satisfaction with their institution in a single satisfaction question. Overall satisfaction among international students with their institution in Germany was 87%, compared to an equal 87% in the ISB. Overall satisfaction percentages for institutions in the Germany-30 range between 81% and 96%. Twelve German institutions achieved an overall satisfaction percentage above the ISB average. Six German institutions scored a first place in the international ISB benchmark.

All in all German HE institutions have several very positive issues to talk about, nonetheless there remains room for improvement in other areas. Following the developments over time may help the German HE sector to become world class.

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<tr>
<th>What drives international students to recommend?</th>
<th>UG/BA</th>
<th>PGT/MA</th>
<th>PGR/MA</th>
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<tr>
<td>1 Good teachers</td>
<td>Course content</td>
<td>Supervisor ability</td>
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<td>2 Flexibility</td>
<td>Good teachers</td>
<td>Assessment</td>
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<td>3 Course content</td>
<td>Employability</td>
<td>Careers advice</td>
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<td>4 Employability</td>
<td>Careers advice</td>
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<td>5 Careers advice</td>
<td>Research</td>
<td>Learning support</td>
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<td>6 Learning support</td>
<td>Good contacts</td>
<td>Study content</td>
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<td>7 Performance feedback</td>
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<td>8 Research</td>
<td>Work experience</td>
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<td>9 Good contacts</td>
<td>Expert lecturers</td>
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<td>10 Work experience</td>
<td>Flexibility</td>
<td>Good contacts</td>
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*Key driver analysis of international students in Germany, columns ranked by strength of correlation with recommendation.
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<th>Institution</th>
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<th>Technical University</th>
<th>University of Applied Sciences</th>
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<td>Otto-von-Guericke-Universität Magdeburg</td>
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<td>Technische Universität München</td>
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<td>Hochschule Niederrhein</td>
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<td>Georg-Simon-Ohm Hochschule für angewandte Wissenschaften – Fachhochschule Nürnberg</td>
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<td>Hochschule Ostwestfalen-Lippe</td>
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<td>Bauhaus-Universität Weimar</td>
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<td>Bergische Universität Wuppertal</td>
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International students spend a lot of time considering their options for study in foreign countries. Parents are often heavily involved too, taking into account such issues as money, distance, quality of learning, and what is best for their child. This chapter looks at the overall first impression given by German Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs) to prospective students. This process begins with the initial contact and response times between student and institutions, progressing into the application process, first impressions, and assistance on arrival. It also includes the experiences which students have of initial assistance with regards to orientation and technical issues after they first arrive.

1.1. APPLICATION

With ever-advancing methods of communication, students are becoming increasingly streetwise with regards to finding and organising information concerning HEIs. For this reason, the idea of a public image and marketing of both the education provided and the overall experience as well as standard of living should be paramount to the planning of institutes. Furthermore, as the numbers of students looking to study is on the rise, it is also important that institutions ensure that they have the ability to process applications on a large scale and respond within good time, as a student receiving little or no feedback in a matter of weeks may begin to view the HEI in a negative light and may decide upon studying elsewhere. On the other hand, sending a response in good time bodes well in maintaining student interest and in securing a place on a course for a student in a timely fashion. Institutions should aim to deliver an application process that is smooth, informative, and well organised, giving the prospective student the assurance that the HEI can provide them with the necessary support and guidance.

In this respect, HEIs should not underestimate the importance of social media. Research from i-graduate into the role of social media (ISB exit wave 2010) shows the importance this carries for students Europe-wide in their information gathering. Social networking sites, forums, and blogs are all now major sources of information for prospective students.
1.2. APPLICATION METHOD

The methods in which students applied for German HEIs are typical for most HEIs around the world. The most common method was to apply using **Direct Paper Application** (37%), after which was the **Direct Online Application Method** (28%). These were rather predictably the most common methods of application. Next to this was the **Uni-assist Method** (16%), which is a form of online application through a not-for-profit support structure. Besides these top three, there were no hugely significant methods of application; though a fair amount (6%) were carried out via **Another University**. The remaining application methods (**APS, Overseas Representative, Via an Education Agent, ZVS - Zentralstelle für die Vergabe von Studienplätzen, Other**) were shown to be below 6% each. Thus there is variety in the results, however the two most popular are also the most commonly found in most HEIs around the world.

1.3. CONTACT RESPONSE TIME

The estimated average time taken for a German HEI to respond to an initial enquiry is around 26 days, with slight variances between the institution types. This is comparable to 21.5 days in the international benchmark. Averaging 82%, the satisfaction level of international students applying to German HEIs is acceptable to the majority, but could still be improved. Overall, this is slightly longer in Germany than in the international benchmark, but international students in Germany are evidently quite satisfied by this period of time. Reducing the time spent by students waiting for a

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**Figure 1:** Actual Contact Response Time in Number of Days for Institution Type

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution type</th>
<th>Number of days</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>University of Applied Sciences (n = 466)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Technical University (n = 438)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University (n = 1639)</td>
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response would be advised, as when compared to other countries, Germany does not fare particularly well concerning time spent waiting by students. It is up to one week slower in comparison to some of the top performing nations in this field, highlighting the potential for improvement.

The traditional method of applying directly to the HEI through the international admission system of international office can result in a strain on personnel, which may inhibit the carrying out of other day-to-day tasks. This is especially the case when prospective students apply multiple times and to several HEIs. If not already, one recommendation could be to affiliate the HEI with the charitable organisation Uni-assist e.V. which aims to specifically handle the large number of new applicants each semester. In doing so, the student pays for a professional service which can even handle multiple applications from students to several institutes. This could reduce the burden which the application process places upon the international office and administrative staff, saving time and ensuring a quicker response for students during the period of mass application.

**Figure 2:** Satisfaction with Response Time by Institution Type

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution type</th>
<th>Percentage satisfied</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>University of Applied Sciences (n = 486)</td>
<td>83%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical University (n = 455)</td>
<td>84%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University (n = 1734)</td>
<td>80%</td>
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1.4. OFFER RESPONSE TIME

The offer response time is the period of time between deciding to offer a place to an applicant based on their completed application form and offering the student a place on a course. It should be remembered that if a student applies to an HEI, they are placing faith in the hands of those making the decision and handling the application. The way this is handled and the length of time taken to offer a position is crucial to the student’s perception of how well the HEI is organised and how seriously their application is being taken. In German HEIs, the average wait for an offer of a place was 46 days, which fares averagely well with those from other nations. With a satisfaction level of 73% however, it could be improved for some students, but in comparison to the benchmark (74%), is not far below average standards.

Figure 3: Offer Response Time by Institution Type

Institution type

University of Applied Sciences (n = 467)

Technical University (n = 436)

University (n = 1659)
The most important aspect of responding to students is not the speed of contact or the speed of offer, but more the management of expectations. If it is made known to the student that a period of 3 weeks is normal in hearing back from an HEI in Germany, they will not feel disillusioned or rejected by the time that this time period has passed. This requires clarity, honesty and communication from the HEI, in order for the international student to feel well-handled and respected. Criticism comes mainly from international students at HEIs which appear to be disorganised or which handle applications in a sluggish manner. The aim for German HEIs should be to ensure that international students attend their institution, through fast, efficient handling of applications and offers. This would increase the chance that the students accepted into programmes would select the German HEI, and not opt for another offer given faster from elsewhere. German HEIs can maintain a reputation of world class higher education more easily with world class international students. The risk of losing these students to more efficiently organised foreign universities is thus reduced.

**Figure 4:** Satisfaction with Offer Response Time by Institute

Reasons for varying response times differ greatly, depending on factors such as administrative procedures, popularity, numbers of internationals applying, assessment of academic credentials of prospective students and size and efficiency of the department dealing with the applications. The response times from Initial Contact to Offer suggest that a review of application procedures may be useful in many German HEIs.
1.5. INFORMATION PROVISION

Supporting international students is a two-way process between the student and the HEI. It should no longer be considered anything different. In return for an invaluable international reputation and the networking potential of maintaining a healthy international student body, students must first be made aware of the courses and institutions available. After this, they must be encouraged to apply, be responded to quickly, and be supported throughout the application process.

In order to help students through the application and information gathering phases, HEIs in Germany should provide accurate and frequently updated information in both their printed and electronic sources. Revision of the institute’s webpage with the international student in mind is an obvious start, and would be helpful in answering questions for which a student might normally contact the HEI. Such information could include average response times and entry requirements for courses, as well as the technical issues such as visas and work permits if they are interested in a part-time job during their studies. Furthermore, Scholarship Programmes could be made known in this fashion, as they were found to be difficult to find information on for 40% of students, along with Availability of Accommodation (31%) and Living Costs (25%). Access to concise information reassures the student, saves the institution time and effort in the long term, and is cost-effective. It should be remembered that since foreign students gather HEI-specific information from the website, it must be treated as the focal point of information. Thus, it must be presented in an accessible, informative and relevant manner. Above all, it should not only be written in German but also in English or other target group languages, especially in the specific international section of the website. Management of expectations should be kept in mind at this point too, allowing the student to be aware of what to expect and what is expected of them.

When looking to increase the ability to attract foreign students, German HEIs have great potential to dramatically increase their current levels. Anecdotal evidence and open comments from the ISB highlight a lack of awareness concerning the strength of German higher education and that students find too little to encourage their application. This could be countered through utilising more visible methods of marketing and advertisement, and not principally relying on educational prestige. In other words, a greater level of enthusiasm for active recruitment should provide quite noticeable increases in application numbers, especially when combined with the high standard of education at very reasonable cost to the student.
Prospective students prefer to feel as if an institution is glad of their application, and shows enthusiasm with regard to their interest. In a similar vein, it is very important in the initial phases of contact that the student is provided with all of the relevant and necessary information for their application, registration, and arrival. Institutions could aim to pay more attention to the early phases of communication and assistance. However, it should be remembered that there is a fine balance between assisting students and ‘spoon feeding’ them. It is not wise to provide everything for prospective students, without the necessary research on their part and personal development which they undoubtedly undergo. In other words, the HEI should have a strong hand in helping the students when they come across technical difficulties which they encounter, but should not restrict the potential development which being an international student brings.

*It is impossible for an English speaking student to get a full picture of the life there, because most fliers, booklets and other materials concerning student life; application forms for dorms and libraries, and other major parts of the website are in the German language.*

(Student from Turkmenistan)

*I was unable to participate in the orientation weeks because of a lack of communication...*  
(Student from the USA)

### 1.6. SOCIAL MEDIA

A large number of universities in this instance use social media to associate and align themselves with students. Utilising social networking websites is a very effective means of information provision for the institution, and is cost effective. Creating an ‘official’ group or forum for prospective students allows them to share information and to create friendship networks before they even arrive in the host country. Furthermore, encouraging current students to maintain a blog can also shed light on the first few weeks of their experience, and when published on the university website offers a personal insight into the initial stages of living in Germany, their problems and how they overcame them. Such methods are extremely useful for students not only in terms of access to information, but in that they already establish a sense of connection to the institution and the country, generally increasing their self-confidence and the feeling that they are not alone. Information over the whereabouts of such official groups or forums can easily be provided by the institution by several means of communication, most obviously via email. It is this form of information which
is recalled most readily, according to the ISB open comments, besides the necessary standardised (and often impersonal) information received from institutions.

After accepting my offer of admission, I received no further communication from the university.  
(Student from Canada)

In other words, students enjoy receiving information to which they can relate to on a personal level, which is welcoming and enjoyable to read. It also increases the likelihood of recalling the fact that they received help and information from the institution, as 34% state that they do not recall receiving information from the HEI, a percentage substantially higher (12%) than the ISB average. Thus students desire specific information in the form of regular, informative communication through a variety of means in both social as well as academic contexts, which HEIs can achieve through establishing a system of social media communication as well as the more traditional forms of contact.

1.7. BUDDY SYSTEMS

Buddy systems where in place have proven to be a success, allowing students to maintain lasting connections to the place of study. Such systems involve pairing each international student with a volunteer domestic student, assisting the new student with everyday technical issues (mobile phone packages, where to eat and drink etc.). It benefits the volunteer domestic student through improvement of their CV, a wider cultural understanding, and the possibility of expanding their own circle of friends. Not only this, the international students also tend to achieve a better language understanding of the host nation and better all round settling-in experience than they might have experienced without a buddy. Some German HEIs already have such a system in place, and have provided a more welcoming and enjoyable experience in the initial period of study. Buddy systems can also be implemented online, through email introduction, but should not replace face-to-face meetings. This is especially the case for certain cultures which value personal meetings as being of much higher importance than remote communication.
The buddy system at the graduate school was good. I had a very good buddy to help me. (Student from India)

There was a buddy programme, which assigns every new student with a friendly one who already studied and knows the procedures well. My buddy was perfect – he understood each of my troubles and together we dealt with everything. (Student from Vietnam)

1.8. PRE-ARRIVAL INFORMATION PROVISION

The surge of online information could provide an extremely useful help method for both student and institution alike. Pre-arrival information lets students know what will be expected of them, what they should bring to be inducted or registered, the ins and outs of student life in that country and institution, as well as some background information concerning local customs and general prices of key items. Some of this information would be culturally specific (such as staple food items), but in the main would provide simple, effective information. Further advice concerning immigration, course requirements, textbooks, and timetables would also prove useful to the vast majority.

1.9. ARRIVAL

An extremely important part of the study experience for an international student is the arrival at the destination of study. It is a crucial part of the relationship between student and institution and will establish a lasting impression for the duration of the study period. There is only one chance of a first impression. It is key to the welcoming that certain provisions are taken care of, such as directions to accommodation, that accommodation is organised before arrival and that if arriving late in the evening or early in the morning, some kind of temporary accommodation is available until normal office hours. After all, the student is a guest at the institution and should be treated as such. The term ‘Arrival’ covers several aspects, including pre-departure information, airport greeting, induction and orientation. For a student travelling hundreds or thousands of miles to reach the final destination, one would imagine that the prospect of a friendly welcome would be a certainty. Unfortunately, this is often not the case. For some, much of the organisation and orientation is undergone through the use of ‘Fresher’s fairs’ or an equivalent information event organised by the HEI usually in the first few days of the semester. Some HEIs in other countries then organise a secondary fair, to put latecomers
on an even keel with other students when they arrive. Overall, German HEIs performed reasonably well, on par with the international benchmark of 82% of international students stating that they were satisfied with the overall welcome. The next section looks at the composition of this result in more detail.

