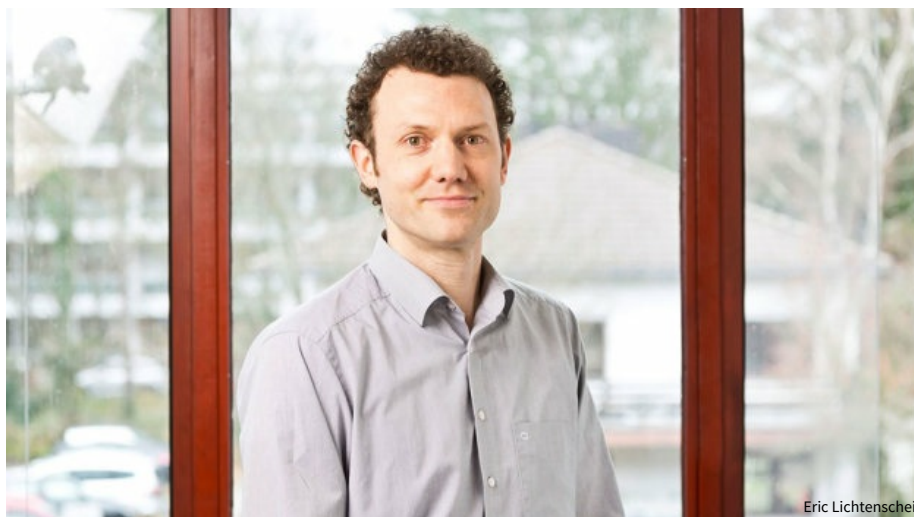


“Targeted support for universities in crisis management”



Dr. Jan Kercher, DAAD expert for external studies and statistics, has an eye on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the international academic world

How are German universities dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic? How are they preparing for the coming semester? And what do international students who have plans to study abroad say about the pandemic? Answers to these and other questions are provided by the DAAD survey “COVID-19 and the impact on international student mobility in Germany”, which has now been published. We spoke with Dr. Jan Kercher, expert for external studies and statistics at the DAAD, who conducted the survey.

Why was the COVID-19 survey conducted?

Until now, there has been no stocktaking of how German universities have dealt with the COVID-19 pandemic and how they are currently preparing for the coming semester, only anecdotal evidence from individual universities. However, such a stocktaking is necessary, in order to be able to support the universities in a targeted and needs-oriented manner in overcoming the crisis. We also know that there is currently a great deal of uncertainty at universities and that information on how other universities have behaved can help them to better deal with this uncertainty. A look at other countries and the universities there can also be very helpful here. A further incentive for us was that our sister organisation in the USA, the International Institute of Education, had already conducted a similar survey among US

universities. We then largely adopted this survey in order to be able to draw comparisons with
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international students largely accepted and carry on even to make to their comparisons with the situation in the USA.

What insights have you gained from the survey?

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a major impact on student mobility in Germany. At two thirds of the universities, international students were unable to begin or continue their studies in Germany as planned during the 2020 summer semester due to travel restrictions. Over 40 percent of the universities stated that international students left Germany after pandemic-related restrictions came into force at their university or at federal level. Extrapolated for all universities in Germany, this results in a figure of around 80,000 students who left Germany due to the pandemic. In addition, welcome events for international students were cancelled at 80 percent of the universities, and international trips for marketing purposes could not take place at two thirds of the universities. Almost a third of the universities discontinued certain study abroad and exchange programmes in the summer semester, and almost a quarter even cancelled all programmes. These are indeed severe impairments for student mobility in Germany.

However, there are also some encouraging and optimistic findings. About one third of the universities state that hardly any students cancelled their planned stays abroad during the summer semester. Another quarter assumes that the proportion of students who cancelled their planned stays abroad is less than half. More than a third of the universities assume that students' interest in studying abroad in the coming winter semester will remain unchanged. A further third assumes that interest will only decline slightly. These optimistic assessments also coincide with international student surveys. For example, a recent survey of international students with plans to study abroad has just revealed that only seven percent have given up their plans to study abroad due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Also, among these students, Germany, along with New Zealand and China, is one of the three countries whose handling of the crisis has been rated the best. This gives reason to hope that there will not be too great a decline in the number of international students in Germany in the winter semester.

How have the universities reacted to the pandemic?

In our view, German universities have reacted in a very calm and committed manner. About half of the universities switched to a mixed model of classroom and virtual teaching in the summer semester, while the other half switched exclusively to virtual teaching. More than 90 percent of the universities have supported their own students abroad on their return journey, for example by providing organisational or even financial assistance. Extrapolated to all universities in Germany, it can be assumed that about 8,500 student returnees have been supported in this way. Seven out of ten universities have held virtual welcome events, and about half have increased their online marketing activities. Over 80 percent of the universities have reacted to the corona crisis by modifying the application and selection procedures for international students. Application deadlines have been extended at about two thirds of the universities, and at every second university it is now possible to submit application documents online. Another important finding was that only two percent of the universities reported that student dorms have been closed during the summer semester. We know from the IIE survey that this was the case at more than half of the US universities surveyed. Especially for international students, such closures can lead to massive problems and in extreme cases even to homelessness, as they often have no possibility to stay with friends or relatives temporarily. It is therefore very gratifying that these dorm closures could largely be prevented in Germany.

You are also maintaining the DAAD's "COVID-19 Impact on International Higher Education: Studies & Forecasts". What is it about?

The aim of this website is to help universities, higher education experts and policy-makers to gain a quick and easy overview of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the international academic world. There is already such an astonishing number of analyses and forecasts on this topic that it is easy to lose track. That's why we also started a weekly "COVID-19 Update" two months ago, which universities can have sent to them by e-mail. Here, we collect international press releases on how universities and university policy in other countries are dealing with the pandemic. We hope that in this way, we can help the universities to cope

dealing with the pandemic. We hope that in this way, we can help the universities to cope with the very difficult and dynamic situation that we have at the moment.

Dr. Jan Kercher/Barbara Westfeld (1 July 2020)

FURTHER LINKS

[DAAD survey "COVID-19 and the impact on international student mobility in Germany"](https://static.daad.de/media/daad_de/pdfs_nicht_barrierefrei/der-daad/analysen-studien/daad_2020_covid-19_and_the_impact_on_international_student_mobility_in_germany.pdf)
[https://static.daad.de/media/daad_de/pdfs_nicht_barrierefrei/der-daad/analysen-studien/daad_2020_covid-19_and_the_impact_on_international_student_mobility_in_germany.pdf]
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