

DAAD | Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF)

3rd Symposium on International Mobility

International Mobility of Students 2009

Repeat Survey on Study Visits to Other Countries
by German Students

Berlin, 14 May 2009

DAAD

Deutscher Akademischer Austausch Dienst
German Academic Exchange Service

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Summary of Findings

Repeat Survey on the International Mobility of Students 2009 Study Visits to Other Countries by German Students

Following a first survey on study visits abroad made by German students, carried out in January 2007, this survey was repeated in February 2009 to ascertain changes in the mobility behaviour of German students. In a national representative poll, around 7,000 students provided internet-supported information on their motives and experience in undertaking visits abroad for studying purposes.

The design of the survey and the used instruments fully correspond to the previous survey. This makes the findings entirely comparable to those polled two years ago.

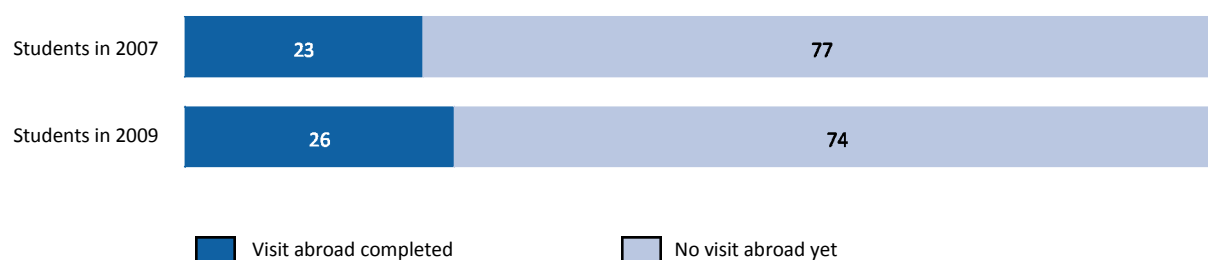
The polling instruments used were newly developed for this survey series. Although this makes a comparison with other surveys exploring the subject of students' international mobility more difficult, it nevertheless also provides a deeper and more extensive analysis of the questions and problems arising in connection with students' visits abroad.

Students with International Experience

In February 2009, 26% of all German students taking a first course of studies had stayed abroad for studying purposes, from a course of studies abroad to attending a language course. This represents a 3% increase in students' international mobility compared to 2007. As pleasing as an increase in the number of internationally mobile students is, one cannot immediately assume this marks a positive trend. The higher number of students with international experience is a snapshot figure which may easily fall back again.

