



The German University System An Overview



DAAD

Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst
German Academic Exchange Service

Publisher DAAD
Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst
German Academic Exchange Service
Kennedyallee 50, 53175 Bonn (Germany)
www.daad.de

Section K23 – Information on Studying in Germany

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Layout and Typesetting DITHO Design GmbH, Köln

Photo Credits Norbert Hüttermann/DAAD, Thomas Ebert/DAAD (Frankfurt; Trier), Horst Gerlach/DAAD, Ikhlās Abbis/DAAD, Thomas Bergmann/DAAD, David Ausserhofer – Peter Himself/DAAD (Berlin), Lichtenscheid/DAAD, DAAD (Essen), ricok69/photocase.de (Rostock), birdys/photocase.de (Hamburg), tagstiles.com/photocase.de (Dresden), mlieser/photocase.de (Konstanz), NatureQualityPicture/photocase.de (Kempten)

Printed by W. Kohlhammer Druckerei GmbH + Co. KG, Stuttgart



Print run August 2019 – 15,000

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This publication was funded by the Federal Foreign Office.



Federal Foreign Office

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German universities A success story with a long tradition

German universities enjoy an outstanding reputation around the world. They are highly attractive partners for higher education institutions worldwide – and the top choice among international students who wish to study in non-English speaking host countries.

Who
are we?

The German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) is the world's largest organisation of its kind dedicated to promoting academic cooperation.

► www.daad.de

→ 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. Around 80 global patents are taken out by researchers in Germany every day.

Around 360,000 international students study in Germany – 12.8% of all students. Germany is the 4th most popular destination among international students after the USA, Great Britain and Australia.

→ Century-old tradition

German universities are proud of their long, successful tradition.

The first university was founded in Heidelberg in 1386. The ideas proposed by the reformer Wilhelm von Humboldt (1767–1835) played an especially influential role in German higher education. His principle of uniting research and instruction remains the focus of German universities today.

→ Reliable partners

German universities are strongly committed to establishing and expanding worldwide collaborations, bilateral universities, international exchange programmes, joint degree programmes and partnerships between equals. There are currently more than 33,000 international cooperation agreements with over 5,250 universities in 158 countries worldwide.

→ International orientation

According to “The Shape of Global Higher Education: National Policies Framework for International Engagement” by the British Council, Germany together with Malaysia has the most balanced portfolio of national policies supporting international higher education. About 37% 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



The university system

Diversity at the highest quality

The German university system is extremely diverse. **Over 2.9 million students** study at **430 state-accredited higher education institutions** in some **170 cities** in Germany.

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

- **Universities** for general and theoretically 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 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. Certain master's programmes are tuition-based, in some cases, costing more than 10,000 euros per semester (ca. 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 Strategy

Following the success of the Excellence Initiative (2007–2017), the German federal and state governments launched a second funding programme to promote cutting-edge research at German universities. The goal of the new Excellence Strategy is to further strengthen Germany's competitive edge on the international market as a place of science and research.

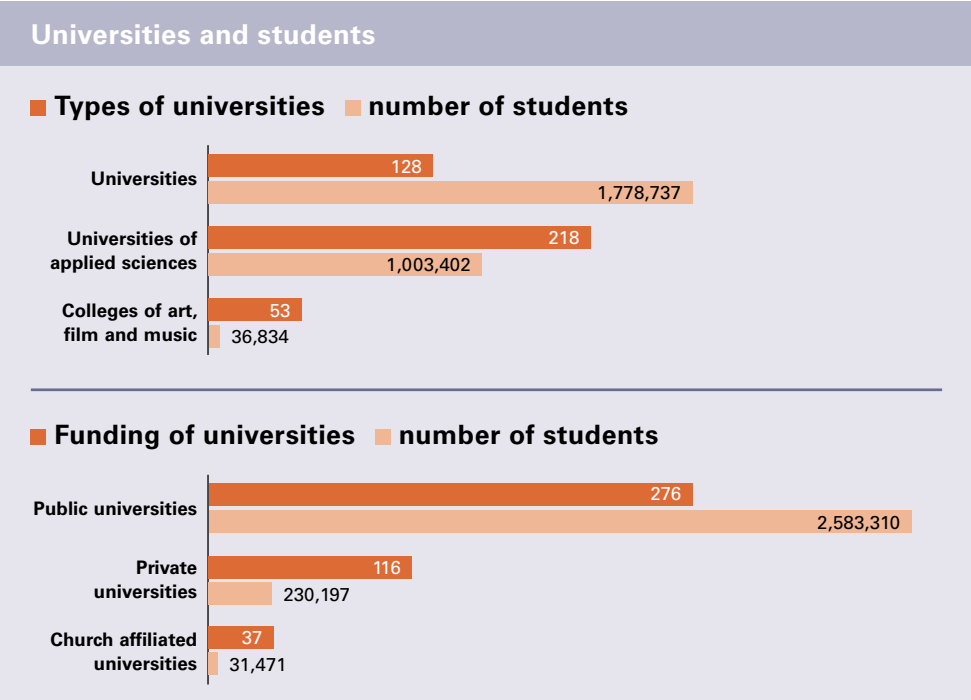
Each year about 533 million euros are allocated to establish **excellence clusters** in specific research fields and support the activities of selected **"Universities of Excellence"**.

In **excellence clusters**, internationally competitive research fields at one university or consortium of universities are awarded targeted funding. Researchers of various disciplines and institutions collaborate on joint research projects. Currently 57 excellence clusters are receiving funding. The following **"Universities of Excellence"** were awarded additional funding every year until the end of 2026.



