German Priorities in the Internationalization of Higher Education: Recent Developments and Future Trends

Germany is an important hub for global student mobility. It is a leading destination for international students (245,000 in fall 2010, this corresponds to 11% of its overall student population). Till 2020, DAAD and the German government will try to increase the number of international students to 300,000. Germany is also a large source of students who study abroad: 102,800 were enrolled in universities outside of Germany in 2008; if one includes internships, language courses and independent research, about 30% of all German students go abroad during their studies. DAAD and the German government have the goal to increase this percentage to 50%. The German government aims to promote student mobility within its broader strategy for the internationalization of science and research (Strategy of the Federal Government for the Internationalization of Science and Research, February 2008).

Two of the goals of this strategy are to strengthen research cooperation with global leaders and to increase long-term cooperation with developing countries in education, research and development. There are various entities responsible for the implementation of these policies: first and foremost the universities themselves, organized in the German Rectors’ Conference (HRK) in addition to other organizations such as the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD), the German Research Foundation (DFG) and the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation (AvH).

Immigration policies and laws have improved in Germany to support its appeal as an attractive destination for international students. The option to remain in Germany after graduation in order to find employment has been extended. Non-EU citizens who graduate from a German university can prolong their stay for up to one year in order to find and accept a job. About one third of them actually take advantage of this possibility.

The role of DAAD in Educational Mobility

The DAAD supports students and academics from abroad in order to create lifelong friends of Germany through programs that target future leaders in education, science and research, culture, industry and commerce, politics and the media. Through educational exchange, DAAD also wants to enhance development and support economic and democratic reforms in other countries. In addition, DAAD supports German students and academics abroad, recognizing their potential as future leaders with international and intercultural experience.

As DAAD is a self-administered association of German universities; 234 institutions are members with voting rights to influence the management of the organization (e.g. by electing the president and the board). Its budget of 384 million Euros (or 500 million US Dollars, in 2010) is financed about 45% by the Federal Foreign Office, 26% by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research, 13% by the European Union, 9% by the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development, and by other sources. With these funds, DAAD supported 106,000 grantees in 2010 (64,000 from Germany and 42,000 to Germany). The 64,000 from Germany include 32,000 in EU programs like ERASMUS which are administered by DAAD.

DAAD’s contribution to promoting student mobility with Germany is quite diverse and includes a broad range of approximately 250 funding programs for international and German applicants and institutions. Scholarship programs
available include undergraduate, postgraduate and doctoral programs, research visits, language and specialist courses, internships and lectureships. The majority of DAAD programs still target individual applicants, but an increasing number of them are directed toward institutions. These programs might support ERASMUS-type mobility schemes with credit transfer, double or joint degree programs, Bachelors’ programs with an extra year abroad ("Bachelor +") or joint doctoral schools or the cooperation between two groups of researchers or entire universities. Recently, the DAAD set up a new mobility program, PROMOS, which offers universities the possibility to apply for funding for scholarships which they then are free to distribute to their (German) students. This program is generously funded by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research; the goal is, as mentioned above, to increase the percentage of German students with experience abroad from 30% to 50% of the student population. A similar program (Kontaktstipendien) also exists for foreign students at German universities, here the scholarships are also distributed by the universities themselves. In addition, DAAD now has a brand-new program “Strategic Partnerships”, which awards up to 1 million Euros over four years in funding for a single university partnership at the university level and “thematic networks” at the department level. This partnership program is a flagship program which is exclusively quality-driven and which comes in addition to several other partnership programs which DAAD has funded with Central and Eastern Europe and developing countries since 1974.

While working with all countries worldwide (it is running a campaign “Go Out” which tries to encourage outbound mobility in general), DAAD is also trying to encourage mobility to certain parts of the world with programs like “Go East” (Central and Eastern Europe), “A New Passage to India” and “Welcome to Africa” or “Language Plus Internship in China” or “Language Plus Internship in Japan”.

In the field of development cooperation, DAAD tries to train administrators and deans from developing countries in its DIES program, fosters regional and interregional cooperation through networks, helps with local capacity building by training experts in specialized Masters’ courses and promotes intercultural understanding and “good governance”, linking universities and industry (new program “North-South University-Industry Cooperation”). We have learned to involve those “being aided” and to adapt solutions locally (e.g. Centers for Technical Expertise in African universities run by these universities together with a German partner).

Furthermore, DAAD tries to help countries in transition in their transformation processes and runs specialized programs e.g. for Afghanistan, Iraq, Pakistan, Egypt and Tunisia.

In the last years, the most rapid expansion of DAAD programs has taken place with the newly emerging markets like China, India, Brazil and Russia, together with a rapid expansion of the EU programs.

In addition to its scholarship programs, DAAD has started about ten years ago to also act as the marketing agency for German higher education. Given the rise of middle classes in developing and newly developed countries, the idea was to go beyond the limited number of scholarships and to interest more students whose families were able and willing to pay for their studies themselves. One major selling point is quality (“National Code of Conduct on Foreign Students at German Universities”), another the fact that tuition fees are either nonexistent (in 14 out of 16 states) or very low. The first step was the development of new Bachelor’s and Master’s courses which were taught entirely in English, the second step a worldwide campaign. In addition, DAAD and the Rectors’ Conference formed a marketing consortium GATE with the possibility for individual German universities to become fee-paying members in return for specialized services.
The worldwide network of DAAD offices abroad was expanded from 14 to 64. The marketing campaign has the slogans “Study in Germany – Land of Ideas” or “Research in Germany – Land of Ideas”, depending on the target audience. It was an immediate success – in just five years from 1999 to 2004 the number of international students in Germany rose by 50%.

Another new field of activity for DAAD during the last years has been the support for “German backed universities”, offshore ventures which involve German universities but always also a local partner. Among them are the German-Turkish University, the German University in Cairo, the German University in Amman, a number of projects in China and others – a total of over 30. In most of these projects, the language of instruction is English.

What about the students who are neither international students nor going abroad – i.e. the majority of all students? DAAD tries to promote “internationalization at home” for them through its new program “Internationalization of Teaching” which supports curriculum projects that give teaching an international dimension, projects which train faculty internationally and projects which draw upon the expertise of foreign experts for curriculum innovation. Some examples: International online game for the training of civil engineers, language tandems with international students on campus, development of international “case studies” for management students...

As a result of this wide array of activities, Germany comes first in the internationalization of higher education, ahead of Australia, the United Kingdom and China, according to a British Council Survey. The USA is only in sixth position, behind Malaysia. The ranking compares the higher education systems in twelve countries regarding access, quality and reputation of degrees, support for foreign students and encouraging their own students and academics to study and do research abroad. Germany scores in particular thanks to its internationalization strategy, which actively promotes mobility in both directions, and through the amount of funding.

Germany is not earning money with its international students since there are no overseas student fees. But the German economy is export-driven, needs an internationally qualified workforce and is increasingly facing a shortage of qualified manpower. DAAD is trying to strike a balance between foreign cultural policy (winning friends for Germany worldwide), development cooperation (capacity building in developing countries) and winning qualified individuals for life and work in Germany. Luckily, since internationalization comes high on the German government’s agenda, DAAD’s funding continues to be strong. This allows us to pursue an approach to internationalization which is rather based on cooperation than on competition alone, one where our partnerships are based on mutual gain rather than financial returns.

Dr. Dorothea Rüland, Secretary General, DAAD (March 2012)