1 Study-Related Visits Abroad by German Students

Shown in %

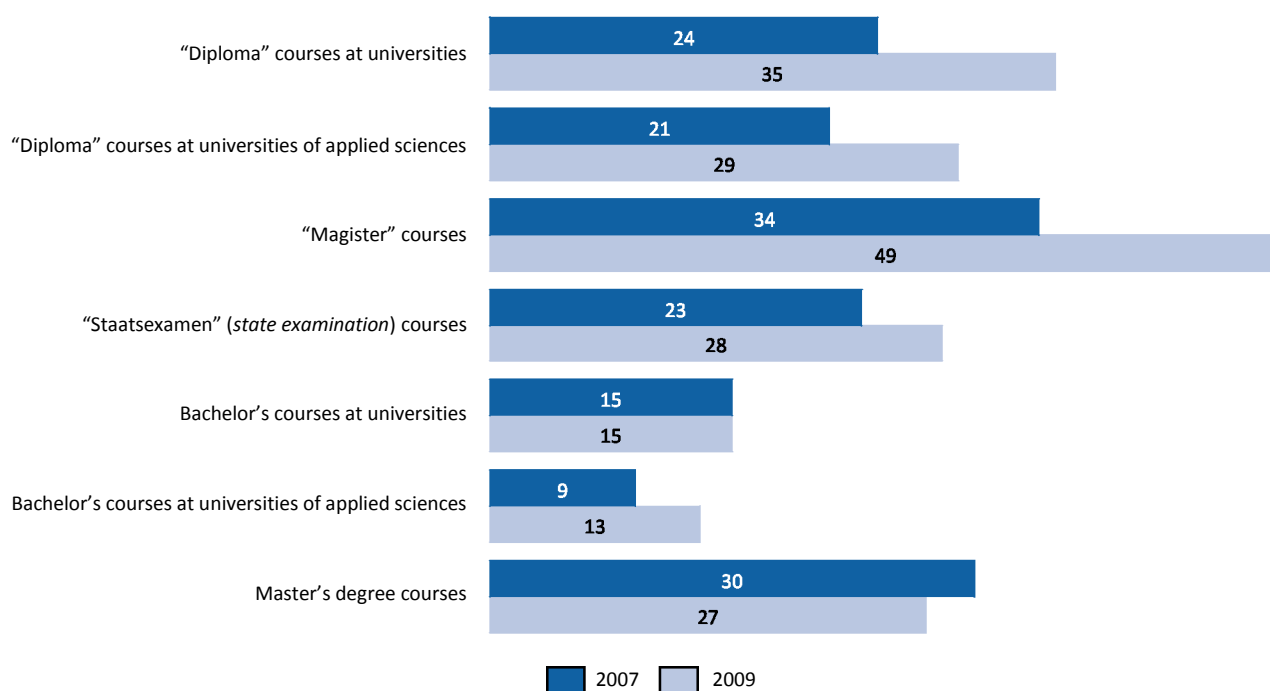


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The higher number of internationally mobile students arises from the current state of transition from the more conventional German higher education structures to the Bachelor's/Master's system. The majority of German students continue to study in "Diploma" and "Magister" courses. However, these courses mostly no longer accept new students; apart from study courses finishing with a "Staatsexamen" (*state examination*) qualification, the majority of first-time matriculated students enrol in Bachelor's degree programmes. This means that students seeking to achieve "Diploma" or "Magister" qualification are increasingly studying at higher semester levels and their average "studying age" is rising. However, those studying at higher semester levels typically have a higher share of fellow students with international experience.

These findings are confirmed by the trend in international mobility in study courses differentiated according to type of final qualification. In the case of conventional “Diploma” courses run at the universities and the universities of applied sciences, but also as regards “Magister” and “Staatsexamen” (*state examination*) courses, there is a distinct rise in the proportion of students who have experienced a visit abroad. This increase of up to 15% is firstly attributable to the rise in “studying age” in these conventional study courses. The lack of first-year students and hence a large proportion of students at higher semester levels has the effect of raising the mobility ratio. Secondly, however, it is exactly here, at these higher semester levels of conventional study courses, that the proportion of internationally mobile students has increased once more compared to 2007. Both trends, the increase in the average “studying age” in conventional study courses and the additional rise in international mobility in the higher semesters of such courses, have led to an increase of the overall share of students with international experience. The Bachelor’s courses run at the universities do not have such a positive impact. Here the share of internationally mobile students remains unchanged. A level of 15% was already recorded two years ago. By comparison, the Bachelor’s courses run at the universities of applied sciences show a certain improvement in the situation. Here the share of students with international experience rose by four percentage points to 13% and is hence closing on the value recorded at the universities. This trend also contributes to an increase in the overall proportion of students with experience of study-related visits abroad. And yet it is too early to begin speaking of a positive trend. Two measures of mobility are not sufficient to do so.

2 Study-Related Visits Abroad by German Students by Type of Final Qualification



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As regards students in Master's courses, one can still only speak in terms of trends. The share of students with experience of visits abroad has not risen in these study courses but has dropped three percentage points to 27%. It is to be anticipated that Master's degree courses have not had a positive impact so far. However, one must not overlook the fact that, especially in the case of the recently introduced Master's study courses, it will take a few years more and a growing number of students before the studying behaviour and mobility pattern truly emerge.

