The German University System at a Glance

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Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst
German Academic Exchange Service

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German universities
A success story with a long tradition

Germany is one of the most popular places to study in the world – and number one among all non-English speaking countries. Its universities enjoy an excellent international reputation and are valued cooperation partners with foreign universities worldwide.

Who are we?
The German Academic Exchange Service is the world's largest organisation dedicated to promoting academic cooperation.
▶ **www.daad.de**

German universities maintain more than **34,000 international partnerships** with over 5,000 universities in 150 countries worldwide.

With more than **340,000 international students** (= more than 12% of all students) Germany is the third most popular country among international students after the USA and Great Britain.

Modern and innovative

German universities provide important stimulus for innovation and progress. More than 80 Nobel laureates have come from Germany, most of whom have received the Nobel Prize in Chemistry, Physics and Medicine.

Century-old tradition

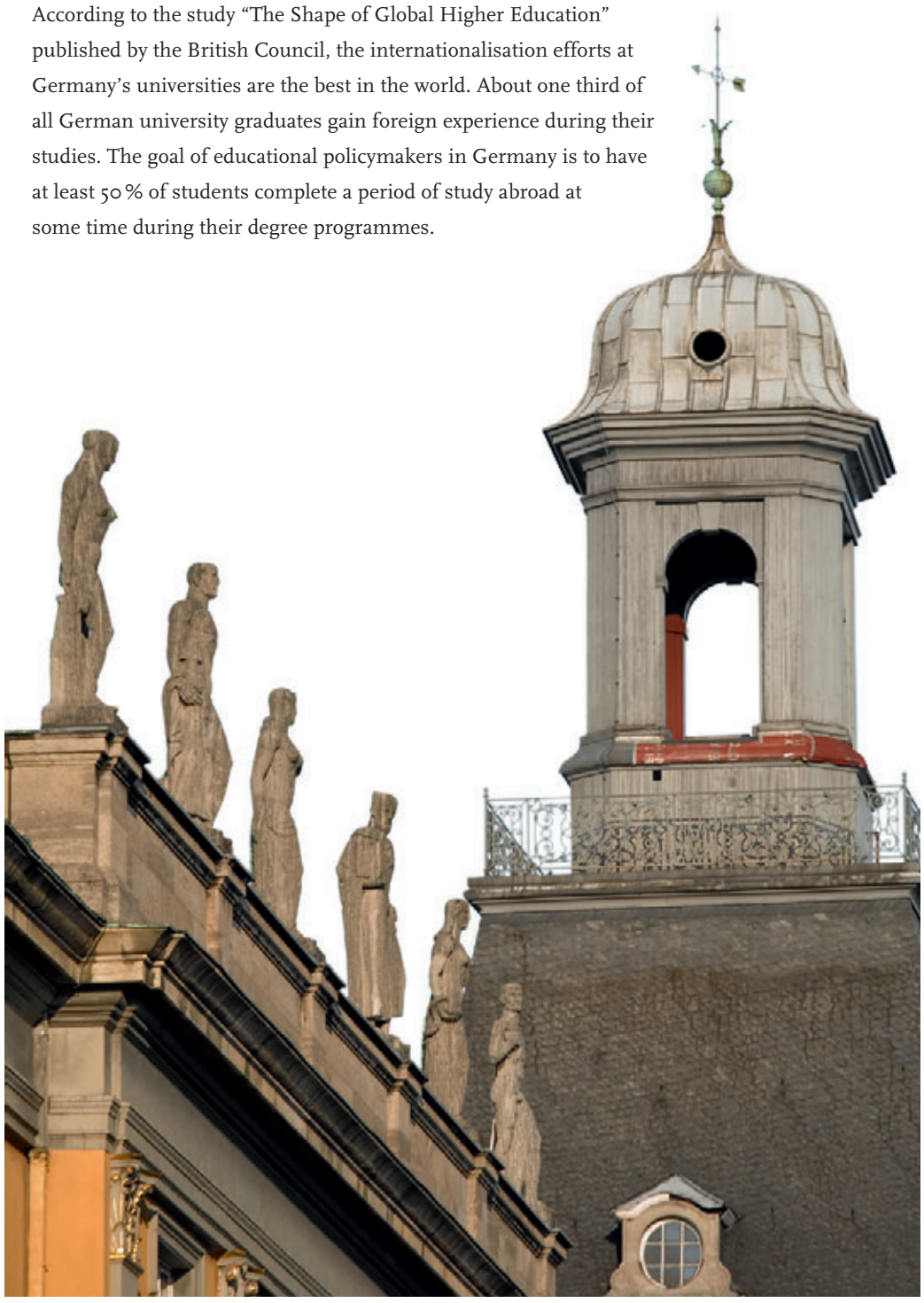
German universities are proud of their long, successful tradition. The first university was founded in Heidelberg in 1386. German universities have continually expanded and flourished ever since. One of the most influential German scholars was the reformer Wilhelm von Humboldt (1767–1835), whose principle of uniting research and instruction remains the focus of German universities today.

