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German universities are to strengthen their international profile

Study reveals growing international focus and international mobility, even for lecturers. Johanna Wanka: "Universities are the driving force of exchange"

More international first-year students, a rise in researchers from other countries and an increase in German professors working abroad: universities in Germany are places of growing internationality. This persistent trend can be recognised in a recent study by the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD), the German Rectors' Conference and the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation.

According to the study, which was conducted in mid-2014, there were around 31,000 international collaborations agreed by just under 300 German universities with around 5000 university partners in 150 different countries. A good half of these collaborations are for the purpose of exchange programmes for students and university staff within the framework of the European Erasmus programme. This greatly emphasises the importance of this programme for collaboration in the European academic community. The annual study, which was first published in 2008 and is entitled "Profile data on the internationality of German universities", is financed by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF).

"Our universities are a gateway to the world; their value when it comes to shaping our society is priceless. As a driving force of international collaboration, they ensure academic exchange and mobility. Almost incidentally, they also promote cultural openness among students and lecturers and make them curious about the unknown," said Johanna Wanka, Federal Minister of Education and Research.

In the study, the universities are divided into large and small universities/universities of applied sciences, colleges of art and music and technical universities and analysed in seven categories. The number of international students and foreign staff on campus, the mobility of students and lecturers and the number of international degree programmes are important for their profiles. Participating universities are also ranked in relation to comparable universities based on their key figures. This can be used as an instrument to assess their international activities and as a data basis for empirical comparisons and benchmarks.

As a result, the German university landscape has developed a dynamic international exchange, but there are still major differences between types of higher education institution. Overall, technical universities and colleges of art and music achieve the highest scores. In colleges of art and music, the proportion of international staff in the sciences and the arts has risen to 15.7% since 2006, which represents a 20% increase. The amount of international researchers at technical universities also increased to 13.8% (+16%). These figures are even more significant when it comes to the increase in international first-year students. Here the proportion rose by

13.3% to 16.1%; at technical universities this figure grew by 29.2% to just under a quarter of first-year students.

Despite a positive trend, these figures were lower at small universities and universities of applied sciences. One of the reasons for this is that these universities find it difficult to attract international students and academics. In addition, technical disciplines strongly appeal to international students and academics. The same applies to colleges of art and music, where the proportion of students coming from outside of Germany is as high as 70% at some universities. Small universities were able to make significant gains in terms of their professors' international mobility. As a result, the proportion of lecturers at small universities receiving funding through the Erasmus programme has risen by 32% since 2007 (to 7.8%).

By contrast, declining or stagnating trends can only be seen in a few areas, e.g. the proportion of international students on doctoral degree programmes. Since 2006, this trend has been very similar in all the types of higher education institution surveyed (approx. 18% at technical universities and approx. 14% and 15% at small and major universities respectively).

The BMBF has compiled an "International Cooperation" action plan to drive this trend forward with specific measures and initiatives. The federal government defined a strategy for the internationalisation of science and research in Germany back in 2008; this action plan ties in with this. "The internationalisation of universities is a key concern for German and European education policy," said Wanka. "Universities with an international profile offer students and researchers the opportunity to learn from and collaborate with the world's best."

You can find more information [here](#) (in German only). The study can be downloaded [here](#) (in German only).