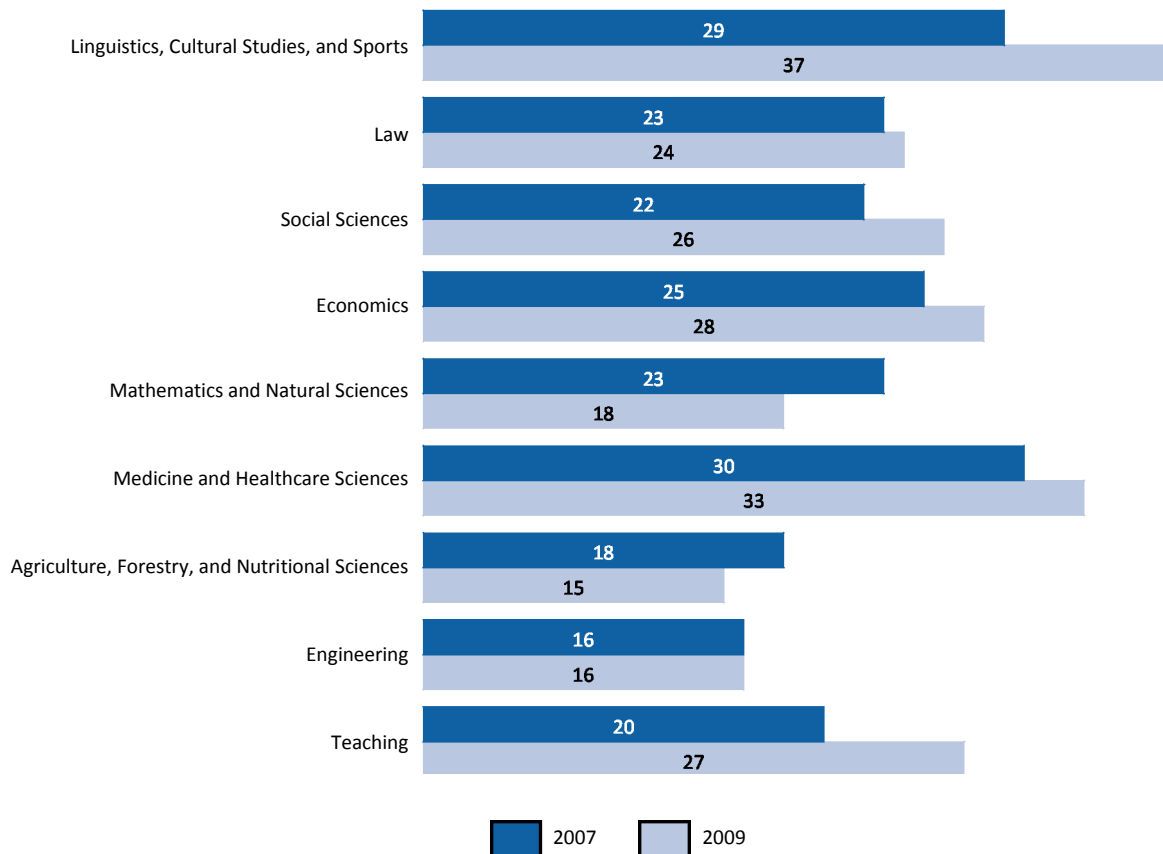
International Experience in the Various Subject Groups

Between the various subject groups there are clear differences in the frequency of visits abroad made by German students. These differences are firstly due to the cultural background of the subjects and secondly come from current developments in the transition from conventional study courses to Bachelor's/Master's courses.

Linguistics, Cultural Studies, and Medicine continue to have a particularly high number of internationally mobile students, whereas Agricultural Science, Forestry Science, Nutritional Sciences, Engineering, Mathematics, and Natural Sciences have relatively few mobile students. This general finding is accompanied by a series of significant changes, however.