Reliable partners

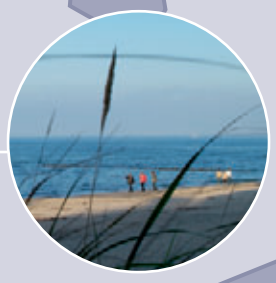
German universities are strongly committed to expanding university-level cooperation worldwide, bilateral university agreements, international student exchange programmes, joint degree programmes and equal partnerships.

International orientation

According to the study "The Shape of Global Higher Education" published by the British Council, the internationalisation efforts at Germany's universities are the best in the world. About one third of all German university graduates gain foreign experience during their studies. The goal of educational policymakers in Germany is to have at least 50 % of students complete a period of study abroad at some time during their degree programmes.



University cities in Germany



Denmark
North Sea
Baltic Sea
Netherlands
Belgium
Luxembourg
France
Switzerland
Liechtenstein
Austria
Italy
Czech Republic
Poland

Flensburg
Kiel
Heide
Schleswig-Holstein
Elmshorn
Lübeck
Wedel
Hamburg
Hamburg
Wilhelmshaven
Bremerhaven
Emden
Buxtehude
Leer
Elsfleth
Bremen
Ottersberg
Oldenburg
Bremen
Lüneburg
Elbe
Hermannsburg
Niedersachsen
Vechta
Weser
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Detmold
Holzminden
Wernigerode
Bernburg
Dessau
Köthen
Cottbus
Bocholt
Kleve
Recklinghausen
Hamm
Paderborn
Gelsenkirchen
Bochum
Dortmund
Essen
Duisburg
Mülheim/
Ruhr
Witten-Herdecke
Iserlohn
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Wuppertal
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Rhein
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Göttingen
Nordhausen
Halle
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Bad Sooden-Allendorf
Hessen
Fulda
Thüringen
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Sachsen
Moritzburg
Dresden
Görlitz
Zittau
Weimar
Jena
Erfurt
Gera
Mittweida
Freiberg
Chemnitz
Zwickau
Schmalkalden
Ilmenau
Köln
Brühl
Alfter
Bonn
Aachen
St. Augustin
Bad Honnef
Siegen
Dietzhölztal
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Hachenburg
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Idstein
Friedberg
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Saarland
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Saarbrücken
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Heidelberg
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Heilbronn
Karlsruhe
Pforzheim
Ludwigsburg
Bad Liebenzell
Stuttgart
Esslingen
Aalen
Schwäbisch Gmünd
Calw
Offenburg
Tübingen
Nürtingen
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Ulm
Neu-Ulm
Fürth
Erlangen
Nürnberg
Amberg
Ansbach
Neuendettelsau
Regensburg
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Eichstätt
Ingolstadt
Donau
Passau
Bayern
Landshut
Augsburg
Freising
Erding
München
Neubiberg
Rosenheim
Kempten
Trossingen
Riedlingen
Biberach
Furtwangen
Freiburg
Albstadt-Sigmaringen
Weingarten
Ravensburg
Friedrichshafen
Weilheim
Konstanz
Isny

The university system
Diversity at the highest quality

The German university system is extremely diverse with over **2.7 million students** enrolled at about **400 nationally accredited universities** in some **180 cities** throughout Germany.