- RWTH Aachen University
- Freie Universität Berlin
- Humboldt Universität zu Berlin
- TU Berlin
- University of Bonn
- TU Dresden
- University of Hamburg
- Heidelberg University
- Karlsruhe Institute of Technology
- University of Konstanz
- LMU Munich
- TU Munich
- University of Tübingen

► www.dfg.de/exzellenzstrategie



Study opportunities

Something for everyone

Together with 48 countries, Germany has 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 facilitate 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:

around **19,900 degree programmes**, including

- more than **10,400** undergraduate programmes
- more than **9,450** graduate programmes and
- more than **1,550** international, mainly English-language bachelor's, master's and doctoral programmes.

Online courses: Both public and private universities offer free and tuition-based online and distance learning courses in numerous disciplines.

- www.hochschulkompass.de (> "Distance Studies")
- www.daad.de/international-programmes (> "Study online"). This database contains more than 1,900 international English-language bachelor's, master's and doctoral programmes.

Internationally recognised degrees

German universities award a variety of certificates of professional qualification.

Bachelor's degree (B.A., B.Sc., ...)

- 1st academic degree
- 6- to 8-semester undergraduate study programme

Master's degree (M.A., M.Sc., ...)

- 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

- Academic degree awarded to graduates in the natural sciences, engineering, economics and social sciences
- The "Diplom" certificate is equivalent to a master's degree.
- 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 **attractive doctoral study opportunities**. There are basically two options:

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.

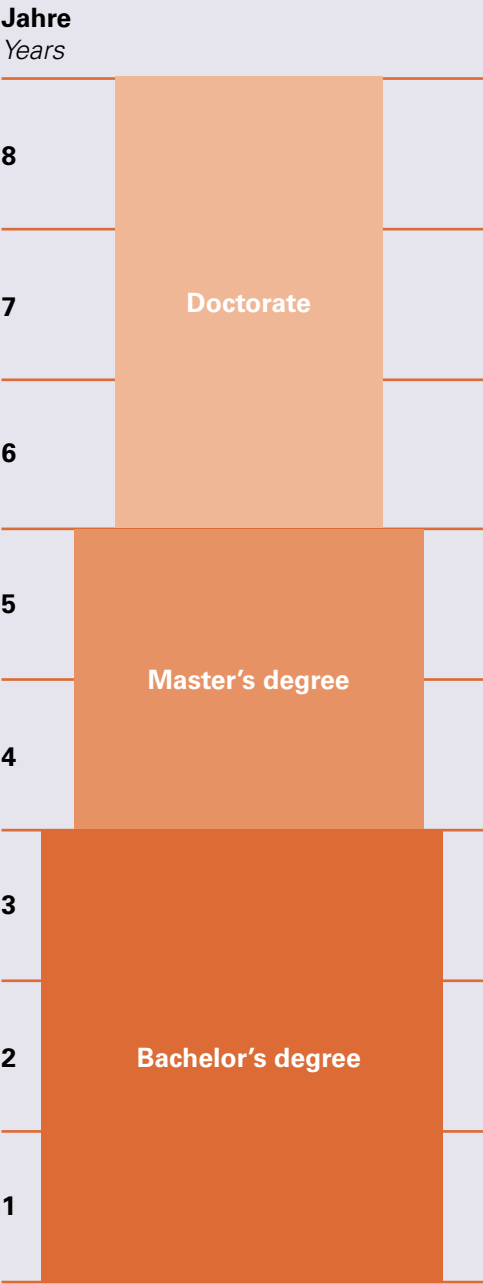
2. Structured PhD programmes

Candidates can enrol in a PhD programme. Research training groups and graduate schools are two examples of such programmes.

Research training groups = short-term graduate research programmes at universities. The dissertations usually have an interdisciplinary focus and are written in collaboration with other researchers. For a list of research training groups funded by the German Research Foundation (DFG), visit www.dfg.de/gk.

Graduate schools and international doctoral programmes = mostly English-language programmes tailored to the needs of international doctoral candidates. Such programmes can take place at universities or research organisations, e.g. at one of **60 International Max Planck Research Schools (IMPRS)**.

- www.gerit.org
- www.research-in-germany.org
- www.phdgermany.de
- www.mpg.de/en/imprs



Requirements and regulations

Realistic chances for applicants

University admission and eligibility

International students must meet certain admission requirements. Visit www.anabin.kmk.org for an overview of foreign secondary school-leaving certificates recognised as a higher education entrance qualification in Germany. Universities may also set their own admission requirements for applicants. Especially for master’s degree programmes, each university can decide whether applicants must fulfil specific requirements or pass additional tests. Therefore, when applying for admission to a particular university or degree programme, prospective students should always ask about any special rules that might apply 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

International students 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

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 8,700 euros at their disposal for one year of study. From January 2020, this amount will be raised to 10,236.00 euros.

Employment after graduation

About 44 % 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 demand.

Services for international students

Sound advice and financial aid

With top-notch facilities, 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 advice 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.hrk.de/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. 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 statutes 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 policymakers 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 structures for internationalisation and providing expertise for academic and research collaborations.

In 2017, the DAAD had a budget of around 522 million euros at its disposal. With this funding, over 140,000 students and researchers were given 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.

DAAD Branch Offices and Information Centres (IC)

www.daad.de/local



Important links

- www.study-in-germany.de
Studying and living in Germany, database with all degree programmes
- www.daad.de/international-programmes
International bachelor’s, master’s and doctoral programmes, language and short courses, preparatory courses
- www.research-in-germany.org
- www.make-it-in-germany.com

Addresses

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