3 Study-Related Visits Abroad by German Students by Subject Group

Shown in %



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Particularly Linguistics and Cultural Studies, as well as Social Science and Economics, show a rise in the number of students with international experience. These are the subject groups where the above-described correlation is especially striking: though many students are still matriculated in “Diploma” or “Magister” courses, first-time matriculations are particularly evident with respect to Bachelor’s courses. The considerable number of students at higher semester levels distorts the average share of internationally mobile students. It is to be expected that, with growing numbers of students taking Bachelor’s courses, the mobility level will diminish again.

An entirely different situation exists in the subject groups Mathematics and Natural Sciences, Agricultural Science, Forestry Science, Nutritional Sciences, and Engineering. These disciplines already showed a relatively low number of internationally mobile students in the last survey. In the past two years, this mobility level has either diminished still further or has remained stable at a relatively low figure. This is not only due to the corresponding cultural background of the subjects being studied but also comes as a result of the early and relatively speedy transition to Bachelor’s/Master’s courses, especially in Agricultural Science, Forestry Science, Nutritional Sciences, and Engineering run at the universities of applied sciences.

Study courses leading to a “Staatsexamen” (*state examination qualification*) present an inconsistent picture. Among students reading Law, the frequency of study-related visits abroad has changed very little. In essence, studying requirements have also changed very little. Among those studying Medicine, the share of students with international experience is a little higher than two years ago. The interest in relatively short student placements abroad has continued to grow in this subject group. By comparison, international mobility among teacher candidates has significantly increased. 27% of them have experienced a study-related visit abroad. Further analysis is required to determine whether the causes of these developments are to be found in changes in the cultural background of subjects studied, a shift towards more foreign language teachers, or labour market adjustments.

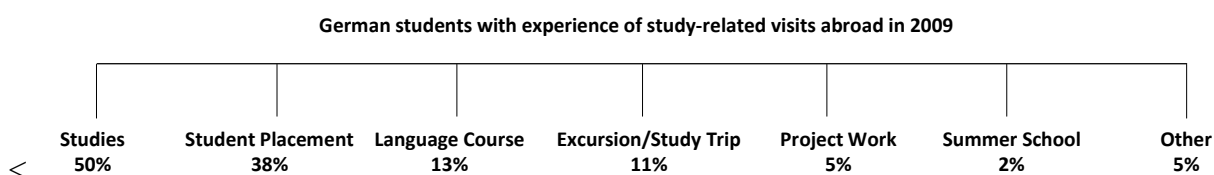
Visit Types and Duration

Every second student with experience of study-related visits abroad was matriculated at a foreign university for a certain period of time. It was the same situation two years ago. Particularly the Social Sciences have a high share of students with experience of studying abroad, whereas their number is lower in the Natural Sciences and Engineering. The reverse situation exists when it comes to student placements abroad. This type of visit abroad is particularly made by future doctors and engineers. However, one cannot overlook the fact that the share of internationally mobile students who completed a placement in another country has declined from 41% to 38%.

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Study-Related Visits Abroad by German Students by Type of Visit

Multiple responses



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There are no significant changes in the other types of study-related visits abroad. 13% of all mobile students have registered for a language course abroad at least once, their number being especially high among students of Linguistics and Cultural Studies. International study visits are particularly made by students in the subject group Mathematics and Natural Sciences, which is also true of visits abroad related to project work. Of the overall figure of internationally mobile students, 11% and 5% respectively have already made such visits.

Only a low number of students have made use of summer schools so far. Compared to 2007, the corresponding share has even declined from 3% to 2%.

