

## German International Student Barometer, D-ISB, Academic Year 2011/12 Executive Summary

### Background

The **German International Student Barometer (D-ISB)** ran from 24 October to 9 December 2011, at 52 Hochschulen in Germany to capture opinions of the international student cohort studying in Germany during the academic year 2011/2012. 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).

At the initial enquiry by HRK for an interest in a nation-wide Barometer Survey a large and positive response was received. 57 Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) responded to the third wave and showed an interest in taking part in the D-ISB. 52 HEIs launched the ISB survey, 37 HEIs decided for a feedback presentation at a cost for the HEI. Out of the 37 HEIs, 34 HEIs have been included in both the national and international benchmark and 3 HEIs have not made the benchmarks. 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 17,732 international students studying in Germany are set in the context of the experiences of 209,422 international students at 238 HEIs taking part in the ISB comparative global benchmark for the Entry Wave 2011. Of the 238 participating HEIs, 208 institutions qualified for the benchmarking.

### Profile of the D-ISB

Profile of the D-ISB: 52% of respondents were female, 46% male and 2% prefer not to answer; among the respondents, students from China are the largest group (11%) followed by Russia (6%) and Turkey (4%). The overall majority were classed as being 'other' nationalities (60%).

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

- 41% BA level students
- 37% MA level students
- 13% PhD level students
- 9% Other categories of students (respondents mentioned here Staatspruefung, Diplom, Magister, Bachelor, etc)

In terms of Hochschule profile the split was as follows:

- 27 Universities (Universitäten)
- 3 Technical Universities (Technische Universität)
- 22 Universites of Applied Sciences (Fachhochschulen).

### Choice of destination and arrival

Why did the international students choose to come to Germany? The most important factor in deciding where to study was the Teaching Quality which was highlighted as important for 96% of respondents. This was followed by the reputation of the institution they study at (91%) and the reputation of the education system and qualification reputation (both 90%). Since 2009, some of the influences in deciding for Germany have changed quite dramatically. For example specific course of study saw a positive increase of 10% since 2009, and the opportunities for long term employment also increased, by 10%. Factors such as work opportunities, and teacher reputation, all increased in importance as a factor of study choice by 5-6%. On the other hand, University scholarship/bursary (-4%), social atmosphere (-5%), and personal safety (-2%) all dropped in the same sense.



We can go into more detail concerning factors which affected individual choices to study in Germany. In terms of influence, friends influenced 46% of students, and the website of the institution was 43%, 5% above the ISB average. DAAD influenced 20% of students to study in Germany, and the website [www.daad.de](http://www.daad.de) influenced 16%.

The number of days international students have to wait for both an initial response as well as from application to final offer from the HEI is quite satisfactory according to the students, with a satisfaction rating between 71-85%. In terms of student satisfaction, this is more or less in line with the results of last year, and by study level, BA students were generally least satisfied, and the PhD students most satisfied. Some HEIs will benefit from providing more insight into the application process as students like to be kept informed during the process.

27% of students attended an on-campus recruitment event in Germany, compared to the ISB average of just 13%. The events were quite effective in providing students with useful information, particularly in the fields of getting the opportunity to meet academic staff, as well as current students. However, students certainly would have appreciated the chance to use the on-campus event as an opportunity to see the accommodation facilities; just over half deemed this aspect as satisfactory. It was also seen as being a missed opportunity for international students to see social facilities at the institution (75% satisfied) as well as for parents to gather information (64% satisfied).

*“The learning has been of good standard. But sometimes so much that one misses some opportunities in taking part in certain courses.”*

*“There were too much problems related to the choice of courses, the choice of the faculty. The staff let us find out by ourselves but in a country where you know nothing it's not easy to pick up ALL the info by yourself. But Germany is a really good to country to live in and the teachers are really good compared to my home country”*