1.10. INITIAL WELCOME

German HEIs show comparatively good results in areas such as Welcome (71%) and First Night (76%), being on or above the ISB average standards. Being very important factors in the overall impression of the institution, there are aspects which German HEIs could aim to improve in order to outclass their peers. According to ISB data, the higher scoring nations in the ISB performed well through utilising such services as picking up the students from the airport, assisting them to their new accommodation, and ensuring they are comfortable in their new surroundings. Some institutions around the world also offer a form of ‘start-up pack’, which includes some basic toiletries, foodstuffs and bedding for the newly arrived students. Small details like these can make a huge difference in the first few days in an unfamiliar country.

After the first steps on German soil, the next stage of settling in Formal Welcome (85%) proved to be satisfactory, hovering 1% above the ISB benchmark. This is a standard which German HEIs should be looking to maintain and improve.
1.11. ACADEMIC REGISTRATION AND ORIENTATION

Registration (80%), Orientation of HEI (83%), and Local Orientation (81%) compared relatively well with the ISB benchmark (at 81%, 82%, and 82% respectively). These are important for new international students in organising themselves as quickly as possible and providing them with advice on some technical issues. However, despite this positive beginning, this section was not a strong point for German HEIs as a whole, and one of the weakest sections of the overall welcome was the Visa Advice (66% satisfaction, down 9% on the ISB average), a point which should be readily addressed to improve the student experience. Along with this, issues were evident with Accommodation Offices (only 68% satisfied, down 4% on ISB average), which is in itself a hugely important factor in the arrival period. On a positive note, the Finance Office (76%) did perform better than the ISB benchmark at 74%, enabling students to set up a bank account and organise other monetary issues.

With improvement in these sections, German HEIs would vastly increase their overall performance in the application and arrival section, and much of this information (even at a basic level) could be given on the website of the HEIs. Again, what is to be remembered here is that expectation management is of paramount importance. Anecdotal evidence provides examples of varying levels of support offered at different institutions, highlighting the need for solid services, as a potent mix of tiredness, confusion and emotion can often exacerbate the overwhelming step in moving country.

I was dissatisfied with the registration procedure which was ambiguous and took almost three weeks. (Student from Romania)

...not knowing anyone was overwhelming, but the staff who helped me register were very friendly and helpful. (Student from Australia)

Need more details about the work permits for foreign citizens, about their status as PhD workers, about the services which every person should visit immediately after arrival – Auslanderburo, Auslanderbehorde, Arbeitsamt, Rathouse etc. (Student from Bulgaria)

We had an Introduction Week, and they explained everything to us, and helped us a lot to get everything done right. Really helpful! (Student from Russian Federation)
1.12. **Application and Arrival: Points and Actions to Consider**

- Remember that students are becoming increasingly streetwise with their methods of gathering information. As a result, HEIs in Germany could increase their presence on popular websites, forums and other forms of social media to entice prospective students.

- The process of applications should be reviewed and altered to increase efficacy, as long periods are spent waiting, particularly for notification of acceptance or rejection.

- In conjunction with this, managing the expectations of responses to applications is of crucial importance. Students will not feel disillusioned if their application takes weeks longer than it is expected to.

- HEIs could make use of the charitable Uni-assist system, which can handle the application sorting process for them, reducing the burden of mass applications, leaving their staff free to attend to other tasks.

- Updated, accessible information in numerous languages should be available on each website, particularly in any internationally-themed sections.

- More visible marketing should be used, especially online. Use of social media would greatly improve awareness of HEIs in Germany and allow useful pre-arrival contact and information exchange.

- More assistance on arrival, particularly in Welcome and First Night is needed in order to bring these sections up to speed with the rest of German HEI performance. Furthermore, technical assistance outside of Finance Office also requires attention, especially in terms of Accommodation assistance.
1.13. Case study

What makes the arrival and welcome process work easily for international students at the Georg-Simon-Ohm University of Applied Sciences?

The ISB research highlights that the international students of the Georg-Simon-Ohm University of Applied Sciences feel welcome and especially appreciate the organisation of the arrival process (91% satisfied), the entire welcome process and the contact with the German students, called ‘host friends’ in ISB terminology. What does the Georg-Simon-Ohm University do to achieve this?

First of all, there is accommodation pre-arranged for all the exchange students – every student gets a room in one of the student residence halls. Not having to worry about your accommodation when arriving in Nuremberg is certainly considered a plus by international students!

Furthermore, every exchange student gets a German ‘buddy’. The student buddies support the incoming students during the entire time of their stay, pick them up from the station or airport, show them the campus, help them with the first formalities and support them to get integrated quickly into the German culture. The experiences at Nuremberg show that the contact to the student buddies and the feeling to be welcomed personally and warmly at their arrival leads to a very positive first impression. In many cases, the students establish close and lasting friendships with their buddies.

In order to facilitate the formalities which are necessary in the beginning, Georg-Simon-Ohm University organises ‘Orientation Weeks’. During these days, they help the students to register at the university and at the city of Nuremberg, which allows them to purchase German health insurance. Georg-Simon-Ohm University also arranges group meetings to open a bank account or to apply for a residence permit.

Regarding the German language, the university offers intensive courses prior to the beginning of the semester which are organised by the ‘Language Centre’ of the university. The students can choose between several levels and participate for free in the intensive courses for two weeks (in March) or for four weeks (in September). During the semester, they can take more German courses or register for a ‘Language Tandem’ in order to talk to a German student regularly and informally in a social setting.

One of the most important factors in order to feel welcome is the fast integration into the university system and into the city life in Nuremberg. Therefore, Georg-Simon-Ohm University offers their international stu-
dents numerous activities, such as a welcome brunch, a ‘Come Together’
evening in order to meet other German students or an official reception
with a welcome speech by the university’s president. Moreover, the cul-
tural programme includes excursions, cultural nights, visit to museums,
sport events etc. In order to organise these ‘Come Together’ activities, the
International Office is supported by the ‘Club International’ which consists
of many German students who are highly motivated to support the inte-
gration of the international students.

Apart from integration into university and student life, the university also
offers international students the project ‘Mi casa es tu casa’ in order to
get in contact with German families who live in Nuremberg. These families
invite their guests for dinner, organise trips in the region, go to a soccer
match or concert together and much more.

All of these activities before and after the arrival of the incom-
ing international students contribute to a warm welcome and
fast integration into life in Nuremberg.
**Case study**

**What makes the application and arrival process work smoothly for international students at the Fachhochschule Dortmund – University of Applied Sciences and Arts?**

The Fachhochschule Dortmund outperforms the German ISB benchmark when it comes to various aspects of the arrival phase for international students. The registration process, the university orientation and the understanding of study sense, i.e. what is required of you by your new university works extremely well at Dortmund. Making sure new international students feel welcome from day 1 is an important part of their overall satisfaction and their likeliness for future recommendation. What does the Fachhochschule Dortmund do to achieve this?

Probably the most important reason for Dortmund’s success is that the whole procedure is undertaken by the International Office – ‘Service aus einer Hand.’ From the first information request, through the entire application process and on to the final admission, the whole process is handled by the staff at the International Office. This service is geared towards being personalised and knowing your international students. For that reason, each international student has to come to the International Office to become personally acquainted with the International Office staff and to register. In their admission letter, each international student is made aware of this procedure and receives an invite for an obligatory two-day course, AMICUS, to get them acquainted with the International Office as well as with the procedure and processes at the Fachhochschule Dortmund. The university believes it is helpful to get students truly committed by asking them to contribute by their own means. However, when you have really good study results (i.e. Credit Points) the 500 Euro may be refunded.

Besides the workshops and regular counselling offered by the International Office, Fachhochschule Dortmund introduced a system 4 years ago in which all students must have a personal conversation about their study progress once a year. These conversations are to determine that the study is going as planned, and if not, what can be done to improve the situation. By having these conversations during the 2nd or 3rd study semester, changes can be made relatively early in the academic study in order to avoid students stopping their study altogether.
Next to this, the International Office is also responsible for the study progress papers which are needed by international students to comply with visa requirements. And last, but certainly not least, every e-mail is answered personally, with a personal e-mail signature underneath the e-mail stating clearly the contact details of the International Office staff member concerned. If a member of staff is absent, for whatever reason, an out-of-office mail mentions the contact details of another member of staff acting as replacement. The simple, but personal touch of having a person’s name and contact details may make a big difference to an international student arriving in a completely new environment.
This chapter looks at the process of integration which each student undergoes when they arrive at their destination of study. The question for HEIs in Germany is how best to integrate the student population of foreign and domestic students. Furthermore, students from foreign countries may wish to actively mix with the wider local community, not spending their time experiencing only student relations. Information provision from the HEI can prepare international students for what they may come across during their experience in German culture. This may reveal aspects of German culture which they may find appealing before arrival, allowing them to plan some activities for themselves. In other words, cultural and social integration for international students is a two-way system which requires input and communication from both the student and the institution.

The most important aspect to remember with regard to integration is that it must continue over a longer period of time than simply the initial arrival. For example, a student may not have adequately settled, or feel equipped for, a large organised event for international students at the very beginning of the study period. Such events may not even be to their taste. It is important to organise a variety of events which are suited to diverse personality types, for example community work and involvement, buddy systems and language courses which involve informal teaching from domestic students. Also, the requirements of students can differ depending on their level of study and age; some students may prefer arts based entertainment or cultural events, rather than the more obvious student social activities (clubs, pubs etc.). Sport can also offer one of the best opportunities for international student integration, often providing the ideal opportunity to make informal introductions and maybe even strengthening the HEI’s sporting prowess. Not all options are available or affordable to each HEI, but it would be worth considering ways in which an HEI in Germany can cater for the diverse sporting tastes of their international students, where costs and feasibility allow.
Making friends among other international students has been great and easier than I thought ... I got to know so many people.
(Student from Finland)

Germans generally know each other from school and they group together, and since we won’t just sit at a cafe after class it’s harder to socialize with them.
(Student from Greece)

The individuality culture of people here unlike in my home country is making it difficult to easily make friends.
(Student from Nigeria)

This chapter also covers such aspects as usage of cultural support throughout the year, for example in counselling or advisory options. Overall, the support offered by German HEIs for their international students is not well utilised, with the most commonly used support office (International Office) being used by 46% of students. There are also support factors such as Student Unions and Sports and Social Activities which will be discussed later in the chapter.

2.1. MAKING FRIENDS: ON ARRIVAL AND DURING THE PROGRAMME

International students value the opportunity to integrate with others in the international learning environment. This could be with people from their own country, those from Germany or other international students. This enthusiasm is reflected in the fact that 41% found it very important and 46% found it important to have the possibility to build up networks and friendships in an intercultural context.

Upon arrival, the group of friends which international students found to be most satisfactory was other international students (87%), which was slightly above the ISB benchmark. This level of satisfaction was notably higher than the levels experienced with meeting those of their own nationality (76%) and domestic students (72%), both of which fell below the International Benchmark by 4% and 1% respectively. However, international students place more value on mixing with students from the host country (91%) than from other countries (85%) and far more than making friends from their home nationality (58%) groups, highlighting their desire to mix with German students above all others. The likelihood for the higher initial satisfaction of making friends from other nationali-
Cultural and Social Integration

Cultural and social integration could be due to the fact that international students are often placed together in accommodation, which increases the chance of quick initial integration. As international students are likely to be seeking friendship with others from the early stages of their stay, those who are situated in their vicinity will be the most likely candidates.

Of course, there are a number of options which HEIs can use in order to improve integration with domestic students at grass-roots level. Such a procedure could simply involve greater consideration when allocating accommodation. Although it is often pleasant and to some extent comforting to have students from your home region close to you, it does not necessarily increase the integration of international students. If students from the same country are placed in close proximity to one another, they may converse in their native tongue, rather than improve their knowledge of the German language.

I took a German intensive course where I met foreign students and together we got to know the university and Berlin.
(Student from the Netherlands)

The possibility of a multicultural integration is also an advantage.
(Student from Brazil)

Integration can also be improved through utilising social networking websites and online messenger services in order to initiate contact between students, even before they meet in person. This can work well for both international and domestic students, especially if a system is in place for a number of years and is well known to the students at the university. After all, news can travel fast around campus, and especially in an international student community which uses social media as a form on contacting each other. Other institutions across the world use such systems as a cost effective and efficient method of spreading news. Thus, such means suit both the students and the institutions.

In terms of integrating and making friends, both Chinese and Russian nationalities found it important to mix with *Host Friends* (90%) and *Other Friends* (around 80%). Both were substantially less focused on making friends with those of their own nationality (72%, 56%) highlighting the focus upon intercultural integration. However, how the expectations matched to reality was apparently disappointing for both nationalities. In fact, 9 out of 10 students found it surprisingly positive in meeting those of the same nationality. Students from both China and Russia were quite satisfied with relations between themselves and other internationals, with
satisfaction results settling on 74% for Chinese and 84% for Russian students. The main source of disappointment for students of these nationalities stemmed mainly from satisfaction in Sino-German relations particularly, but also for Russian-German relations (64%, 72% respectively) highlighting a lack of proper integration. However, when compared to other countries, a similar outcome is prevalent; in Belgium (65%, 78%), Sweden (59%, 69%) and the Netherlands (61%, 68%). The USA fared slightly better (71%, 80%), along with Ireland (68%, 80%).

**Figure 6:** The Importance of Making Friends Home/Host/Other by Nationality

![Chart showing the importance of making friends from home, host, or other countries by nationality.](image)

### 2.2. **CLUBS/SOCIETIES & STUDENT UNIONS**

Perhaps integration can be encouraged through greater use of facilities by international students, particularly with regard to those facilities which traditionally encourage socialising. A good example is that the German university clubs and societies are used by just 28% of international students: with less than one third of students making use of such services, it is hardly surprising that integration is not as high as it might be. Encouraging greater participation in clubs and societies is likely to improve satisfaction, since when used, 90% of students are satisfied with them which highlights the utility value of these services.
Usage and satisfaction with Students’ Unions offers a similar story. Only 14% of international students make use of this service, which can offer membership to a like-minded group of mixed individuals and the opportunity to integrate with domestic students and possibly those within the local community. However, again when used, this service was well-thought-of, scoring an 85% satisfaction rate amongst students.