There are also clear differences in the preferred type of visit when differentiating between the various types of final qualification sought by students. Even if one may not overlook the fact that the various study courses have different cultural backgrounds, such an appraisal provides the first indications of possible trends. In the case of conventional "Diploma" courses at university, internationally mobile students are particularly interested in studying abroad. This is even more true of Master's courses. In this respect the latter are a special case in the sense that, due to frequent multiple visits made parallel to the study course, language courses and study visits are undertaken more frequently than on average. By contrast, student placements play a comparatively minor role. The situation is reversed for "Diploma" courses run at the universities of applied sciences. Student placements are the key type of visit abroad here. Only a third of such students had matriculated for a studies course at a foreign university. In the case of "Staatsexamen" (*state examination*) courses, studying abroad and doing a student placement are more or less equally popular.

5 Study-Related Visits Abroad by German Students by Type of Visit and by Type of Final Qualification

Multiple responses; results shown in %

Type of Final Qualification	Type of Visit					
	Studies	Student Placement	Language Course	Study Visit	Project Work	Summer School
"Diploma" courses at universities	62	36	11	11	8	1
"Diploma" courses at universities of applied sciences	32	54	8	13	7	4
"Magister" courses	67	28	21	19	6	2
"Staatsexamen" (<i>state examination</i>) courses	42	45	11	9	2	2
Bachelor's courses at universities	46	26	21	9	5	1
Bachelor's courses at universities of applied sciences	38	38	13	12	3	1

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Doing a course of studies abroad has a similar significance in the Bachelor's courses run at the universities as it has in the conventional "Diploma" courses, albeit at a significantly lower level. Here, apart from the short-term language courses, all types of visit abroad have decreased in significance. By contrast, student placements, language courses, and study visits are averagely popular among Bachelor students with international experience at the universities of applied sciences. Around two fifths of such Bachelor students have completed a course of studies abroad, exceeding the comparative share of students in "Diploma" courses at the universities of applied sciences.

The average duration of all study-related visits abroad by German students amounts to 6 months, a figure unchanged since 2007. A quarter of students with international experience spent no more than three months abroad for studying purposes and only 8% spent more than a year in foreign countries. The average duration differs considerably, depending on the type of visit. A course of studies abroad at a foreign university lasts an average of six months whereas a foreign placement is averagely three months and project work two months. All other types of visit abroad average only one month.

6 Overall Duration of Foreign Visits by German Students

Shown in %



Average Duration of Various Types of Visit Abroad

Shown as median values

Studies	→	6 months
Language Course	→	1 month
Student Placement	→	3 months
Excursion/Study Trip	→	1 month
Project Work	→	2 months
Summer School	→	1 month