### Use of Social Media

International students were asked to what extent they are aware of the institution's presence on the social networking sites of Facebook, YouTube, StudiVZ and Twitter. In general, comparing the knowledge of social networking sites in Germany with the knowledge of it in the international benchmark, Germany as a country lacks somewhat behind. The presence of institutions on the social networking service Facebook is known the best: 50% of the respondents in Germany say that they are aware of the institution's presence on Facebook, against 58% in the ISB. About the video-sharing website YouTube, 17% of the international students in D-ISB answer they know about its presence, compared with 25% in the international benchmark. StudiVZ is used less than the two social networking sites mentioned above; 11% of the respondents are familiar with this typically German social networking site. The biggest difference in awareness of social networking sites when comparing D-ISB against the ISB, is to be found on Twitter. In Germany, 9% of the respondents say they are familiar with this online social networking and micro-blogging service, compared with 19% in the ISB. When asking students how helpful the institution's social networking sites were, it turns out that especially for 'Finding local information', social network sites are useful: 76% says they found it helpful. Also for 'Communicating with other students' (73% found it helpful) and 'Finding out about course info' (68% found it helpful), social media proves to be useful for international students. These numbers are more or less on par with the international benchmark. Having a stronger focus on social media could improve the arrival and learning experience greatly and those students that did use social media found it very helpful. Facebook, for instance, is useful for forums and direct contact with the university and other students. Furthermore, it proves to be good for (sharing) pre-arrival experiences. YouTube is specifically helpful to explain certain aspects of study life via videos; utilise current students to inform prospective students. Another way of giving reminders and providing updates for deadlines and quick information bites can be done via Twitter.

### Satisfaction with the arrival aspects

Respondents were asked to rate their overall satisfaction with their arrival experience at their HEI in Germany in a single satisfaction question; the results from this were that overall satisfaction upon arrival was 81% satisfied in the D-ISB, compared with 83% satisfied in the ISB.

Furthermore, when all rated factors are taken into consideration, the average between them sits at 80% satisfaction, which is -1% on the ISB average, but is an improvement of 1% for Germany on last year.

Regarding specific aspects of the arrival experience:

There has been little change in the last year concerning the arrival aspects. The formal welcoming in Germany received a high satisfaction rate (89%), as did the opportunity to mix with other internationals (other friends [89%]). In general, the aspects covered in the arrival section received satisfaction rates of above 75%. This was let down however by the Accommodation Office (72%) and the General Welcome (71%). Accommodation condition on arrival was also down on the ISB average, at 74% satisfaction.

The results thus are overall quite positive for Germany in arrival aspects, with the biggest deficit between D-ISB and Europe ISB occurring in the accommodation office (-2%), and the biggest positive difference the Europe ISB in setting up a bank account (+8%). However, setting up a bank account satisfaction has decreased slightly since last year. Mixing with host friends (domestic students) also scored strongly in Germany when compared to the Europe ISB, up 3% on the Europe average. In general, there were overall improvements in comparison to last year, though no changes were of a percentage higher than 3%. Other increases are clear, but since the first wave in 2009 meeting home friends has increased by 9%, with positive jumps in both 2009-10 and 2010-11. Furthermore, the accommodation office has improved by 4% since 2009, study sense and registration by 5%. Negative changes since 2009 are existent though negligible, and include the opening a bank account and internet access on arrival (-2%).

*"xxx tells new students almost nothing about how the program works before they arrive, or how to set things up in Germany. That was unsettling. DAAD helped me with everything, most importantly a homestay program, and that was very, very good."*

*"The sports facilities in Europe in general are much more expensive/more difficult to access than at home, but that is not specific to xxx from my experience. I am really enjoying living here. I like that the city is safe and clean."*

### **Satisfaction with the learning aspects**

Respondents were asked to rate their overall satisfaction with their learning experience at their HEI in Germany in a single satisfaction question; the results from this were that overall satisfaction was 85% in the D-ISB, which is on par with the overall ISB average. The 85% result is an increase of 1% on last year, which highlights at least some positive changes and brings Germany into line with the rest of the ISB.

Just as in the arrival section, students were also asked to rate their satisfaction with specific aspects of the learning experience. Overall, we saw that Germany performed in balance with the learning section of the ISB results.

The main positive results in comparison to the ISB were mainly in areas surrounding teaching and lectures: Quality of lectures was 2% higher than the ISB, as was good teachers, and course content. These factors are of course positively aligned with the increased focus which international students place upon related areas in deciding where to study (as noted in the choice of destination section). This bodes well for Germany, as a country aiming to provide what its students expect in terms of learning quality.

Particularly since 2009, almost all sectors of the learning section have increased. The most notable of these are: Language support (by 11%), learning support (8%) and careers advice (7%). Furthermore, most of the sections have improved by a few percent points since last year. Areas which can still be classed as weak in comparison to the global ISB do exist, with language support and course organisation both -8% and – similar to last year – performance feedback (-2%), assessment (-1%), and marking criteria (-5%) all down on the ISB averages.

For these reasons, the following should be focused on for the coming year, with their current satisfaction rate in brackets:

- Assessment (83%, +2% on last year)
- Marking Criteria (75%, +3% on last year)
- Learning Support (81%, same as last year)
- Course Organisation (74%, +4% on last year)

Interesting to note, was that between BA, MA and PhD students, only the latter showed a noticeable decrease in satisfaction in comparison to last year. Both BA and MA saw at least small increases in almost all factors.