2.3. INTERNATIONAL OFFICE

The International Office is typically the centre point for HEI international student communication. As a result it is an extremely important facility when its services are required. Results according to ISB data can be interpreted in several ways, but can be best illustrated in positive or negative opinions gathered from open comments. The usage percentage of international students with the International Office was 46%, and the satisfaction of this use was high, at 89%. This, backed by anecdotal evidence suggests that although awareness of the International Office is by no means universal, its services are well received and greatly appreciated where applicable. This positivity is something which German HEIs can use to highlight as a true strength, providing they can make their services more widely known.

I think the university International Office and department supported me a lot in getting my visa approval. The student visa process in India is a painful thing to go through; hazardous bureaucracy kills you and your time completely. But again, university support is commendable.

(Student from India)

The international office staff are very helpful and understand other cultures.

(Student from Egypt)

...there are many attractive programs that are provided by university clubs and international office.

(Student from Indonesia)

The International Office offers a wide range of services. It has maintained continuous contact with me during my studies. I know I can always go to them if I incur any difficulties with my studies or even in my private life. They are well connected with other organisations.

(Nationality unknown)
2.4. **COUNSELLING AND DISABILITY SUPPORT**

Although these services are normally used by the minority of students, they remain extremely important for those who require such facilities. Counselling services are used by around 6% of international students; however this may not reflect the actual number requiring the service, only those aware of its existence and where to find it. Promisingly, 85% of students using counselling services found them to be to their satisfaction, although this is slightly below the international benchmark of 87%. Disability support was used by 2% of international students, with a high satisfaction rate of 90%.

![Figure 7: Usage/Knowledge of Various Support Services](image)

2.5. **SPORT & SOCIAL ACTIVITIES**

Sport, either competitive or uncompetitive, provides a useful platform for integration, sharing of sporting cultures and student personal development. Exercise is something in which the majority of international students will take part, in some form, during their study period in Germany and it is an important aspect of consideration of the student’s health and well-being. Overall, in this respect German HEIs perform relatively well. The availability and quality of sports services vary from institution to institution, as some HEIs focus more specifically on sport than others.
However, Sport Facilities were deemed as important by three-quarters of international students studying in Germany (75%) which is in line with the ISB benchmark. From this number, 81% were satisfied with the facilities on offer, as opposed to 76%, the ISB average. Those from the EU were 85% satisfied with the facilities available and those outside of the EU were less pleased with what was available, with 78% indicating satisfaction.

Social activities organised through the university are also important in the integration of students. They offer the chance for students to meet and find common ground in a variety of ways, depending on what is available to them both on and off campus. Social activities can allow an exchange of experiences, a chance to meet and greet new friends, as well as the indirect benefits to HEIs such as more content students, and the spreading of useful information throughout the student body. Students studying in Germany place relatively high importance in the quality of social facilities (78%), emphasising the need for suitable, accessible places for students to socialise. From this, the percentage of students finding this to be to their satisfaction is also 78%, equal to the ISB benchmark. With social activities, three quarters consider it as being important to them. From this, 76% were satisfied with the activities made available to them.

**Figure 8: Importance & Satisfaction with Sports and Social Facilities**

![Graph showing the percentage of students satisfied with sports and social facilities for EU and Non EU students.](image)

- EU (n = 2827)
- Non EU (n = 6170)
83% of students from the European Union were satisfied with the social facilities and 80% satisfied with the social activities organised. In comparison, those from outside the EU were 7% and 6% less content in these fields. So in general, German HEIs perform in and around the ISB benchmark in terms of the social facilities they provide, and the social activities that they arrange. Improvements could include more organised social events and a stronger backing of sport programmes in terms of expense, since students (especially those coming from outside of the EU) often found existing programmes to be of a poor standard.

*... I think more sports facilities owned by the University would be nice.*
(Student from Brazil)

*The language school & sports facilities widen opportunities.*
(Student from India)

*... the sports programs on offer here are pathetic.*
(Student from Australia)

### 2.6. OPPORTUNITY TO EXPERIENCE GERMAN CULTURE

The reason for going to a particular country is often the culture which it portrays internationally. While this can still include old stereotypes, the idea of studying in Germany conveys the notion of studying in an organised and high level institution, often situated in an attractive town or bustling city. Being a large, developed country it also conjures images of cosmopolitanism and tolerance, an attractive premise for international students. Despite this, often international students are left wanting when it comes to truly integrating into society during their stay. Although in many cases the period of time for study limits the chance of this, an HEI can still assist an international student. In their aims to experience Germany at a deeper level, students desire experiences which go further than the standard tourist trails.
According to ISB data, the will to experience German culture is strong for international students. Overall, 91% of students visiting Germany placed importance on the host culture. This was more so the case with non-EU students (92%) than with EU students (88%). The satisfaction levels were found to be slightly disappointing however, with non-EU students only 82% satisfied (EU students 90%).

After spending more than six months in Germany, I can say that my urge to learn more about Germany and Europe over all increased quite a few fold. (Student from India)

...the city is beautiful, people are nice and it is a good University. (Student from Hungary)

I just think it isn’t really a ‘cultural exchange experience’. Everyone that I talk to tells me that they almost never have the chance to talk to German people. How can I learn German and about its culture if I can’t talk to anyone from the country? Really, really disappointed with the experience in this aspect! (Student from Brazil)

...Being a small town, it is very full of life and culture (theatre, music, clubs, ‘Kneipen’). It is a friendly city and great to learn German in. The international connections you make, give new ways of looking at things. Also very multicultural. (Student from Sweden)
2.7. **Cultural and Social Integration: Points and Actions to consider**

- Provision of information before the student arrives will help them to manage their expectations, especially in social and living aspects.

- Bear in mind that students maintain diverse social preferences and appreciate the opportunity to expand their knowledge of their host culture. This means providing not only ‘typical’ student social activities (for example visits to museums, discotheques) but also the chance to come into contact with those in the wider community. This can include both educational and social events, such as charity work.

- Not all options are available to all German HEIs, but a genuine effort should be made to give further backing towards social and sporting programmes. This will in turn benefit the reputation of the HEI and German education system as a whole.

- Usage of certain social facilities on offer is quite low overall across the board, but there is a relatively high level of satisfaction for those which are used. Greater awareness of the facilities available would increase usage and student enjoyment. It would also increase integration.

- Using social media, HEIs can organise events for students and communicate with them with relative ease, especially after a particular adaptable system has been in place for a few years.
2.8. Case study
What makes the cultural and social integration work at the University of Konstanz?

The University of Konstanz outperforms the German ISB benchmark with 9.5% in the area of social facilities and with 6% for integration with the host culture. What’s their secret?

As a relatively small, modern campus university, Konstanz has an undeniable infrastructural advantage over bigger German universities which are sometimes spread out over an entire town. For Konstanz it is their declared aim to put this infrastructural asset to the best possible use in the integration process of students – both local and international. With approximately 1300 international students of a total student body of nearly 10,000, the University of Konstanz tries to provide the best possible academic and non-academic support on campus to ensure that students can spend the greater part of their days on campus without having to leave in between lectures. Thus, Konstanz succeeds in fostering the development of a very close-knit student community.

Amongst the services offered to this end are the following:
- 24/7 library
- book shop
- popular cafeteria offering a wide variety of subsidised meals
- Chinese restaurant
- student-run coffee place
- student-run beer garden
- in- and outdoor public meeting places
- on-campus sports facilities
- and a … university beach!

Additionally the International Office has implemented several measures which are specifically designed to counter-balance infrastructural disadvantages (such as cost of living in Konstanz and the location in the German periphery) and to assist international students with their academic, cultural and social integration.

These measures are:
- low cost pre-semester intensive language courses
- intensive language training at all levels
- assistance with all administrative tasks
- academic advising
- lectures on German academic culture
lectures on the History, Culture and Politics of the Lake Constance region

targeted group lectures on various topics: Staying in Germany after Finishing a Degree; Extension of Residence Permits; Academic English Sessions; Intercultural Training, etc.

excursions to the surrounding area

Next to the free of charge pre-semester orientation programmes, the University of Konstanz has special student tutors available for student populations from several countries offering ongoing support with course selection and other academic issues through regular group meetings. Working with domestic students enhances the integration between international and domestic students. Students play a big role in this integration process. For instance, the International Office hosts and supports several student initiatives working together as ‘Step In’ to socially and academically integrate international students.

One of the ‘Step IN’ programmes, for example, is a one-to-one buddy programme matching international students with a PASSpartner, who picks them up from the station upon arrival, helps them move into their dorm and ideally becomes a friend. The Step IN initiative also organises daytrips and parties for international students. Moreover, the International Office works closely together with departments and departmental exchange coordinators to offer special information sessions for international students in the beginning of each semester. Individual departments even receive financial support from the International Office for student assistants advising incoming students. Likewise, the International Office also maintains strong links to the Housing Department (Seezeit), affiliated with the University of Konstanz but not run by it. Together with Seezeit the International Office introduced a unique concept of flat-sharing in one of the Konstanz dorms: Europahaus – flats for four people; shared by two international and two German students.

All these measures are taken at the University of Konstanz to enhance the academic, cultural and social integration of international students seem to have borne fruit, judging the high satisfaction rate international students expressed for this area of the ISB. This wide variety of measures can only be carried out thanks to a strict service mentality and a very good student/staff ratio in the International Office.
Cultural and social Integration

Case study
What makes the cultural and social integration such a success for international students at University of Regensburg?

The International Student Barometer™ placed University of Regensburg among the best universities with regard to the cultural and social integration process for international students. Clearly the middle-sized town itself adds to this, as does the campus life and its structure, but what activities are being developed by the International Office to support this integration?

The medieval city centre of Regensburg has been on the UNESCO List of World Heritage Sites since 2006. Due to the size of the city, it is easy to meet with other people, and furthermore, the city is famous for having most pubs per square mile in Germany! Since the foundation of the University of Regensburg in 1962 the population of Regensburg has always been open to student culture. There is a student/town population ratio with every 6th Regensburg inhabitant being a student. On top of that, the town itself boasts a rich cultural life with theatres and many festivals. All these features make the town vibrant and accessible for international students.

Equally, the campus structure of the University of Regensburg promotes social integration. Many students spend most of their days on campus as it provides all the necessary facilities – like libraries, cafeterias, CIP pools and a large sports centre with a wide range of sports activities. Students also meet each other in the orchestras, choirs, during the art exhibitions and by playing in one of the theatre groups. Among those, the group Babylon is especially worth mentioning as it is designed for international students as a project to learn German in quite a different – and intensive – way. This is achieved by acting in a stage play that they perform during the summer semester.

Over the years, the International Office has managed to establish and maintain a close-knit network between the local authorities – such as the foreigners’ registration office, student religious societies, counselling services and health insurance companies – as well as the halls of residence. The halls of residence provide accommodation for both international students and German students; there are no special dormitories for either group.
All incoming students are welcomed at a Get-Together-Party at the beginning of the semester. Moreover, the tutors of the International Office organise film and cooking evenings, parties, pub crawls and Regensburg sightseeing tours. Tutors also help with practical issues like seeing a doctor or buying a used bike.

Moreover, the International Office offers STARTKLAR, a free orientation course where new degree-seeking students are helped with formalities such as opening a bank account, taking out health insurance, registering at the foreigners’ registration office and planning their studies. Especially for exchange students, the university offers an Orientation Programme that offers student guidance (such as choosing one’s courses and matriculation) and assists with formalities. New students are also shown around the university and the town. Both STARTKLAR and the Orientation Programme for exchange students are a first social meeting point and convey a feeling of being welcome to the students.

During their time in Regensburg, international and German students have the possibility to meet twice a week during the International Coffee Hour in the rooms of the International Office. Furthermore, the ‘Semesterprogramm’ of the International Office invites international students to participate in excursions and parties. The excursions range from close by destinations such Neuschwanstein, the Christmas Market in Nuremberg, or to more distant places such as Berlin.

Last but not least, the DaF (German as Foreign Language) programme offers a wide range of German language courses, courses on German culture including film and literature classes, which further highlights the great opportunities to integrate into German society.
This chapter assesses the accommodation provision and living for international students whilst studying at German HEIs. It takes into account numerous factors, including accommodation cost and quality, eating establishments provided by the university, provision of facilities as well as the more general safety and transport fields. In a sense, this chapter may provide the most accurate overall picture of how satisfied international students feel with their experience living and studying in Germany when combined with chapters concerning the study itself. Anecdotal evidence adds context to the data itself, meaning we can gain a wider understanding of the results, and more specific idea of aspects of the living experience which can be improved.

3.1. ACCOMMODATION

The offer of accommodation is paramount in the student experience. Students have moved to an unfamiliar environment for study purposes, and their experience with accommodation and service provision can impact greatly upon their experience in Germany. It is one of the most highly valued aspects of the student experience, with accommodation quality and accommodation cost valued as being important or very important by 95% and 97% of students respectively. The smooth transition of arrival and settling is fundamental to the overall experience of studying abroad, thus where and how a student lives during the period of study can have a large impact on this. Of course from each area of the world come different personalities with different requirements and expectations, which can make pleasing all students a difficult task. However, despite the difficulties in managing such differences, the living and accommodation elements of study should be addressed thoroughly by HEIs. As an international student will be living in the accommodation which is usually provided by or connected to the HEI, it becomes representative of the institution itself, and can add or detract to its reputation.
Overall satisfaction with accommodation in Germany raised some concerns, more so in terms of cost than quality. Most agreed (85%) that overall accommodation quality was satisfactory to requirements, but only 68% felt that this provision was acceptable. Non-EU students were generally unhappier than EU students in this respect, with only 66% satisfied with the service. It is important to manage expectations with accommodation, as international students often believe that the accommodation situation is inextricably linked to and is organised by the HEI, which it usually is not. Thus, it should be explained thoroughly that such functions as the accommodation office are provided to assist finding accommodation, and that this is not an obligation. In other words, the process must be explained so that international students do not reach unrealistic expectations. Some of the open comments can shed light on the mixed feelings of students.

“

I couldn’t think of a better place to be for a semester or for my entire University studies. The only thing that could make it better would be to have more student housing. (Student from the USA)

The housing cost may need a bit of a revision, though the quality is more than excellent. (Student from Ethiopia)
I think that the University should keep better contact with the institutions in which students are going to be staying. I ended up with a room that is 70 euro more per month than I anticipated, and the University didn’t know about it. Now I’m going home early for educational and family reasons, and I’m losing over 1,000 American dollars because of the unanticipated and unwanted price of my room.