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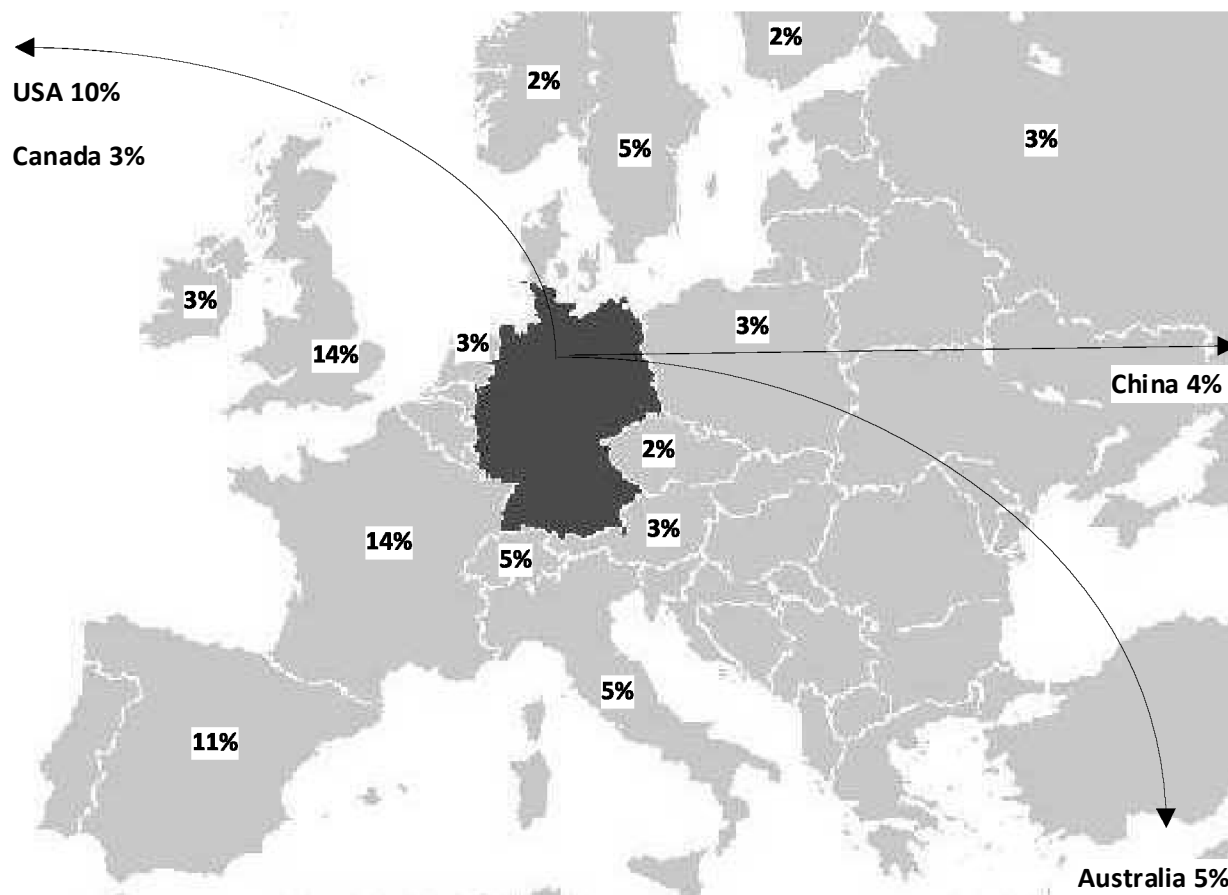
Countries and Regions

Compared to 2007, there are no significant changes in the regions preferred by students for study-related visits abroad. Western Europe remains the favourite destination for internationally mobile German students. Around two thirds of all mobile students spent one or several visits there. The UK, France, and Spain continue to top the popularity stakes as host countries. Next, by a clear margin, are Italy, Switzerland, and Sweden. 12% of students chose the USA or Canada and only 11% were drawn towards Eastern European countries. Here, Russia and Poland top the charts among students interested in going abroad. Another 11% of those polled visited an Asian country. China and Japan were the most popular destinations here. Latin America and Africa each attracted 7% of students to make study-related foreign visits there. And a similarly high share of students have already made study-related visits to Australia or other countries of this continent.

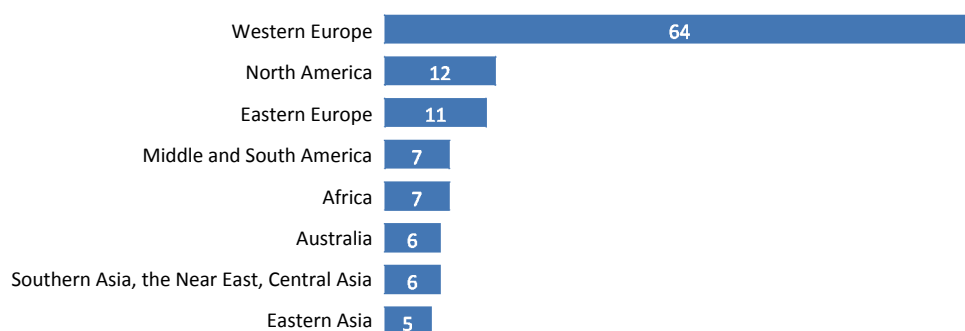
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Key Host Countries of Study-Related Visits Abroad