### 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 83% satisfied in the D-ISB, compared with 85% satisfied in the ISB. Despite doing well against the ISB from factor to factor, some areas of living brought down the overall average quite substantially, whilst others came in quite the contrast to this.

Students were also asked to rate their satisfaction with specific aspects of the living experience: Germany performed very well in some aspects, with scores against the ISB benchmark higher in areas such as Housing cost (+13%) and living cost (+20%). Furthermore, other positive areas include the opportunity to experience the host culture (+5%), social facilities (+2%) and social activities (+2%).

The areas just highlighted are of course fundamental to the international student experience. The German institutions also performed well in some aspects of other categories, namely:

- Eco-friendly attitude (+5%)
- Safety (+5%)
- Other friends (+3%)
- Housing quality (+3%)

Linked closely to the housing cost satisfaction is the quality. Students regularly state in ISB comments linkages between cost and quality, as well as condition on arrival, when feelings toward accommodation are often at their most extreme. Furthermore, a handful of factors were noticeably below the ISB benchmark, and could be improved:

- Campus buildings (-7%)
- Financial Support (-8%)
- Visa Advice (-10%)

This is a similar result to last year, albeit with some noticeable improvement (financial support and visa advice +2% on 2010). Overall, Germany did see some positive changes in satisfaction in other results in the living section, when compared to last year: In particular, social activities and opportunities to experience host culture improved. Interestingly, the exchange students found it a far more pleasing section than those seeking degrees, with 88% satisfaction compared to degree seeking at 81%.

### 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 83% were satisfied with the overall support at their HEI in Germany, up 1% on last year. This is in comparison with 87% in the ISB. Students were also asked to rate their satisfaction with specific aspects of the support services, and historically Germany has performed quite poorly in this section, but thankfully this is gradually starting to change. Main areas of concern in Germany lie in the accommodation office and residential assistants (or halls welfare) which were both 4% below the ISB benchmark. Other areas perform quite well, especially in the aspects catering/campus eating places (+4%) and health centre (+3%). Regularly underrated, the on campus catering facilities can often have a large impact on the impression which the student receives when at the institution, and the good satisfaction in Germany is a reflection of the amicable cost for eating which is generally found on campus in Germany. The careers service was also above the ISB benchmark (by 1%), and even more noticeably so when compared to the European benchmark (+4%). This is a promising result, considering the emphasis placed on this area by the ISB results in Germany last year.

*"The most important issue which I had so much trouble with was finding a place to live. Nobody gives information to PhD students and I did not know that I, as a PhD student, can apply for Wohnheims. I had no idea where I should go and whom I should ask. and when you ask someone, they always say it is impossible to get a room! If there was an introductory meeting when we PhD students arrive to Germany, we would not have so many difficulties. I changed 4 places until I got a room from Studentenwerk, and apart from financial issues, it was so much stress for me. I still don't know what opportunities are available in xxx, apart from emails that I get the from international office, which covers very few cultural programs and language courses. ... I don't know where to get information, e.g. web pages, if I want to know what is happening here."*

*"International Office keep sending all information just in German although I asked them about English version. Webpage about activities for international students is also available only in German. Most of the people coming here are able to communicate in German but still there are people studying in English and so they should have also opportunity to take part in social life here."*

### Recommendation levels in the D-ISB

Students were asked whether they would recommend their international study experience in Germany. The overall result was that over 1/3 (34%) of international students studying in Germany would 'actively encourage' others to do the same. Furthermore, almost half (48%) would encourage people to apply to study in Germany 'if asked'. This amounts to a total of 82% positively recommending Germany as a study destination. Promisingly, the results are an improvement on last year, with +3% more students stating that they would actively encourage others to study in Germany in comparison to 2010. This 3% has been taken from the less enthusiastic sections 'if asked, I would discourage people from applying', and 'if asked, I would neither encourage nor discourage people to apply'. Interestingly, exchange students were far more enthusiastic in encouraging others to apply: 46% would actively encourage others to apply, compared to 31% of degree seekers.