(Student from the USA)

3.2. ACCOMMODATION OFFICE

Often one of the first points of contact for an international student, experiences when dealing with the accommodation office can have a lasting impression of an HEI in any nation. If it is found to be inefficient, disorganised and unhelpful, then this notion will be recalled quite readily when an international student is asked of their experiences in their visited country. It will also bear heavily on the initial impression given to those in contact with the student during their stay, including family and friends. For these reasons, it is very important that HEIs in Germany take note of issues and address them promptly in order to maintain a smooth transition from home country to host country. Feedback from international students in Germany indicates a 74% satisfaction level in use of the accommodation office, equal to the ISB benchmark. However, the accommodation office is used by only 38% of international students in Germany, compared to the 43% benchmark. The standard of service received by students is thus on par with the ISB benchmark, but should be a point of focus for German HEIs, since a quarter of students were not satisfied with its services. In addition, just over one third of international students make use of its services, pointing to a lack of awareness of its existence or services, or perhaps a lack of awareness of the name of the service they are in fact using. The following anecdotal evidence provides specific opinions and may help to further understand these statistics:
There was an unacceptably bad level of work at the Accommodation Office; irresponsible staff which made mistakes in the contract. I had to wait for my documents for 6 weeks and received them with mistakes, moreover nobody was accountable for these mistakes and nobody could correct them. (Student from Belarus)

The accommodation office for exchange students helped me a lot, gave me information brochure; it was very nice of them. (Student from S. Korea)

For the first two months I didn’t even know of this accommodation office and its existence, and on reaching there again no one spoke in English (even if they knew how to). (Student from India)

The Accommodation Office is not often open. It’s sometimes hard to go to the office without skipping classes. (Student from Belgium)

In reviewing these comments, one can see that a level of frustration exists in some of the fundamental aspects of the accommodation office and how it operates. Concerns over basal functions such as communication and administration were highlighted quite frequently. Furthermore, it is apparent that office opening hours may cause inconvenience for students, which is essential to avoid in the initial, often confusing period of arrival. Despite this, the level of accommodation office satisfaction was still in line with the ISB average, perhaps pointing to a more widespread issue. Accommodation can be a complicated issue for HEIs and students, with differences in taste and expectations in terms of cost and quality, and it should be kept in mind that the accommodation office can only deal with the facilities which are available to it, which may exacerbate any existing administrative problems.

3.3. FAITH-BASED PROVISION (INCLUDING PRAYER ROOMS, QUIET SPACES, OVERALL FLEXIBILITY WITH RELIGION)

The facilities for those requiring facilities linked to their faith can be an integral part of the services provided. Despite a small percentage of international students having used these services in German HEIs (6%), for those that require such provision it can be incredibly important. Those students that had used facilities for religious worship generally found the services to be of a good standard (89%). Thus, although not perfect, the German HEIs can -in the main- be satisfied with the service they offer in
this aspect. However, some comments highlighted a lack of enthusiasm for having religious facilities in the HEI buildings, whilst others highlighted them as a necessity:

*I really do not support the idea of having prayer rooms in the University. If someone has to pray, he/she must find their own place and time without bothering others... My lecture on Friday was shifted because a few students told the Prof. that the class timing overlapped on their prayer time. The Prof. didn’t bother asking for the opinion of the rest of the students in the class and shifted it... the shift of time hampered my other programs. My point is one should under no circumstance support the mixing of religion with education. If someone has to pray, he/she is free to pray but all others shouldn’t be troubled. I hope you make a point and try to improve the situation in the near future.*

(Student from Bangladesh)

*For Moslems, we have difficulties in getting praying places. We have to pray 5 times a day. There is no special place for that. We will really appreciate if the university could provide a place for us even only 1m x 2m.*

(Student from Indonesia)

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**Figure 10:** Satisfaction with Accommodation Elements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Technical University (n = 1553)</th>
<th>University of Applied Sciences (n = 1675)</th>
<th>University (n = 5680)</th>
<th>University (n = 5735)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chaplaincy or multi faith provision</td>
<td><img src="chart" alt="Chaplaincy" /></td>
<td><img src="chart" alt="Chaplaincy" /></td>
<td><img src="chart" alt="Chaplaincy" /></td>
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<tr>
<td>Campus eating places</td>
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<td><img src="chart" alt="Campus eating" /></td>
<td><img src="chart" alt="Campus eating" /></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- **Not applicable/not relevant to me**
- **May be useful to me but I don’t know where to find it**
- **I know where this service is but I haven’t used it**
- **I have used this service**
An example of overcoming the religion and education debate has been seen at the Rijks Universiteit of Groningen in the Netherlands. They state on their website that they are in tolerance of all beliefs and religions, but endeavour to keep this separated from the educational domain. This leaves the responsibility upon the international student to arrange their requirements around their studies.

3.4. CAMPUS EATING FACILITIES

The on-campus eating facilities (or Mensa) provide a useful option for students, usually in the form of an affordable, convenient means of sustenance before, between, or after classes. They should offer a variety of meals for the different tastes and requirements of students from a wide range of countries, whilst also accounting for dietary and religious needs. It is understandably difficult to cater for people of all different areas of the globe, but HEIs should endeavour to produce the best possible service within reasonable means for its students, as is witnessed in universities in other areas of the world.

The catering facilities provided by the HEIs were used by 82% of international students, (higher than the 76% ISB average), highlighting the convenience of their on-campus location. The satisfaction rate was slightly less remarkable, scoring 79%. This was however higher than the ISB average of 75%. We can look to the open comments from students for positive feedback and criticism in its functions:

"I was really astonished when I saw the Mensa for the first time! Really WELL DONE! (Student from Bulgaria)"

"Sometimes I don’t like the food in Mensa. But it is really economical. (Student from China)"

"Food in Mensa are always the same, they should make some more changes in the week menu. (Student from Estonia)"

"I am a pure vegetarian. I don’t find much variety in the Mensa for a vegetarian. Most of the times, I satisfy myself with salad. (Student from India)"
Unfortunately the campus eating places do not offer food conforming to Islamic eating restrictions (Halal meat). So we have to settle for vegetarian food even if we are not vegetarian. It would be a good gesture if there is for example one Halal meal per week as acknowledgement of the diversity. The same applies to Jews who eat kosher meat, yet nothing is offered to satisfy their religious needs. I think the Mensa should be more attentive towards such issues as in Australian Universities for example!

(Student from Iraq)

Despite the comparatively high level of catering services in German HEIs, there appears to be a variety of areas for improvement in this field. Overall, the services are satisfactory to the students, but with more attention to detail and a wider understanding of specific cultural and dietary requirements, the ratings could show further improvement.

3.5. TRANSPORT OPTIONS

This section accounts for both transport links around the area and transport links to the HEI a fundamental part of the student experience in terms of organisation, expenditure and convenience. The results concluded that students placed high importance on both of these, with 92% importance placed on transport links in the surrounding area and 83% for those between university locations. This highlights the necessity of transport, especially if in an outlying area from the HEI. Those in their last year of study placed less stress on the importance of transport links between University locations, some 6% below those staying short-term. The satisfaction levels were reasonable in that satisfaction with transport in the surrounding area came in at 83%, 4% higher than the ISB average. Furthermore, transport links between university locations resulted in 80% satisfaction rates, on par with the ISB average. Most problems with transport concerned the location of accommodation rather than the transport quality itself, of which most gave positive reviews. Open comments from the questionnaire may provide food for thought on this matter:
We have no public transportation facilities and the bus stop is 1km away from my room. The road leading to my house has no lights and when it’s dark I don’t feel safe.  
(Student from Cameroon)

Public transportation is very good. It could be cheaper.  
(Student from Finland)

I think the location of the student hostels are not strategic as most of them are far away from the place where we study and the transportation is not as often as we hope. In my place there is even no transportation nearby to get to the main city. I’m not glad about that.  
(Student from Malaysia)

3.6. SAFETY

Safety is a factor which is often the concern of parents rather than the students themselves, especially with younger students (undergraduates placed least importance on this aspect from the three subgroups of education level). Due to this, how safe a country or particular region is can have a large impact on choices for students, especially those influenced heavily by their parents when choosing. The fact of the matter is that some places have less crime than others and reputation or stereotypes can often over ride common sense or fact in such factors. Thus, the safety of each area should be made clear to potential students and their families.

Germany is a safe place, and with a high level of importance placed on this area (90% of students rating it as so with a 94% ISB average), it is important to make sure that the campus itself is a haven for international students, and is as safe as possible for those studying at each institution. Furthermore, tips and advice can be given to international students to help them stay safe whilst off campus, and what to expect from the area. Again this relates back to expectation management; honestly highlighting which areas of the town are best in safety terms or which parts of the area are best avoided if any. Germany does score well in the aspect of safety, with a 92% satisfaction rate on safety (1% up on the ISB average), thus it should be advertised as a secure destination for those wishing to study abroad.
One of my preconditions prior coming to Germany was, ‘Wherever I go, safety and security comes first.’ Up to this point, I am satisfied with my living experience that mostly emerges from social security!
(Student from Bangladesh)

Safety and Security is not as I expected, and I wish for a better security.
(Student from Iran)

Amazing, the university and the city are eco-friendly, safe and secure.
(Student from India)

The city is wonderful (which helps too) and the feeling I have as a girl is very positive, meaning that I feel safe here in any part of the city.
(Student from Italy)

Being somewhat difficult to measure and being almost reliant on particular positive or negative experiences, less direct anecdotal evidence is provided in the open comments from students regarding this subject. However, the general consensus is that international students in the main feel safe while studying in Germany.
3.7. Accommodation and Living: Points and Actions to Consider

- The Quality of Accommodation was for the vast majority of students satisfactory. However, the Cost of Accommodation left a bitter taste in the mouth, with many believing it to be much higher than expected or too high to be of value. Expectation management could be utilised here to ensure realistic impressions.

- The Accommodation Office was often found to be inconvenient to visit, and was sometimes only practical to go to during class times. Institutions could consider better signposting and extended or more flexible opening hours.

- The eating facilities could provide a more varied menu, taking into account international tastes and dietary and religious needs for consumption.

- Transport to and from some HEIs was considered impractical due to distance from accommodation. Some students also suggested that the transport price was too high. Perhaps subsidies could be put in place where not already present.

- Tips for safety off-campus are useful to some students, despite an overall high safety rating.

- A more thorough explanation should be given to international students concerning accommodation cost and availability differences (if any) especially in comparison to domestic students.
3.8. Case Study: WHAT MAKES ACCOMMODATION SUCH A VALUED EXPERIENCE FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS AT THE CHRISTIAN-ALBRECHTS-UNIVERSITY IN KIEL?

Accommodation for international students at the Christian-Albrechts-Universität zu Kiel is arranged in cooperation with the Studentenwerk Schleswig-Holstein. Most of the students apply online for housing in one of the student dorms – this seems to be highly appreciated because the Christian-Albrechts-Universität zu Kiel is outperforming the German benchmark for accommodation cost and accommodation quality. In general, the situation in relation to housing is relaxed in Kiel compared to other cities in Germany, where accommodation is often more expensive and difficult to find. Besides, Kiel is a safe city but most German cities are considered safe, so what constitutes their success?

It starts with availability. Studentenwerk and the International Center work together to get as many rooms available as possible. For instance, each winter semester, the International Center publishes an article, calling upon private landlords to offer furnished rooms to International Students. During the enrolment phase, tutors and international students with a few years experience of living in Kiel, help to place international students in those private apartments. This programme has become really successful and supports the integration of international students.

For the last few years, Studentenwerk Schleswig-Holstein has been renovating its facilities in order to improve the accommodation standards. Since 2003 Studentenwerk offers to international students a special service called BaSIS. BaSIS stands for Beratung und Service für Internationale Studierende (Support and Service for International Students). Studentenwerk tries to avoid accumulation of just one nationality, allows 30% foreigners in their residences and in the international dormitories only 50% international students. These conditions encourage integration between German and international students. Foreign students get a chance to learn about the host country directly from domestic students and are able to adapt much faster to the cultural German characteristics. On the other hand, it is a great opportunity for German students to live an international life at their campus, make friends among international students and gain an insight into international academic mobility.
In each of the student residencies special tutors are appointed. Mostly international students themselves and residents of the dormitories too. Their own experience and language skills make them the excellent first contact for international students when it comes to questions about everyday life in the Studentenwerks’s houses. The tutors are employed by Studentenwerk and are constantly coached by BaSIS, ensuring they can assist in many very different situations, and most importantly, without bureaucratic obstacles and during day and night. Tutors organise table tennis tournaments, cinema evenings, welcome brunches, etc.

A further task of the Studentenwerk’s tutors is the organisation of country evenings – a sequel of events named ‘Culture Sessions’. For its integrative function in the student dormitories in Kiel, the project has received an award of the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 2009. Topics for the evenings range from traditions, mentality, history, geography, tourist places, typical food, etc. The budget for the country evenings is being contributed by the self administration of inhabitants, the so-called Heimrat, and by Studentenwerk. The goal of the series of cultural events is to let students actively participate in and form the cultural life on campus, help them present their cultures and encourage the others to appreciate the diversity in the dormitories. The ‘Culture Sessions’ give the inhabitants an opportunity to spend quality time with one another within the building.

Studentenwerk Schleswig-Holstein offers each semester for all students on the Kiel campus intercultural trainings. Students can follow a range of practical exercises and theoretical lectures concerning intercultural communication.
Learning and infrastructure form another crucial part of the international study experience. Involving such areas as the library, available learning spaces, language support, and course flexibility, this chapter aims to look at student expectations and satisfaction regarding these aspects. Furthermore, it looks to gain a wider understanding of opinion through using open comments to elucidate the results.

A student can go abroad for many reasons, but usually an important reason is the opportunity to experience high quality teaching in a new environment. Thus, the study environment becomes an important issue when deciding which country to study in and at which institution.