Multiple responses

**Destination Regions of Study-Related Visits Abroad**

Multiple responses; results shown in %



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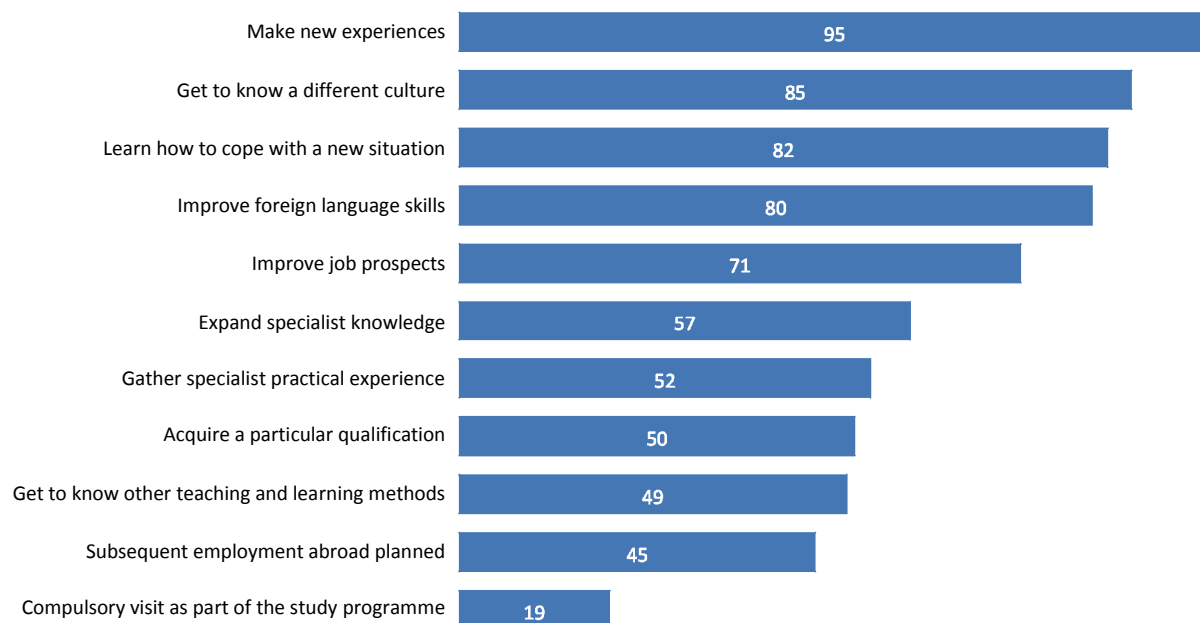
Reasons for Study-Related International Mobility

The motivation for study visits abroad among German students has not seen any major changes in the last two years. The students in question still explain their studying abroad as being based on a desire to acquire social and communication skills. Almost all those polled hoped to make new experiences, wanted to get to know different lifestyles and working cultures, and learn how to cope with a new and unaccustomed situation. Improving their foreign language skills was also stated as a key factor.

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Reasons for Study-Related Visits Abroad

Responses ranging from 1 = “completely unimportant” to 5 = “very important”, range values 4 & 5 shown in %



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A similarly strong motivating factor for a study visit abroad was the expectation of improved job prospects. Almost three in four students cited this as a reason. By contrast, students attached less importance to reasons associated with improving their specialist qualifications and preparing for a career. Only every second student aspired to a high degree of specialist knowledge, particular qualifications, or specialist practical experience. However, the share of internationally mobile students who emphasise aspects related to job and career benefits has increased somewhat over the last two years.

Quite a few students mentioned job and career intentions in the immediate future as the decisive factor for undertaking visits abroad. Almost every second student associates visits abroad with the intention of subsequently pursuing a profession in a foreign country.