There are **three different types of universities**:

- **Universities** for scientifically oriented study
- **Universities of applied sciences** for practically oriented study
- **Colleges of art, film and music** for artistic study

Public or private

Most universities in Germany receive state and federal public funding. In addition to numerous private universities, there are also 40 universities which receive funding from the German Catholic and Protestant churches.

Tuition fees

The majority of students in Germany attend public universities. Most undergraduate and many master's degree programmes are tuition-free. In certain cases, however, and especially for non-consecutive master's degree programmes, students may be charged tuition fees of 10,000 euros or more per semester (= 1/2 year). Private universities tend to charge relatively high tuition fees, as well.

Quality and ranking

All universities in Germany offer a high quality of instruction. Independent accreditation agencies regularly monitor the quality of the universities and the degree programmes they offer.

▶ **www.akkreditierungsrat.de**

With so little difference in quality between universities, rankings play hardly any role in Germany. The CHE University Ranking is the most comprehensive ranking instrument in Germany.

▶ **www.universityranking.de**

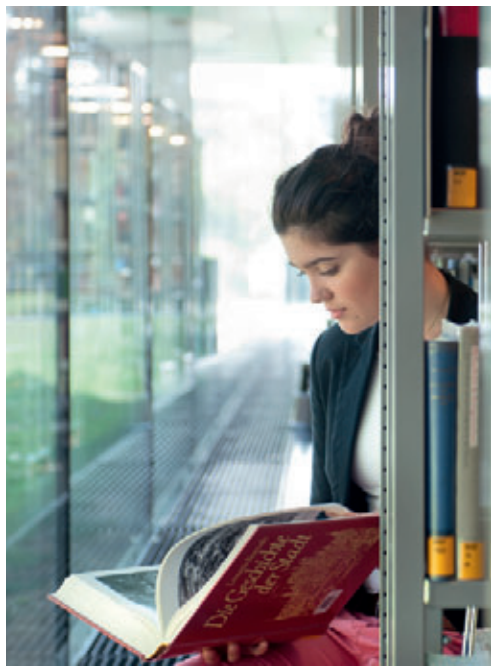
Excellence Initiative

In 2005, the German states and federal government launched a programme, titled the Excellence Initiative, to promote science and research at German universities.

▶ **www.dfg.de/exzellenzinitiative**

A total of 4.6 billion euros has been allocated to fund the programme until the end of 2017. The Excellence Initiative awards funding for:

- Graduate schools to promote talented, young researchers
- Clusters of Excellence to promote cutting-edge research
- Institutional strategies for project-based expansion of top university research

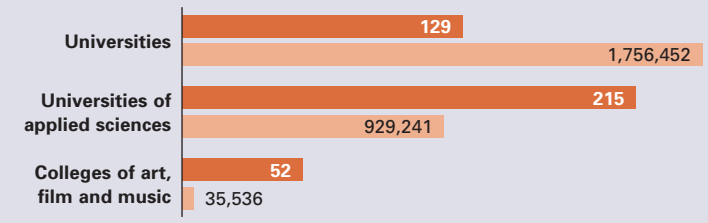


The following universities will receive funding for their outstanding institutional strategies until the end of 2017:

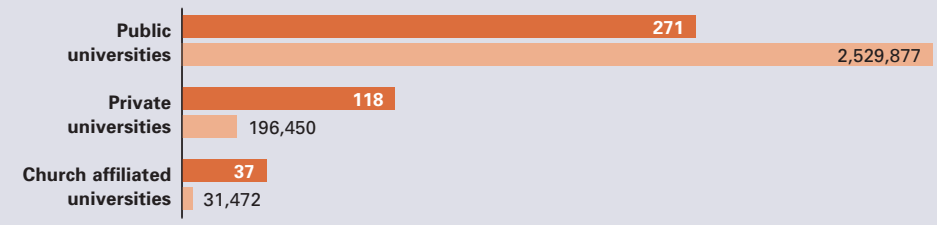
- RWTH Aachen University
- Freie Universität Berlin
- Humboldt University Berlin
- University of Bremen
- Dresden University of Technology
- University of Heidelberg
- University of Cologne
- University of Konstanz
- Ludwig Maximilians University Munich
- Technische Universität München
- University of Tübingen

Universities and students

Types of universities and number of students



Funding of universities and number of students



Source: Federal Statistical Office (2015/16)

Study opportunities
Something for everyone

Germany is among 50 countries which have formed a European Higher Education Area in accordance with the **Bologna Process**. Initiated in 1999, the largest university reform process in decades aims to standardise graduation certificates throughout Europe and ease student mobility. Part of this reform calls for two-phased bachelor's and master's degree programmes, which most German universities have introduced on a wide scale.

German universities offer degree programmes suited to all students at all levels of study.

There are over **18,500 degree programmes**, including

- more than **10,000** undergraduate programmes
- more than **8,700** graduate programmes

A complete database of all degree programmes in Germany is available at **www.study-in.de**.

At **www.daad.de/international-programmes**, web users can search a database of ca. **1,400 internationally oriented bachelor's, master's and doctoral programmes that are mainly taught in English**.

Internationally recognised degrees

German universities award a variety of certificates of professional qualification.

Bachelor's degree (BA, BSc, ...)
- 1st academic degree
- 6- to 8-semester undergraduate study programme

Master's degree (MA, MSc, ...)
- 2nd academic degree (following successful completion of a bachelor's)
- 2- to 4-semester advanced study programme

State examination
- State certificate awarded to medical doctors, pharmacists, jurists and teachers

Diplom
- German academic degree, equivalent to a master's degree, awarded to graduates in the Natural Sciences, Engineering, Economics and Social Sciences
- Most *Diplom* programmes have been replaced by equivalent bachelor's and master's degree programmes.
- Some engineering programmes offer students a choice between a *Diplom-Ingenieur* (Dipl.-Ing.) certificate and a master's degree.

Doctorate
- Academic degree following a master's degree, state examination or *Diplom* from a university or a university of applied sciences
- Conferral of a doctoral title
- 4- to 10-semester study and research programme and completion of a doctoral thesis

Two paths to a doctorate

German universities offer postgraduates **two attractive doctoral study opportunities:**

1. Individual doctoral study

Doctoral candidates may choose to work independently on a doctoral thesis (dissertation).

They must first convince a professor (= doctoral supervisor) of the suitability of his/her qualifications and research proposal.

2. Structured PhD programmes

Candidates can enrol in a PhD programme, e.g.:

Research training groups = university research programmes of limited duration. Dissertations are usually part of an interdisciplinary project carried out by several researchers.

Graduate schools and **international doctoral programmes** = especially tailored to the needs of international doctoral candidates, mostly English language programmes at universities or research institutes

Requirements and regulations
Realistic chances for applicants

University admission and eligibility

Visit **www.anabin.kmk.org** for an overview of foreign secondary school-leaving certificates recognised as a higher education entrance qualification in Germany. Universities are also permitted to individualise requirements for admission. Especially for master's degree programmes, each university can decide whether applicants must fulfil specific requirements or pass additional tests. Therefore, when applicants apply for admission to a particular university or particular degree programme, they should always ask about any special rules that might relate to them.

Language proficiency

The required level of language proficiency at German universities largely depends on the degree programme in question:

- International degree programmes: good English language skills
- All other degree programmes: good German language skills

Students can certify their German language ability by taking one of several standardised tests, e. g. TestDaF, the Test of German as a Foreign Language.
► **www.testdaf.de**

Entry visas

Foreigners may require an entry visa depending on their country of origin and the purpose of their visit.