**Figure 11:** Importance of Infrastructure

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service</th>
<th>Students (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>IT and system support</td>
<td>Very unimportant: 0.1% Unimportant: 1.4% Important: 25.2% Very important: 73.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning spaces</td>
<td>Very unimportant: 0.2% Unimportant: 0.9% Important: 20.8% Very important: 78.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technology</td>
<td>Very unimportant: 0.1% Unimportant: 0.7% Important: 20.9% Very important: 78.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Library</td>
<td>Very unimportant: 0.1% Unimportant: 0.5% Important: 20.7% Very important: 78.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet access</td>
<td>Very unimportant: 0.1% Unimportant: 0.4% Important: 20.6% Very important: 78.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**4.1. LIBRARIES & LEARNING SPACES**

Libraries are known to be an important factor for students in their learning experience, and are useful for providing study space as well as the more traditional resources required for learning, such as books and journals. Library facilities are held in high importance by international students, with 89% placing them as being of importance in German HEIs. This was more often the case for non-EU students (90%) than EU students (86%). Libraries across the world can be of a highly varied calibre. For this reason,
it is important to manage expectations and provide information about the library facilities to students, preferably before their arrival. In general, libraries in German HEIs performed well according to student feedback, with an 84% satisfaction rate against the ISB average of 82%.

As the availability of books increases through specialised websites and cheaper international delivery, some would believe that the demand for an extensive stock of reading materials in the library would be lessened. However, some students found the libraries in German HEIs to be unsatisfactory in the quality and quantity of texts available and should strive for a broader coverage of subjects, especially in the English language for international students. As well as this, services in the library were occasionally found to be lacklustre.

Some textbooks are badly needed in the university library.  
(Student from China)

Support service of the library is poor. It is difficult to get full support especially if you do not speak German.  
(Student from Ethiopia)

The libraries are just great; their collection of books is just amazing.  
(Student from Italy)

While it is acknowledged that the course and institution is located in a non-English speaking country, the necessity for a thorough selection of course-related material in the English language remains. Non-German speaking students should of course be encouraged to learn the German language; however they should not be left at a disadvantage as a result of their lower German language level.

Library is poorly stocked in range (not enough English language books) and in number of key course books. Lacking access to online journal databases. Research in an English language course is severely hindered.  
(Student from Australia)

... my course is an international course and there are very few books in English and it becomes very difficult to get them. Also, English novels, magazines, journals would be a value-add to the library and would enhance one’s reading habits which is currently not available in the library.  
(Student from India)
Libraries can of course be expensive to run and maintain, often requiring large sums of investment and sponsorship to continually update their collection of material. There are some common issues which can be addressed easily even on a limited budget, such as opening times and separate areas such as quiet zones or group work zones. International students often place emphasis on the importance of having quiet, dedicated areas to study in the library or around their institution. The reasons for this can be numerous: often student housing can be very lively and unsuitable for concentration, and the library itself can often be a hive of activity. Furthermore, the city or town itself can be bustling and have little in the way of tranquil areas. Library opening times are another area which students often find problematic. Particularly around exam time, students appreciate the chance to use dedicated areas associated with the HEI for long stretches of study. For example, some universities employ a 24-hour study area for students in the weeks leading up to and during exam periods, which is welcomed by many. This provides an option for an organised area devoted to study, which reduces the distractions of studying at home and also provides an option for students that study more effectively at night rather than during the day.

When compared to satisfaction with the library facilities, the learning spaces did not fare as well according to international student opinion. Learning spaces can refer to classrooms and lecture theatres. German HEIs provide good learning services in general, with 78% of students satisfied with the learning spaces provided by the HEIs, which fell slightly below the ISB average of 84%. This means that German HEIs go against the usual ISB trend of having a higher level of international student satisfaction in learning spaces than library functions.

The worst part of this semester has been the quality of the learning space. We have a class, once a week in a dilapidated building, with an elevator that was built in 1958 (really, it says so).

(Student from South Africa)

... more learning spaces outside of the library are needed!

(Student from Austria)

I also like the fact that [the HEI] is situated in a quiet place with large lawns where one can read/learn without being distracted.

(Student from Kenya)
4.2. I.T. SUPPORT

Working one’s way around an unfamiliar HEI website can be frustrating, and it takes time for a student to become accustomed to the systems and accessibility at a new institution. For this reason, supporting students in the use of campus technological facilities and with online functions can be essential in the learning experience and in coming to terms with the way in which the HEI functions. Since important information is often sent electronically, it also means that important facts and notifications may be missed if problems with email or web connectivity persist. According to international student feedback, German HEIs perform well in terms of I.T. support. A lower-than-normal proportion of international students use the I.T. services (41% compared to the ISB average of 46%) and when called upon, the services of the I.T. department are of a highly satisfactory standard (90%), slightly higher than the ISB average of 88%.
4.3. EMAIL & INTERNET

One of the most important of all aspects in the ISB questionnaire according to students is the ability to connect to the internet and use email during their period of study. In fact, only 3% of students in Germany did not rate this as an important factor in their study experience. To many people, the ability to connect to the internet and communicate with others across the world is paramount in their daily lives, and this is of particular importance to international students who may be far from home and relatives. The ability to access information is of course a huge benefit to any student, directly assisting their studies and learning potential. Germany performs well in this respect, with generally solid provision of fast internet access. Despite several cases of poor service, the standard of internet service both on arrival and throughout the period of study is satisfactory (81% on arrival and 86% throughout period of study), comparable with the ISB average. Some of the individual open comments do point to improvements which could be made. The main theme of these comments concerned the limitations of the internet connection.

*Why I gave „very dissatisfied“ for internet access, is because there’s a limit how much you can use internet in the university-apartments. It should be non-limited or the limit should be higher, since one can’t watch films or TV-series a lot without using the limit full.*

(Student from Finland)

*Just one comment about internet access. Living by Studentenwerk gives a very good and cheap internet access which is a great benefit for students. Unfortunately other companies charge much more money, and the quality of internet connection is much lower.*

(Student from Kazakhstan)

*Having a cap on internet access is infuriating when trying to download (essential) academic materials.*

(Student from the United Kingdom)
4.4. **FLEXIBILITY (INCLUDING COURSE ADAPTABILITY, STRUCTURAL FLEXIBILITY, FEELING OF INTELLECTUAL FREEDOM OF CHOICE)**

Flexibility is fundamental in explaining the levels of satisfaction and enjoyment experienced by students during the course of study. Flexibility involves the choices which students have over what they choose and the number of restrictions placed upon them in their subject choice. It can involve the overall sense of freedom which a student experiences regarding their course and thus can be a general rather than specific issue. Despite having many positive aspects regarding study, Germany performs slightly under the ISB benchmark in this respect. Three-quarters of international students express contentedness with this aspect of the study, which is 5% below the ISB benchmark, and thus highlights room for improvement. It is important to highlight the significance of flexibility to international students, with 89% of international students describing it as being an important factor in their study, which is in line with the ISB benchmark.

The best thing for me doing a PhD [at an institution in Germany] than in an Indian university is the amount of flexibility in deciding what I want to do for my research and the attitude of the supervisors in guiding research students within their chose framework of study.  

(Student from India)

The availability of many research projects and the flexibility for the students to choose a project based on their interest are among the positive things in this program.  

(Student from Indonesia)

Flexibility in choosing courses was partially available. In the sense that in theory you can do it, but in practice it is binding due to the structure of the studies; you don’t know if you will get a fitting seminar next semester, colliding lectures and so on.  

(Student from Romania)

It is thus highlighted that in order for students to feel that the course is in some sense mouldable to their interests and not too fixed, they should be given an element of choice in what to study, with a general core of courses which include the foundations of the study material and lectures. This will provide a firm basis for learning, with the option to either specialise or take additional interest in other subject areas related to the key study.
4.5. ACADEMIC’S ENGLISH & LANGUAGE SUPPORT

International students studying in Germany place less importance than those studying elsewhere on these two lingual areas (the English spoken by academic staff and language support). With 67% of students placing importance on academic’s English and 68% on language support, this is lower than the ISB average of 87% and 74% respectively.

The language ability of teaching academics can be crucial to the learning experience; the ability of academic staff to speak English is essential for international courses offered in that language. If an academic cannot connect with students, or put across their knowledge effectively, the teaching can lose value. This was a considerable weakness overall in German HEIs; when compared to the ISB benchmark, students studying at German HEIs found that despite having good teachers and course content, the English spoken by academic staff left a lot to be desired. With a 79% satisfaction rating compared to the ISB’s 85%, this is certainly a point which should be addressed.

**Figure 13:** Academic’s English

![Bar chart showing percentage of students' satisfaction with academic’s English by country](image)
In terms of language support in general, Germany fares quite poorly. Whether in terms of support in learning English more proficiently, or indeed learning the German language, several remarks highlighted this point as a weakness, in accordance with the statistical data (German HEIs satisfaction rate 65% against ISB 79%). This is disappointing as many students highlight a keen interest in learning the German language and is certainly a problem which institutions should start to address.

At first I tried to follow courses in German language, to improve it, but it was too difficult because I was alone as a foreign student, so teachers did not pay attention to speak slowly. So I decided to turn all courses in English and now it is better! But it’s a pity for my German knowledge.

(Student from Italy)

I would like to have a more intensive German Language Course which will help me improve the language and have access to more literature in German language.

(Student from Kosovo)

Also, it is great opportunity to learn a new wonderful language (German).

(Student nationality not provided)

Some institutions have implemented a language buddy system at German HEIs, which involves asking domestic students to allot a few hours per week to conversing and teaching international students in English or German (or any other language in which they agree on). This provides the international student with a host contact, the domestic student with the opportunity to help others and boost their CV, and the chance for both to improve their language skills. It has already been out into practice in some German HEIs and provides a platform for social interaction and development.

4.6. PERFORMANCE FEEDBACK

International students studying in Germany indicate a strong desire to know how they are faring in their course. In fact, 81% see performance feedback as being an important aspect of their study experience. It can be difficult for teaching staff to know exactly what each student from each region of the world prefers as their form of feedback. Particularly, as some areas of the world are far less direct than others, especially when taking into consideration hierarchical relations between student and lecturer. This is apparent in classes where grades are based partially or fully upon class participation, and in which some international students feel less able to contribute frequently to class debate.
However, an effort should be made to address any fundamental points in a student’s academic study experience, and the idea of making students aware of how best to improve their level of learning is one aspect which is often overlooked by institutions across the world. For most international students, the aim of international study is to achieve a high standard of work whilst simultaneously experiencing a new culture. Due to this, students are often outside of their educational comfort zone, and may be less aware of what is expected of them than in their home country. As a result, it is important that students are made aware of what is expected of them, and what they can do to maximise their learning potential. Whether this is through examination or essay feedback, or more generally through one-to-one meetings with academics, the idea of this kind of support in study is associated with the feeling of satisfaction in a more general sense. After all, not knowing why a certain mark was given or confusion over a series of grades leads to unhappiness for a student, especially when large amounts of time have been spent on a particular topic. For this reason, HEIs in Germany should aim to provide more personal feedback to their international students where possible.

Looking at the results of the ISB, satisfaction with performance feedback is 5% behind the ISB average of 79%. Although this is not substantially below the ISB benchmark, it still points to a need for development in this field, as the average itself could be improved upon.

Along with careers advice and work experience, the demand for feedback is growing as students seek improved results in competitive labour markets. Thus, if German HEIs can set a high standard for performance feedback, they will produce more content international graduates.

In terms of the 'Feedback on coursework’, I would be satisfied were it not for the complete lack of any commenting on graded exams.

(Student from the United States of America)

Not very clear statement about how one is actually doing in the coursework, little to no feedback on current projects.

(Student from Australia)

[feedback] ... generally is very good, but: having feedback on some task only in the end of the semester is not good. Better to know your up-to-date scoring and feedback.

(Student from Russian Federation)

I think feedback is absolutely necessary in learning institutions such as universities.

(Student from Spain)
4.7. **Learning Infrastructure and Environment: Points and Actions to Consider**

- Libraries are generally positively reviewed; however some attention needs to be paid to the small number of English language textbooks in some institutions.

- More flexible opening hours and quiet zones within libraries are cost-effective changes which could enhance satisfaction.

- Learning spaces are limited in German HEIs, with a lack of suitable quiet areas for students in some areas. HEIs should aim to provide a range of different layout and designs of learning spaces to suit all students.

- The quality of English spoken by academic staff was highlighted as a weakness in terms of satisfaction, and is important in putting across the meaning of courses which are otherwise viewed positively. German HEIs may wish to consider carefully assessing the English level spoken by their teaching staff.

- In a similar vein, language support is limited with a reasonably high level of dissatisfaction being expressed. Students both trying to improve their German and English language skills may be impeded by poor language support.

- Students seek a more flexible course. Several commented upon a desire for electives or other programmes which they could involve with their basic programme, in order to gain a more specific idea of a subject, or to further knowledge of their existing subject.

- Students crave more extensive feedback on their subject performance, with the notion of improving their understanding of results and in order to be aware of any progress made.
4.8. Case study

What constitutes the success of the Learning Infrastructure at the University of Göttingen?

The Georg-August-University Göttingen outperforms the German ISB benchmark when it comes to learning spaces and scores highly within the D-ISB 2009/10 for the overall question relating to learning satisfaction at the institution. What creates the success at this university?

To start with, the University of Göttingen is among the highest ranking research universities (within the top 50 universities in the world in the THE Ranking 2010) and one of the nine German universities of excellence. Göttingen is strongly committed to internationalisation and cooperation with equivalent partner institutions of international standing, appreciating cross-boundary research and study as an opportunity to maintain and enhance its current achievements. It is a high priority objective of scholars and staff at Göttingen to allow students to benefit from these strengths. One way to achieve this common purpose is a comprehensive strategy of research based learning, closely connecting theoretical insight, professional application and a spirit of enterprise and innovation. To this end, cutting-edge technology and equipment are available to students as well as young researchers at Göttingen. Göttingen’s good teachers – both German and increasingly from abroad – are conveying state of the art course content to highly qualified students from 120 countries all across the world.

Göttingen attaches great importance to the academic success and personal growth of its international students. A culture of performance feedback has over the recent years become a standard procedure to achieve this. Assessments are customised to suit the situation of international students wherever appropriate, being only one example of the institutional flexibility which benefits international students. Learning support within faculties, e.g. by way of tutorials, as well as by ‘learning partnerships’ of German and international students, academic writing workshops and general or specialised language courses are also highly developed at Göttingen. Many international students, especially those in an advanced stage of their education, are also enjoying the opportunities to teach or gather other professional experience within the framework of Göttingen University.
Infrastructure for study and research is well developed. Göttingen has one of the best European scientific libraries, and plenty of learning and working spaces in the faculties and research institutions. International students receive intensive organisational and personal support from both the internationalisation officers at faculty level, Göttingen’s international services at university level, and also from the dedicated team members of the International Students Services department. Most international programmes are managed by a coordinator, serving as an on-site safeguard for quality. Moreover, faculties receive organisational and conceptual assistance from the Office of Academic Program Development, ensuring uniform structures and standards in international academic programmes.

