

## GERMANY

**Integration strategy needed for international students**

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Germany has to do more to support and integrate international students, according to the German National Association for Student Affairs and the German Academic Exchange Service. Finding accommodation for them is the biggest challenge, especially for non-European students, who may face racism and discrimination in this respect.

Germany has to do more to support and integrate international students, according to *Deutsches Studentenwerk* (DSW) – the German National Association for Student Affairs – and the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD).

The call comes amid evidence of rising resentment of foreigners across the public at large - in common with the tendency in a number of other countries currently.

There are around 360,000 international students in Germany, accounting for 12.8% of the total student population. More than 32,000 come from China, while about 13,500 Indian students and roughly 11,000 Russian students have enrolled. The overall figure has been on the increase for some time.

“What we urgently need is a national strategy for the support, integration and education of international students,” says DAAD President Margret Wintermantel. The DAAD and other German organisations involved in academic exchange have repeatedly emphasised how important it is to make foreign students feel welcome and enable them to stay in Germany as long as they wish.

In 2013 the *Gemeinsame Wissenschaftskonferenz* (GWK) – the Joint Science Conference – issued a strategy paper on internationalisation. The GWK comprises federal and state ministers responsible for higher education and research and for finance. Items in the strategy paper included making German higher education more attractive for international students, increasing international research cooperation and establishing transnational education.

The GWK wants to see universities in Germany that are “so good that they can compete with the best institutions in other countries and contribute to addressing global challenges”.

“What I asked myself at the time was where all these people coming to Germany were going to stay,” says DSW Secretary General Achim Meyer auf der Heyde. “Alongside financing their studies, finding accommodation is the biggest problem for students from abroad.” Meyer auf der Heyde notes that students from non-European countries are having particular difficulty in this respect and may be confronted with racism and discrimination.

The fly in the ointment for Germany’s internationalisation ambitions is that notwithstanding the GWK and many organisations in the higher education sector emphasising the importance of a welcoming culture, xenophobic tendencies have become a problem among the public at large.

Leipzig University, in what used to be East Germany, conducts its *Mitte-Studien* representative survey every two years to monitor authoritarian and extreme right-wing views.

Its latest survey, among 2,400 Germans aged 14 to 93 years, found that almost every third person interviewed believed that “foreigners only come to Germany to take advantage of our welfare state”, while slightly more than a third of the interviewees maintained that “the large number of foreigners are making Germany dangerously ‘foreign-dominated’”. Every fourth person who took part in the survey stated that “if jobs become scarce, the foreigners ought to be sent back to where they come from”.

The *Mitte-Studien* interviewed around 1,900 people in east Germany and 500 people in west Germany.

## Death threats

At Otto von Guericke University Magdeburg, also in east Germany, vice-chancellor Jens Strackeljan received death threats last year in response to his efforts to make his institution more cosmopolitan. Police inspecting a serious car accident he had later on found that the wheels of the car had been tampered with.

Jörg Steinbach, president of Brandenburg University of Technology Cottbus-Senftenberg, another east German institution that has a large number of international students, fears that local demonstrations against foreigners could seriously jeopardise the university's future.

The DSW allocates around a third of its hostel places to international students. The organisation's student services arrange intercultural integration programmes via the hostel tutors.

"None of this is supported by the state governments," Meyer auf der Heyde notes. "I can only agree with Margret Wintermantel that in addition to an internationalisation strategy, we urgently need an integration strategy for foreign students. And it is essential that the student services participate in such a venture."

Meyer auf der Heyde adds that student services also need to take part in planning for larger numbers of foreign researchers in international collaborative projects.

"If internationalisation doesn't work free of charge, integration most certainly won't," Meyer auf der Heyde concludes. "Advertising Germany as a good place for studying without developing its social infrastructure is just like having a holiday country trying to attract tourists without providing enough hotel beds."

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