Propensity to recommend				
Germany (13680)	2011 vs 2010		ISB (160766)	Europe (34621)
34%	+3%	I would actively encourage people to apply	33%	35%
48%	0%	If asked, I would encourage people to apply	47%	48%
14%	-2%	I would neither encourage nor discourage people to apply	15%	14%
3%	-1%	If asked, I would discourage people from applying	3%	3%
1%	0%	I would actively discourage people from applying	1%	1%

Would you recommend the institution to others thinking of applying here?  
 Würden Sie basierend auf Ihren Eindrücken ZUM JEZIGEN ZEITPUNKT die Hochschule anderen Studierenden, die eine Bewerbung hier in Erwägung ziehen, empfehlen?

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### Conclusion

Overall, the results this year for Germany show interesting improvements across the board. In all sections, there are improvements and decreases, but thankfully more so positive than negative. Where increases are seen, they are generally small or negligible, however some have shown real improvements, and are the result of efforts by those at a variety of levels to improve. Furthermore, although some results are small or negligible, there have been general improvements across the ISB in an assortment of factors, and to stay in line with these improvements is an achievement in itself. However, some areas which were once strong have become less so. Reasons for this can be numerous and often depend on the specific factor in question. We saw that overall, the recommendation levels have also increased positively in the last year, pointing towards the general improvements across the board. In order to improve the generally good results in 2011, the area of learning could use some focus in terms of performance feedback, assessment and marking criteria, which of course link closely together. The reason for this suggestion is that it allows students to feel more like they are learning throughout transparent communication with the academics, as well as an understanding of how they should be addressing the key points in their study course. This should also positively affect the course organisation result, which was poor in Germany compared to the ISB benchmark. Students are often confused or unaware of the way in which their course is organised, thus leading to understandable frustration for some individuals. The utilisation of social media could well assist institutions in bettering this aspect, through simple information provision online which is accessible for students and opens up communication between incoming students, current students and staff.

All in all German HEIs 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.

Nr.	alphabetical order	HOCHSCHULE
1	Aachen	Rheinisch-Westfälische Technische Hochschule Aachen
2	Bayreuth	Universität Bayreuth
3	Berlin	Hochschule für Technik und Wirtschaft Berlin
4	Berlin	Technische Universität Berlin
5	Bielefeld	Universität Bielefeld
6	Bochum	Ruhr-Universität Bochum
7	Brandenburg an der Havel	Fachhochschule Brandenburg
8	Darmstadt	Technische Universität Darmstadt
9	Deggendorf	Hochschule Deggendorf
10	Dortmund	Fachhochschule Dortmund

11	Düsseldorf	Heinrich Heine Universität Düsseldorf
12	Emden	Hochschule Emden/Leer
13	Frankfurt	Fachhochschule Frankfurt
14	Freiburg	Albert-Ludwigs-Universität Freiburg
15	Freiburg	Katholische Hochschule Freiburg
16	Furtwangen	Hochschule Furtwangen
17	Göttingen	Georg-August-Universität Göttingen
18	Hamburg	Hochschule für angewandte Wissenschaften Hamburg
19	Hamburg	HafenCity Universität Hamburg
20	Hannover	Fachhochschule Hannover
21	Jena	Friedrich-Schiller-Universität Jena
22	Kassel	Universität Kassel
23	Kiel	Fachhochschule Kiel
24	Kiel	Christian-Albrechts-Universität zu Kiel
25	Köln	Fachhochschule Köln
26	Konstanz	Universität Konstanz
27	Krefeld	Hochschule Niederrhein
28	Leipzig	Universität Leipzig
29	Lemgo	Hochschule Ostwestfalen-Lippe
30	Lüneburg	Leuphana Universität Lüneburg
31	Magdeburg	Otto-von-Guericke Universität Magdeburg
32	Mainz	Johannes Gutenberg-Universität Mainz
33	Mannheim	Universität Mannheim
34	Marburg	Philipps-Universität Marburg
35	Mittweida	Hochschule Mittweida
36	München	Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München
37	Münster	Westfälische Wilhelms-Universität Münster
38	Neubrandenburg	Hochschule Neubrandenburg
39	Offenburg	Hochschule Offenburg
40	Osnabrück	Hochschule Osnabrück
41	Passau	Universität Passau
42	Potsdam	Hochschule für Film und Fernsehen "Konrad Wolf" Potsdam
43	Potsdam	Universität Potsdam
44	Regensburg	Hochschule Regensburg
45	Reutlingen	Hochschule Reutlingen
46	Siegen	Universität Siegen
47	Trier	Universität Trier
48	Tübingen	Universität Tübingen
49	Ulm	Universität Ulm
50	Weimar	Bauhaus-Universität Weimar
51	Würzburg	Universität Würzburg
52	Wuppertal	Bergische Universität Wuppertal