Most of Göttingen’s PhD-Programmes are integrated in three graduate schools and are conducted in close cooperation with the non-university research institutions (namely 5 Max Planck Institutes, the German Primate Centre and the German Aerospace Centre), serving as a platform for mutual intellectual stimulation, networking and preparation for future academic careers.
**Case study**

**What makes living and studying at the Westfälische Wilhelms University in Münster such a good experience?**

The University of Münster outperforms the German ISB benchmark when it comes to a ‘good place to be’, ranking Münster as the number one in Germany and the 4th internationally according to its international students in the D-ISB 2009/10. Why is the Westfälische Wilhelms University Münster so highly rated?

The WWU Münster is the 5th largest university in Germany, with 36,000 students, over 40 international programmes, five English-taught Master programmes and 2,500 international students from 125 countries. For WWU Münster, internationalisation is a key concern; however it is one that can be overcome when constant quality control is maintained. For the WWU Münster, this was an important reason to take part in the ISB. In the area of learning elements, the International Student Barometer™ results show a high satisfaction at WWU Münster with the expert knowledge of the teachers, the library and the technical support. When it comes to the survey questions related to living in Münster, WWU scores especially well in being ‘a good place to be.’ Safety, the sport facilities, and traffic links are all areas that together enhance the feeling of positive well-being. For the city of Münster, it is not unusual to score high when it comes to living in the city; they have won the award for bicycle city of the year 3 times, the LivCom award (2004) for best city to live in and Germany’s Climate Protection (Bundeshaupstadt Klimaschutz) award in 2006.

It helps that the university and the city of Münster are tightly integrated; university buildings are spread over the city and the connection between the university community and the city is practical. Cultural life is strongly developed with 9 choirs, 7 orchestras and 2 theatres. Moreover, a lot of cultural and sport events are organised – some of which are exclusive to students – such as the annual Leonardo-Campus-Run in which teams of local business and students are put together. The strong integration of the academic community into the city makes it easy for international students to become a part of the city and student life in Münster. The small scale of the city, the beautiful surroundings and the lively atmosphere contribute to this feeling even more.

Right from the start, the international students are welcomed to Münster and the WWU by representatives of the city and the university. The International Office’s welcome and support teams for international (exchange) students regularly organise tours of the city and the region for newcomers to
the university, so that they may become familiar with their new surroundings. International students can participate in a Friendship programme, in which contacts between international students and citizens of Münster are facilitated, meetings and events organised and support provided for the participants.

The WWU takes part in the Programme ‘Europa macht Schule’, a project to promote inter-European understanding. International students from European countries act as ambassadors in local schools and carry out projects of their own choosing with pupils – always supported by a teacher and a student team in the International Office.

‘Die Brücke’, the International Centre of the WWU and part of the International Office, is the central meeting place of international students; it provides rooms for international student clubs and societies, ensures that books and newspapers are available in various languages and hosts social and cultural events.

For more advanced students and alumni, ‘Die Brücke’, together with the city of Münster, regularly holds the international fair CONNECTA, where internationally active businesses present themselves and where workshops on application methods are offered as well as information on work perspectives in other countries; this information is partly provided by alumni of the WWU who moved to other countries or returned to their home countries after graduation and who return for the fair as guests of the university and city to support the new students and alumni.
This chapter looks at the level of support and learning which international students feel they receive during their studies in Germany. It also tracks the quality of teaching and the level of knowledge these students believe their academics to have. These factors, combined with learning support, course content, research, and assessment and feedback, form a solid basis for understanding where weaknesses and strengths lie, and an opportunity to enhance academic performance. Good teaching and fair assessment are arguably the most important factors in education, whilst research activity is a very important feature in attracting international students.

5.1. Assessment & Feedback

International students need adequate assessment in order to know how well they have learned their subject and to gauge how well they are performing. A poorly constructed testing system removes a fundamental part of the educational system, one which reflects upon the student, teacher and their development. Without thorough and reliable test methods, it is difficult to gauge how well developed the understanding of a subject the student has. Assessment and feedback go hand in hand in providing a strong system of learning and progress, and in this area Germany fares poorly against the ISB benchmark.

With importance being placed on fair and transparent assessment by 91% of international students in Germany, it is clearly a factor which should be monitored, if only to satisfy the requirements which international students set out. Unfortunately, of this 91% of international students, only 80% found the level of assessment to be satisfactory, resulting in a deficit between importance and satisfaction. Compared to the ISB benchmark, Germany comes in 3% behind the average in terms of satisfaction levels, a weakness which should be regarded as serious by German HEIs. International students expect increasing transparency in their assessment and want to know how well they have performed at all stages of their study where possible. This is exemplified by the importance placed upon performance feedback in the ISB; international students placed an 83% importance rating upon this factor. Unfortunately, only 74% were satisfied with the performance feedback they received.
Of course, factors such as assessment and feedback very much depend on the individual experience of each student, with opinions often only forming after acute experiences. German HEIs appear to be satisfactory although comments arise over the frequency of testing and assessment. The assessment is strict thus making our future degrees compatible in the market.

(Student from Georgia)

No assessment during the semester. The grades depend on the final exam which is about 60-90mins. This is quite demanding for Indian / Asian students who are used to 120-180mins exam.

(Student from India)

For some subjects there is only one assessment i.e. at the end of semester period. This is not good because students do not know their ability or achievement level before the final exam. Assessment should be carried out 2 or 3 times. And if possible, assignments should be given throughout the period of study.

(Student from Malaysia)

Nations which are successful in this area of education often find that a flexible approach to assessment and feedback is most beneficial to all concerned. If students from a particular faculty prefer to have more or less frequent assessment or receive more in-depth feedback, then this can be considered and implemented if appropriate. Such flexibility allows a more positive student-institute rapport to be built.

5.2. LEARNING SUPPORT

International students require support in their studies from their HEIs. The reasons for this are numerous; they are coming from another country which may have an altogether different attitude towards study or courses, may have alternative forms of teaching, or have different ideas of standard class times and course structure. These factors can influence the feeling of support which an international student has. Understandably, the importance of learning support is rated highly (at 87%), and as could be expected, EU students (84%) were less likely to feel the importance of this aspect, when compared to non-EU students (89%). Predictably, doctoral students were the most reliant upon support (at 91%), when compared to undergraduates (86%). In terms of satisfaction, the results do not meet the requirements of international students; the average satisfaction with learning support being 73%, (14% behind the importance rating). Despite their difference
in importance levels, EU and non-EU international students showed no significant difference in terms of satisfaction. Whilst doctoral students felt least satisfaction at 71%, undergraduates were happier at 79% and master students at 77%. The doctoral level result highlights a problem which should be addressed, as doctoral students writing or researching important topics can feel large amounts of pressure, which may be eased somewhat through greater support from their institution.

I find all of the professors to be extremely accommodating in regards to content and they are very supportive when I do not understand something in German. This is very encouraging for a foreigner.  
(Student from Canada)

University Education standards are good and also very supportive in selecting courses of our choice.  
(Student from India)

The support systems (besides academic needs) are also good.  
(Nationality given as ‘Other’)

5.3. RESEARCH

Research can be a crucial part of the choice for international students when considering their options in studying abroad. An HEI with a solid reputation for research will always attract international students from far afield, in order to get the chance to contribute to its history of discovery. An HEI with a reputation for high quality research typically points to a well-funded and well-run educational institute, thus again highlighting the importance of research in attracting high quality international students.

Often depending on their subject choice and level of study, the level of research activity can prove to be either fundamental or indeed of lesser importance to a student. For example, 79% of students in their undergraduate years found research activity to be important; despite this apparent high number, when compared to master level (86%) or doctoral study (96%), this is comparably low. This highlights the continuing importance of research as a student progresses from supervised and supported study, through to more independent and in-depth courses and writing as they develop academically. Furthermore, the higher levels of study are of course more academically demanding, and often include undertaking large pieces of writing and research. Students from outside the EU also found the level of research activity more important (87%) than those from within (77%).
The University is very good and a lot of research scope in the university helps students to broaden their mind.
(Student from Pakistan)

It is a great experience to carry out cutting-edge research in this University.
(Student from the Russian Federation)

(When asked why they would recommend their institution) Due to the high quality and efficiency of teaching and research.
(Student from Syrian Arab Republic)

I would like to encourage others due to the educational and research facilities and the support given by the institution towards foreign students
(Student from Bangladesh)

After establishing that to most students research activity is important, we can look at how satisfied international students are with this factor in Germany, and how well this compares to the ISB benchmark. Overall, 84% of international students are satisfied with the research activity in German HEIs, which is more or less in line with ISB benchmark at 85%. Of the study level subgroups previously discussed, those studying at doctoral level were the most satisfied with research (89%). Undergraduates were the least satisfied at 81% (but also placed the least importance at 79%) concerning research satisfaction. Despite a slight deficit between importance and satisfaction ratings, German HEIs are doing a good job of keeping their students satisfied in this respect, particularly those studying at doctoral or postgraduate level.

5.4. Expert Lecturers & Good Teachers

It is generally accepted that the quality of teaching at an institution is crucial to the education received by international students. If an HEI is known to have poor lecturers or have a severe lack of renowned teachers, then it will have problems attracting serious students. Those looking for the best education will naturally look to HEIs with a reputation for a high standard of teaching to satisfy their needs. The ISB captures importance and satisfaction ratings for the subject area expertise of lecturers/supervisors which refers to the knowledge held by teachers, and can also include how renowned they are, and their frequency and input to the field, depending on the student’s interpretation. The use of the term ‘good teachers’ refers to the ISB statement the teaching ability of lecturers/supervisors, and entails a more fundamental idea; one which reflects the ability of the teacher to transfer their knowledge to the international student effectively.
The importance of these criteria is reflected in the ratings of importance they are given by international students. By highlighting a 96% importance level rating, it is clear that only a small percentage do not see these factors as important. Thus, if an HEI performs poorly in this area, it may struggle to attract future international students. The satisfaction results depict mixed satisfaction levels in Germany; on the one hand, international students seem very satisfied with the standard in expert lecturers (92%); however they are not so enthused over the level of teaching ability (81%). Thus, we can assume that in the opinion of the international students studying in Germany, academic staff are perceived as experts or are capable of publishing relevant work in the field, but may, however, lack the ability to project this knowledge effectively to their international students.
The teachers and supporting-service staff are very kind and professional. Good teaching quality.  
(Student from China)

One note, when I listen to an American lecturer, I feel that American teachers are far better than the German ones. They try to convey the spirit of the subject, the develop intuition, and deep understanding, their lectures are lively. Many German lecturers and professors just convey mere information and bare knowledge. Maybe this is because they don’t lecture in their native language, maybe!  
(Student from Egypt)

I noticed a very big difference in the lecturers’ abilities. Some are very professional and knowledgeable about the subjects they teach, but on the other hand others are just really bad teachers.  
(Student from Lebanon)

Compared to the ISB benchmark, Germany is around the average for expert lecturers and teaching ability. With the satisfaction in the expertise of the lecturers at 92% satisfaction rate (-1% on ISB) and satisfaction with teaching ability of lecturers at 81% (-3%), there is certainly room for improvement. Furthermore, evidence points to the deficit between importance and satisfaction for international students, which for both is quite noticeable. To reduce this deficit, refresher teaching courses and organised ‘best practice’ meetings could be utilised.
5.5. COURSE CONTENT

For an international student, a course which is interesting and contains relevant academic information forms a large part of the feeling of how much of a success their experience in Germany was. If they follow a course which fails to inspire them through a lack of quality educational learning, they are much more likely to rate the HEI poorly, and may view their experience studying in Germany more negatively. There are several factors which can affect the feeling of whether a course is as rewarding and fulfilling as it should be. The level which students feel they can gain an understanding of their preferred subject is paramount to this. Factors which influence this aspect of a study can include the opportunity to be guided in the use of literature, repetition of subject topics, how interestingly a topic is set out, the theories taught, the style of classes or seminars and group work.

The academic content of the course is understandably rated as being important by 96% of international students. Little difference was seen in this level of importance across nationality, level of study, period of study and institution type, highlighting the universal significance of this area of education. The level of satisfaction was substantially below this, with 83% of international students indicating satisfaction, compared to the ISB benchmark of 87%. Although not immediately alarming, this is an area which German HEIs should look to improve in order to compete with other nations. In combination with an average standard of experts and teachers, a slightly below average course content highlights an overall need for improvement across the board. Below are some open comments which highlight the differing opinions of several international students.

"The environment is lovely and the courses offered in this university are quite interesting but as well challenging." (Student from Nigeria)

"The course content in this semester is very poor." (Student from Estonia)

"The courses I chose were too easy or too difficult and did not fit very well in my previous studies. More information of the course content would have been nice." (Student from Finland)

"I think it can be better if the course contents are selected based on the feedback of the students." (Student from India)
5.6. **Teaching Quality and Learning Support: Points and Actions to Consider**

- Manage the expectations of students before arrival, to prepare them for the types and frequency of assessment which they will undergo and the extent of feedback which they can expect to receive. If highlighted as a real issue, consider altering where feasible.

- Learning support could be improved for international students, particularly for those studying at high levels.

- German HEIs should aim to improve their research capabilities. Even though it was given much importance and attention, it failed to match international student satisfaction.

- The standard and effectiveness of teaching appears to be lower than the expectations of international students, despite a high number of those students stating that they felt their lecturers were experts in the field.

- Course content could use improvement, especially when coupled with the idea that teaching standards are below average.
5.7. Case study

What makes teaching and learning support such a valued experience for international students at the University of Kaiserslautern?

The University of Kaiserslautern is a modern research-oriented university with a technological profile. In the International Student Barometer™ the University of Kaiserslautern outperforms the German benchmark when the international students are asked to rate their overall satisfaction with the learning experience. Moreover, the University of Kaiserslautern scores a number one ranking in both the German ISB as well as the international ISB benchmark for the teaching ability of their lecturers. What constitutes this success in the area of learning and learning support?