- Citizens of EU member states, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway or Switzerland do not require an entry visa.
- Citizens of other countries should contact the German embassy or consulate in their home country or visit **www.diplo.de/visa** for information on specific entry requirements.

Financing

All international students must provide proof that they can finance their studies in Germany (proof of financial resources). At present, international students must show that they have about 8,800 euros at their disposal for one year of study.

Employment after graduation

About 40 % of all foreign students decide to stay and work in Germany after graduating from a German university.

Work regulations for foreigners have significantly improved in recent years. Foreign graduates from non-EU countries may stay in Germany for 18 months after completing their studies so that they can find a job which matches their qualifications. Those who succeed are allowed to remain in Germany – and have good chances of obtaining a permanent residence permit.

The prospects of finding a job are especially promising wherever there is a lack of highly qualified workers in Germany. At present, candidates with expertise in mathematics, computer science, natural sciences or technology are in high

Services for international students
Sound advice and financial aid

With top-notch facilities and excellent academic personnel, German universities offer students optimal conditions for gaining a successful education. The academic staff take students seriously as scholars and researchers, and provide them with excellent advice.

Student Advising Services

Every university has an International Office which is responsible for assisting international students in all matters. This is where students can obtain information on study opportunities and admission requirements, or receive help with preparing for university study, finding accommodation and taking care of formalities.

Code of Conduct

A large number of German universities have adopted the National Code of Conduct on Foreign Students. Its goal is to continue to improve the academic advice service for international students, in particular, by formalising:

- How international students are to be informed and counselled
- How their admission process is conducted
- What kind of academic, language and social advising they can expect

The Code of Conduct assures certain minimum standards, which international applicants can rely on.
► **www.hochschulkompass.de/auslandskooperationen/nationaler-kodex**

Scholarships

A broad range of funding opportunities is available to international students who wish to study in Germany. Most scholarships are awarded by funding organisations and foundations. Some universities have scholarship programmes of their own, but compared to other countries, the number and size of these scholarships are limited. German funding organisations rarely offer full scholarships and generally do not award grants to beginning undergraduates.

Scholarship database

Visit the DAAD scholarship database for an overview of the funding opportunities available to international students.

► **www.funding-guide.de**

University policy
Freedom and flexibility

Decentralised educational policy

Germany is a federal republic and each of its 16 states has a parliament of its own. Educational policy is made at the state level – which means that each state determines its own university law and regulations.

Higher Education Framework Act

Although each state has the liberty to draw up its own science and university policies, a nationwide law – the Higher Education Framework Act (HRG) – stipulates certain guidelines that apply to all states.

Conference of Education Ministers

This group of state ministers of education, science and cultural affairs regularly meets to decide on important educational policy matters on a national scale.
► **www.kmk.org**

German Rectors' Conference

Most German universities are members of the German Rectors' Conference (HRK). The HRK conveys the interests of the universities to policy makers and the public.
► **www.hrk.de**

Creative freedom

Universities enjoy a large degree of freedom to shape their profile. Consequently, regulations are not always the same at every university. This is why many questions can only be answered by directly contacting the university in question.

The DAAD

The German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) is a joint organisation of German institutions of higher education and student bodies. Its task is to promote academic cooperation around the world, especially by awarding scholarships to talented academics, creating outward-looking university structures and providing expertise for academic and research collaborations.

In 2015, the DAAD had a budget of 471 million euros at its disposal. Thanks to its wide range of funding programmes, the DAAD provided more than 127,000 students and researchers worldwide the opportunity to gain international experience.

For more information about studying and living in Germany, visit our website **(www.daad.de)** or the websites of the DAAD Branch Offices and Information Centres.

Important links

► **www.study-in.de**
Studying and living in Germany, database with all degree programmes

► **www.daad.de/international-programmes**
International Bachelor, Master and Doctoral Programmes, language and short courses, preparatory courses

Addresses

For a regularly updated address list, visit **www.daad.de/local**.

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10117 Berlin (Germany)
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