In the entire area of teaching, the University of Kaiserslautern proves to be successful. The course contents, assessment and learning support in this university were highly ranked in the ISB survey. When we look into more detail we can note that the university offers a favourable student-teacher ratio, guaranteeing high-class supervision and an increased level of employability, by communicating frequently with academics. This institution aims to offer education to every person willing to study, without preferential treatment to the best students. Students are considered as partners and are stimulated to continuously develop their ‘innovation engines’ with lots of creativity. To achieve this, a minimum level of bureaucracy and hurdles is essential. Students and faculties are thus given a lot of freedom for experimentation with their policies and teaching schemes, a flexible process that requires responsibility and a high level of transparency.

For the University of Kaiserslautern, internationalisation is a key aspect and for the past five years they have taken strategical decisions to implement this objective. The establishment of the International School of Graduate Studies (ISGS, www.uni-kl.de/isgs) as a central, interdisciplinary infrastructure to support foreign graduate and doctoral students has been recognised as a landmark decision in the ISB study. International students are extremely satisfied with the help offered regarding career planning, something which is gaining increasing importance for graduates and young scientists.
The University of Kaiserslautern was graded excellent in its holistic concept, established by the ISGS, in a DAAD survey to evaluate the current status and measures taken by the Higher Education Institutions to increase their internationalisation. The ISGS serves as a university-wide cross-faculty structure to support internationalisation and coordinates activities and programmes at the graduate level. The special fields of services are:

- Correspondence relating to application, admission and grants
- Pre-departure communication with applicants and candidates
- Reception and welcome on arrival in the city
- Support in administrative & organisational issues, help in visa and residence permit issues
- Organisation of accommodation (on and off campus)
- Social tutoring and provision of non-academic assistance
- Cultural programmes & events
- Intensive German language & integration courses
- Career Service & help to establish contacts to departments, institutions, industry, etc.

Besides the service and support aspects, the main highlight among international students at the University of Kaiserslautern is the feeling of ‘being at home’. With all the personal attention and support from the University and the ISGS, the graduates consider themselves a part of the family.
It is a basic requirement for a student to have adequate funding in order to be able to purchase the required study materials, food supplies and transport to their HEI. Without proper funding, the students’ academic performance can suffer, as well as their international experience as a whole. The purpose of this chapter is to assess the various methods in which international students support themselves financially or are supported by others for the duration of their study. It looks in detail at how and how well German HEIs assist students with financial matters through funding and support, how international students use the financial support offered to them, and their overall satisfaction with financial matters during their period of study.

**Figure 15:** Financial Support v. Unimportant – v. Important
6.1. FUNDING

The majority of international students depend on some form of external funding to support their studies. Whether this is through family, a governmental institution, employer, or some form of loan, most find a necessity to secure before arrival a flow of finance which will suffice for their period of study. Without sufficient funding, the entire experience can be diminished; students may not be able to properly socialise and integrate, purchase the required reading materials, or maintain the standard of living that they prefer during their studies. Funding for most international students studying at German HEIs comes from family (49%), own funds (36%), employer (16%), loan (9%) or some form of scholarship (26%). The remaining few percent were made up of ‘Other’ and Charity funds. There were no noticeable discrepancies between EU and non-EU students regarding methods of funding.

![Figure 16: Financial Support v. Dissatisfied – v. Satisfied](image)

6.2. FINANCES ON ARRIVAL

Setting up a bank account and receiving support from the finance office are two of the main factors which international students face during the initial phase of settling into their place of study. Problems with bureaucracy can restrict the process, which can prove frustrating and time consuming for international students. Not knowing the requirements to set up an account in the country of study is a fundamental aspect of this, which can delay the process for weeks in some cases. For this reason, it is necessary
Fees, Finance and Funding

for an HEI to provide accurate, up-to-date information concerning the rules and regulations of international students setting up an account in Germany, for several banks if possible. In the ISB, Germany is sufficient in this respect as satisfaction with the finance office sits at 79%, which is on par with the ISB average. The only groups of international students which found the level of support to be less satisfactory was the Northern Africans (51%) and Southern Africans (67%). The top performer in finance offices are Belgian institutions, with a very respectable 94% satisfaction rate in combination with the highest usage rate (73%).

… everything was done efficiently for me except the opening of bank account. It should be done more efficiently.

(Student from India)

One week to have a bank account opened is too long. The bank account is needed for buying health insurance, and then academic registration.

(Student from Vietnam)

Some HEIs around the world use the buddy system of volunteer students to provide advice and guidance around such areas as opening bank accounts and organising financial matters. However, some of these tasks are above what can be expected from a volunteering domestic student. Thus, the impetus should still lie with the institution in organising a well-informed and accessible service providing real value for its international students.

Closer links to banks and more information on how to open an account could be provided; including events and information sessions, and pre-arrival information on any frequently occurring problems. Banks and insurance companies could be invited to these sessions, allowing for one-to-one meetings and provision of expert advice. In combination with the past experiences of international students, the institution could thus pinpoint and overcome common pitfalls and standard bureaucracy, which often prove frustrating and inefficient.

6.3. COST OF LIVING

The cost of living is very important to international students. 97% of them stated so across the German ISB, which matched the ISB average. However, on average only 73% of international students were satisfied with the actual cost of living in Germany. The least satisfied international students came from the sub-regions of Northern Africa (56%), Middle Africa (53%)
and Polynesia (50%). This large deficit should be the point of focus for HEIs looking to assist their international students in funds management. On a positive note, despite the gap between importance and satisfaction, Germany fared well against the ISB average, which was only 61% satisfaction. Since studying in Germany is not for free at all universities and all programmes, international students should be informed if they have to pay tuition fees. Even if regular tuition fees are comparably low (between 200 and 500 Euro) this can be very important for arriving students.

In order to reduce the gap between satisfaction and importance, there must be more emphasis placed upon expectation management. Of course, lowering the cost of daily living in Germany is not something an institution can do itself, but once an HEI is aware of the importance placed on this factor, it is important that they inform prospective students before arrival of the costs they can expect to incur in their daily lives. For example, a cost of living and financial advice guide can easily be placed upon the university website and in information sent to new students pre-arrival. This will result in a more complete understanding for international students in terms of the costs they can expect, and how to manage their finances.

The cost of living is for many international students one of the major factors to take into consideration when deciding to study abroad. It affects the quality of life a student can have and the standard of commodities which they can utilise. Whether this is in a country which is known to be more expensive on average, or one known for its cheaper price of goods
and commodities, the ISB average importance rating for cost of living is very high at 97%. Such a high figure emphasises that international students see their finances as an important aspect of their study experience. Variation between students from different regions of the world was noticeable in some instances. For example, students from the Caribbean region placed least importance upon this factor (83%) whilst all students from Australia and New Zealand found the cost of living to be an important aspect. Interestingly, students from the Caribbean were most satisfied with the cost (91%), whilst only 80% of students from Australia and New Zealand indicated that they were satisfied. The least satisfied international students came from the sub-regions of Northern Africa (56%) and Middle Africa (53%).

After establishing the undoubted importance of the cost of living to international students, we can see that overall, the cost of living in Germany was rated as high for quite a large percentage, with just 73% stating that they were satisfied. The remaining 27% found problems with the amount of money they needed during the period of study. This should highlight the cost of living as a point of focus for HEIs looking to assist their international students in funds management.

*Everything costs twice as much in Europe and I knew that before I came. But with my accommodation I find I am not getting good value for money. I have to pay more to catch the U-Bahn out to my Wohnheim and pay more than ERASMUS students that found accommodation on their own.*

(Student from Australia)

*… the people around here are really friendly… the college facilities are extraordinary … the only thing I worry about as a student is the cost of living … apart from that there is nothing else.*

(Student from India)

*I think that the university staff and programs they offer are at the same competitive level as some similar programs in the USA. As well as the tuition cost and cost of living, its 10x better here than in the USA.*

(Student from USA)

*Cost of living is extremely high, which coupled with school fees makes student life in general unbearable.*

(Student from Cameroon)

Undergraduates, master students and doctoral students all placed very similar levels of importance upon the cost of living. However, there were noticeable discrepancies between their satisfaction levels. Apparently,
the higher the level of study, the more satisfied the international student feels regarding cost of living in Germany. At 70% satisfied, undergraduates were markedly more dissatisfied with cost compared with the master (77%) and doctoral students (80%). This difference across the levels of study could be due to numerous possible reasons e.g. a more studious approach, variation in lifestyle, less free time for higher level students, previous study abroad experience, age, and the international student's previous standard of living.

The most important advice to be taken to combat dissatisfaction related to living costs is concerning expectation management. International students should be made aware well in advance of arrival of the normal costs associated with living in Germany for their study. This allows them to accurately plan their finances, and allow for unexpected costs which may arise during the course of the study period. An index of key shopping items, common transport options, social insurance, healthcare, and education and book costs are a fine place to start. Such an index prepares a student to manage their micro as well as macro finances. Providing helpful money management tips to international students before arrival could also greatly improve their financial well-being in the long run. Furthermore, an HEI could look to use social media as a store of useful information for the international student. Forums used by previous students and social networking pages allow students to discuss options before and during their study experience, which can introduce alternative methods of money saving and money management which may have otherwise been overlooked.

6.4. EARNING MONEY

Earning money while studying can make up a significant proportion of income for some international students when funding their studies abroad. Although it should not be the case, some may depend on the ability to work part time just to get by. As a result of this, there is quite high importance placed upon opportunities to earn money as a factor in studying in Germany. 84% of international students regard it as being important, with African students finding it the most important of the continent groups. Those from outside the EU found earning money whilst studying slightly more important than those from within the EU (86% and 81% respectively). Although this is not a particularly large difference, the satisfaction levels between the two were more noticeable, with non-EU international satisfaction at 53% and EU student satisfaction at 62%.
Since I am not from a very strong economic background and funding my education from my own funds, I would like to have an opportunity to earn some money to provide for myself during my course of study. I have not found any opportunities for that as yet.

(Student from India)

I like the university but students with their own funds may find it difficult to survive because there are fewer opportunities to earn money as a part-timer.

(Student from Pakistan)

To overcome this dissatisfaction, again emphasis should be placed upon expectation management. International students should be made aware that in most towns and cities in Germany, part-time work for temporary internationals is not always easy to come by. If an international student is reliant upon part-timer work to fund their living costs in Germany, then there is a chance that this may well lead to problems later in the academic year when initial funds have dwindled.
6.5. **FEES, FINANCE AND FUNDING: POINTS AND ACTIONS TO CONSIDER**

- The most fundamental aspect which can be applied across the board in this chapter is expectation management for international students.

- This stretches across almost all aspects, from accommodation costs, to general living costs, to opportunities for part time work.

- Despite 97% of students stating that it was important, only 73% were satisfied with the cost of living. Students should thus be thoroughly advised over what costs to expect when living in Germany.

- This can also be helped through means of social media, internet forums and information packs sent out prior to the international students’ arrival.

- The opportunity to earn money part-time while studying is seen as important to students. Students should be advised pre-arrival that finding such work may be challenging and they should not rely upon part-time work.
Financial support is a crucial service for international students. The German HEIs’ performance in this area has not been as good as it should. Therefore, we have looked beyond the national boundaries of Germany and use an example from an ISB partner institution from another country. Here is an example of how financial support services could be improved.

The Higher Education Institution in this case study has more than 1,000 international students from over 70 countries outside of the European Union. It has a longstanding policy of integrating into the International Office all essential functions and services for international students: marketing, recruitment, applications, admission, pre-arrival, accommodation, visas, induction, finance, study skills support, social programme, medical and welfare.

The HEI in this case study encourages regular contact between students and International Office staff. Personal finance and support is very important and the International Office has a Finance Officer who assists in all activities.

Services offered include:
- information and advice on academic fees and living costs
- convenient arrangements for payment of fees (bankers draft, bank transfer) including advance fee payments and payments by instalments
- tracking of financial information
- government/ministry-sponsored students do not deal personally with fees
- supply of official letters and advice, to enable students to open national bank accounts
- free airport welcome service including escorted bus transfer and personal taxis arranging university and private accommodation
- promoting online the International Student Calculator for management of personal finances
- subsidising international social events (e.g. parties and receptions) and trips.
International Student societies are also given sponsorship to host national, cultural and religious events, offer immediate assistance when students encounter financial problems, and offer financial support during difficulties.

These policies of the International Office have the support of the Vice-Chancellor – such senior support does help. As a consequence, the HEI consistently scores highly in the International Student Barometer™ satisfaction survey, next to having a low student dropout rate, a high success rate and a good ‘word of mouth’ reputation internationally. This encourages a consistently high and increasing international student enrolment.
There are numerous reasons why international students may decide to study abroad. International study can help in improving students’ language skills, gain experience of a new culture and develop their career opportunities in another country. For these reasons, it is important to most international students that at the end of their study, they leave their German institution with an improved sense of global culture, that they have experienced something new academically, and that they have an improved standing in the global labour market. Due to this, it is important for German HEIs to maintain a good standard of support for their students in terms of employability and career opportunities. Furthermore, those who have studied abroad often have a more global perspective, and thus feel the need to have a more rounded and accomplished sense of employability when looking to find work post-study. Through looking at several aspects, including careers service, careers advice, work experience, and employability, this chapter will assess the ability of German HEIs in providing a satisfactory service. ISB data confirms that all of these aspects are rated as being important to international students, thus the ability of institutions to fulfil such criteria should be assessed.

**Figure 19:** Careers Satisfaction by Institution Type
7.1. CAREERS ADVICE

When considering where to study, international students are looking increasingly to institutions which will assist them in their future career as well as their academic achievements. International students use careers advice and guidance from academic staff to inform thinking about their future, and thus without correct guidance can feel slightly lost in a quickly changing and competitive labour market. Advice and guidance on long-term job opportunities and careers from academic staff can involve the assistance a student may need when considering employment opportunities related to their field of study, and may also consist of opportunities to train and be educated in how to promote oneself when entering a crowded system of employment opportunities.

Evidence of this can be seen in data from the ISB, which highlights an importance rate of 81% with regards to careers advice provided by academic staff. International students from most regions of the world value this factor highly, although those from Australia and New Zealand (62%), Northern Europe (67%) and Western Europe (65%) were the least concerned. The highest levels of importance mostly came from students outside of the Westernised countries, with the exception of North America, which saw middling importance at 71%. There was a surprisingly level result in the field of importance with respect to level of study, with Undergraduates (80%), Master students (83%) at Doctoral students (78%) all showing similar results. It is unsurprising to see Master students placing the highest level of importance, as Doctoral students may feel more directed in their career path and undergraduates are not always so forward thinking or are as yet undecided over their future careers.

Unfortunately, the satisfaction level does not match up to the importance level. Just over half (55%) of international students studying at an HEI in Germany feel satisfied with the advice and guidance provided by academic staff. Of the groups discussed above, Doctoral students were the most satisfied (64%), perhaps highlighting their decreased importance placed on this aspect. Master and Doctoral students were both between 5-10% less satisfied than Doctoral students. Concerning the regions previously mentioned, little can be taken from the aspect of geographic location. However, the African continent as a whole averaged a stronger satisfaction rate than most others.

“… we need more guidance in job seeking/career planning. As a foreign student we also need more information on visa policy and working regarding EU policies which helps us to decide whether to pursue a research career here, or simply to find a job here, or if we’d better off finding a job in our home country.”

(Student from China)
7.2. CAREERS SERVICE

Careers Advisory Services are a comparatively new aspect of the higher educational service, but have grown to be one of the most important to many students. Activities of the Careers Service can include the organisation of careers events, promotion of such events, and the availability of general information regarding careers, workshops, seminars, and all other forms of career advice which are now seen as a standard form of education from an HEI. Usage of the careers service in Germany is only 5% by international students, pointing to either a lack of enthusiasm on the part of the students (which somewhat contradicts the importance aspect in the previous subsection) or a lack of awareness of the careers service itself. It could also be argued that German degree courses are traditionally more closely linked to careers than other nations such as the United Kingdom, where courses are not always easily matched to a career path. For this reason, students may feel that they do not require the career services, as their course already guides them in the direction of a career path. Despite this low usage percentage, when utilised, careers services highlight a reasonably good standard of assistance, with a 77% satisfaction rate amongst international students.

The focus should thus be upon the promotion of the careers service as a useful tool for student development, regardless of whether they have a set career plan already in mind. However, if a student is unaware of a service, it does not matter whether it is effective or not. Thus, if an HEI is providing this important service (sometimes at a considerable cost) then it should be made widely known, so that its services can be utilised and
students can feel the benefit of its expertise. Providing the service is of reasonable quality (the 77% satisfaction rate suggesting so), then it will improve the international student’s overall impression of the HEI, and will increase the likelihood of successfully negotiating a career path.

... the faculty is extremely helpful in building your career in your choice of education. (Student from India)

... the career-orientation is not clear, which always makes students confused after their study, so the advice and guidance in this aspect should be reinforced. (Student from China)

I was asking some people in the international centre and other in my department of studies about the possibilities of long-term job and careers as well as work experiences and work placements for the term after the completion of my studies. Nobody was able to provide me with clear answers. (Student from France)

7.3. WORK EXPERIENCE

Work experience has become a fundamental aspect of studying abroad for many international students. The effect which relevant work experience can have upon a CV in today’s market is huge. Nowadays, students with high-level results and a strong motivation are commonplace in the competitive markets. Therefore there is the need to bolster the CV with a strong augmentation of work-related experience. Such experience can take several forms: internships, apprenticeships, part-time work and teaching assistance are all common interpretations of modern work experience, offering a diverse spectrum of opportunities for international students. Furthermore, it is a chance for many students to experience the working life before entering it fully, thus giving an idea of which kind of company or field they would most enjoy working in.

For these reasons, the importance placed upon work experience by international students was high at 86%. Doctoral students were the only study level to rate work experience below 85% importance, probably due to their advanced study stage, in which they may already have undertaken work experience, may be presently undertaking work experience, or have other plans afoot. International students from non-EU countries placed a higher level of importance upon work experience than those from EU countries (88% vs. 81%).

Some help and advice in work experience/work placements would be appreciable. (Student from Hong Kong)
The opportunities for work experience as part of their studies was a less satisfactory aspect for international students when compared to their importance levels; only 63% stated that they were satisfied in the ISB results. The difference in satisfaction was less noticeable between non-EU and EU internationals (62% and 65% satisfied) as compared to their difference in importance levels. Master level students were least impressed with the work experience opportunities available to them, with only 61% satisfied. At such a crucial point in their academic to working lives, this is an area which is in need of careful revision.

7.4. GOOD CONTACTS

How well an HEI in Germany connects their students with potential employers, alumni, or peers in their field, is a key issue for the majority of students in the international student market. Whether this be in social or business terms, travelling abroad to study highlights the openness which one feels to learning about a new culture, perhaps taking in a new language, and the willingness to meet new people in a different environment. When entering the job market, good contacts can prove to be fundamental in not only finding suitable openings, but in acquiring a position. Students are increasingly aware that a person with connections to a field or particular business can quickly establish deeper contact at the time of their leaving, and even before they leave in many cases. With such a vast array of competition across many graduate markets, students see any potential edge over the competition as a necessity.

In understanding this, it is not surprising why international students place a 93% importance rating on making good contacts for the future. Whether a student was EU or non-EU made almost no difference, while the level of study was also insignificant for students in affecting the level of importance. Indeed it can be said that this aspect was important to all groups covered in the ISB to largely the same high level.

“Making good contacts for the future is only possible because of internet access and transportation; that is why sometimes I am very satisfied in a basic sense ... They did, as much as they can, but they can do more. (Student from Egypt)

Satisfaction levels gave a slight variation in results however; overall only 68% of students are satisfied with the contacts they were able to make. Non-EU students (66%) were substantially less satisfied than EU students (73%) with making good contacts for the future, indicating perhaps institutions need to do more to connect non-EU students with potential employers, peers or alumni who may be able to support their future career.
7.5. EMPLOYABILITY

The need to graduate as employable goes hand in hand with the previous topics in this chapter. Students require the experience and advice to progress their career development, and this is something which many students expect from their HEI. Career advice both as a formal service and delivered as part of the course is something which institutions are increasingly pressured into acknowledging not only from students but indirectly from employers, as the standard of students leaving particular institutions does not go unnoticed year on year. Without the proper skills to exploit opportunities in the labour market, international students can feel left behind. This may be particularly likely when students decide to stay in Germany for a period of work post-study.

The term employability (asked as ‘learning that will help me to get a good job’ in the ISB questionnaire) can include a variation of soft skills which are useful in the job-hunting market. Attributes such as interview techniques, a well constructed CV and presentation skills are now widely accepted as being essential and expected from recent graduates. In recent years students have seen a large benefit in learning such skills, as the labour market becomes increasingly competitive.

Importance rates for employability are understandably high when looking at data from the ISB. With 89% of students stating that ‘learning that will help me to get a good job’ as important, it is viewed as being even more important than career advice and work experience. Students across all groups highlighted the high importance of making good contacts, as well as employability. The lowest two sub-regions of the globe were North America and Western Europe at 80% and 79%, and the highest two sub-regions were Central Asia (96%) and Middle Africa (also 96%). This may highlight a concern of international students outside of Westernised countries that they will find it harder to find work in Germany or elsewhere 72% post-study, compared to those that are from an area more culturally or socially similar to Germany.

In satisfaction terms, 72% of international students were satisfied with the employability aspect in German HEIs. There was limited correlation between importance and satisfaction in terms of sub-regions of the globe, as Central Asia and Middle Africa were both comfortably above the average satisfaction level, whilst North American and Western European were both around the average of 72% despite their lessened value on this aspect.
7.6. **Careers and Employability**  
**Points and Actions to Consider**

- Only 55% of international students found the standard of careers advice and guidance provided by academic staff to be satisfactory. A review (involving student feedback primarily) should be conducted to find out what is deemed important in this service and how academic staff could be better trained to equip students with employability skills as part of their course of study.

- Careers services offer a reasonably good service satisfaction rate (77%), but are very seldom used with just 6% stating that they had utilised the university Careers Service. More awareness of this service and the benefits could vastly improve this area of education.

- The satisfaction with opportunities for work experience is low. Either a revamp of the current system for example better links with employers or a better management of expectations regarding work experience at German HEIs should be considered.

- The importance of making good contacts for the future was universally high across all student groups, but failed to satisfy the needs of the international students as a whole. More focus should be placed upon creating links between alumni, current students, and future employers where applicable.

- This could be achieved through hosting regular employment fairs, and through presentations given by companies and past students of the institution.

- Employability – as a factor gaining rapid importance in the HE field – left international students feeling unsatisfied, an important issue to consider as the ability to get a good job following study is seen as universally important. Increasing the amount of soft skills teaching to students throughout their time at the HEI would certainly improve the chances of a better result in this factor.
7.7. Case study

What constitutes the success of the Career Services at the University of Freiburg?

The University of Freiburg outperforms the German ISB benchmark with 14%, scoring a 94% satisfaction with its international students in the D-ISB 2009/10. What makes their Career Service such a success?

The Career Services of the University of Freiburg was founded in 2001. The focus of the services is in the area ,Advice and Information.’ In essence, the general advice on career orientation and labour market entrance, as well as advice on internships in Germany and abroad. In particular in the area of internship advice, an increased need in specific information and supervision for international students can be seen, which combines studying in Freiburg with a qualification-orientated internship. Specifically for this target group, the University of Freiburg has come up with advice combined with checks for application documents in the English language. The internationalisation of services was further extended in the scope of the short-term project ‘International Career Support Program’ in 2007-2008. As part of this the accessibility of the Recruitment fair ,Heads & Hands’ was improved, which was held in cooperation with the University and the Studentenwerk Freiburg. The range of exhibitors was expanded internationally.

Furthermore, the career services is well-known because of its wide spectrum of information relaying. Including a careers library and a successful series of lectures ,from Uni into a career.’

A major success of the Career Services is based on its cooperation with the regional agency for work in Freiburg as well as with additional internal and external partners. As a result, specific advice can be offered in areas such as the European and Swiss employment markets.

A further success is the high level of competence and linguistic skills of the employees as well as the continual survey of the needs of the target group. For its performances in the area of career services, the University of Freiburg was distinguished in 2007 by the Stifterverband für die Deutsche Wissenschaft as the ,Best Practice Example for Career Services in Germany.’ In the course of the optimisation of the entire student services of the University of Freiburg, the Career Services was integrated in the newly grounded ,Service Center Studium’ on the 1st of April 2010 which – as the central contract point for students – bundles all central advice and information services under a single roof. In this context, the career services were extended to offer a personal job placement service and a check of French application documents.
WHAT CONSTITUTES THE EMPLOYABILITY OF HFU – FURTWANGEN UNIVERSITY’S INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS?

The University of Furtwangen outperforms both the international as well as the German ISB benchmark when it comes to the employability of its international students. What makes these students so highly satisfied when it comes to answering the question ‘how satisfied are you at this stage of the year with learning that will help you to get a good job?’

In 1971 the well-known ‘Ingenieurschmiede’ (foundry for engineers) developed into the ‘Fachhochschule Furtwangen’. By 2005 ‘Fachhochschule Furtwangen’ changed its name to ‘Hochschule Furtwangen’. Furtwangen University offers courses in computer sciences, engineering, media, life sciences, business information systems, product engineering and international business. The University is a relatively small institution, which enhances a close-knit network of personal relationships. Moreover, the institution works with people who have been or are still active in industry, ensuring close contacts to the relevant industries. Next to that the sphere and size of the institution allow for close personal contact between students and professors, which contributes most probably for a large part to the success of the employability of its international students.

WHAT OTHER ACTIVITIES ARE BEING UNDERTAKEN IN THE FIELD OF IMPROVING STUDENTS’ EMPLOYABILITY?

Furtwangen University traditionally has very close links with industry as there are many cooperation projects and all undergraduate students have to carry out a compulsory internship in a company. Most students also do their bachelor or master thesis in cooperation with companies, ensuring a close link to the world of work. Furthermore, all professors have professional experience in industry, and Furtwangen University invites many of their teaching staff directly from industry, asking them to teach on a part-time basis.

There is a close contact between professors and students. In some faculties there is a mentoring system or an advisor concept which means that a group of 3 to 5 students have an allocated professor as their personal mentor. Furthermore, for research projects, students work usually in cooperation with industry. Next to that, Furtwangen University has special student consultation teams.
Twice a year Furtwangen University organises a so called 'Hochschulkontaktbörse' on each campus. Companies come to the HFU campus to present themselves with a booth on this fair and students have the opportunity to contact the representatives of these companies personally. For many of the HFU students this is a good opportunity to find a project, an internship, or a first job.

In the Master programme Business Consulting (taught in English) a series of presentations given by companies on special topics is organised each semester. This series of lectures is called 'Expand your knowledge – extend your network'. These presentations are followed by an informal get-together with beer and pretzels. Thus the international students get a great opportunity to talk to companies. Moreover, the Business School is active on the XING network, and strong in alumni work.

To support students in their transition from the university to the world of work, the university offers workshops ‘how to apply for a job in Germany’. And they encourage and support students who want to do a voluntary internship. In summary, the ‘secret’ is probably the close contact to industry and the close and personal contact between students and professors.
About the Authors

Nannette Ripmeester is i-graduate’s Director of Client Services Europe. After obtaining an MA degree from the University of Amsterdam, Nannette started her international career at the European Commission in Brussels in the area of Labour Mobility. In 1992 Nannette founded Expertise in Labour Mobility, which specialises in advice and information regarding graduate recruitment and provides solutions for international labour mobility. Nannette is the co-author of 37 career books for young professionals, part of the ‘Looking for work in …’ series, which covers job hunting practices and cultural management differences. Given Nannette’s experiences in working in 17 European countries, she understands what drives international graduates. From the early days of i-graduate, Nannette has combined her knowledge of the Higher Education field with insights into the practicalities of international mobile people.

Archibald (Archie) Pollock is author of the ‘Looking for work in Singapore’ career guide. With study specialisation in international public policy making, Archie has worked with i-graduate on a number of projects in recent years, working with universities and higher educational institutions from all over Europe. Having been an international student himself, Archie understands the importance of keeping international study enjoyable, educational and cost effective for the student, without removing the challenges and experiences which he believes moving abroad should bring. He looks forward to taking an active part of the institution-specific feedback presentations throughout Germany in 2011, and hopes that this guide helps to further improve the already positive experiences of international students studying in Germany.
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