Internationally mobile students in Bachelor's courses typically have a high share of compulsory visits abroad. Although generally around a fifth of students mention this aspect as a key factor for a foreign visit during their studies, around a third of polled Bachelor students cite the compulsory nature of their visit abroad.

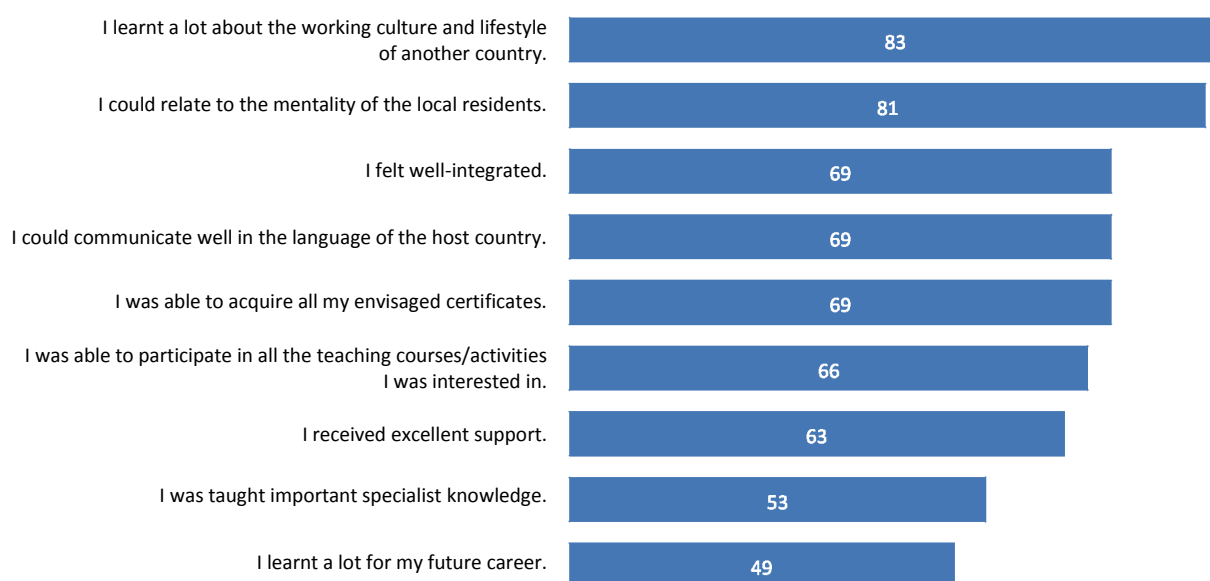
Experiences during Study-Related Visits Abroad

Nothing has changed about the positive experiences made by German students in foreign countries. The overwhelming majority still return home with enriching and pleasant experiences to tell. A mere minority mention cultural differences and subject-related, organisational shortcomings. This positive assessment among students with international experience is cited across the board, regardless of the visited host region.

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Experiences during Study-Related Visits Abroad

Responses ranging from 1 = “not true at all” to 5 = “very true”, range values 4 & 5 shown in %



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Over four fifths of the polled students not only related well to the mentality of the local residents but almost as many again felt well-integrated. This is also attributable to the fact that the majority of internationally mobile students possess foreign language skills that allowed them to communicate in the respective language of the country without any difficulty.

A high proportion (83%) felt that the foreign visits had also given them deep insights into the working culture and lifestyle of the host country. This was helped along by the fact that two thirds were able to participate in all the teaching courses and other study-related activities they were interested in. A similar number of students stated they had acquired all their envisaged certificates.

The experiences made by internationally mobile students firstly show that the foreign visits are well prepared and secondly also reveal that the students go to universities abroad with the right attitude and expectations. They experience hardly any disappointments during their stay because they are well informed and do not have entirely erroneous or exaggerated expectations of their study visits.

Nevertheless, students remain ambivalent about the learning benefits of foreign visits. Even if assessments have slightly improved since 2007, no more than half the students polled had an unreserved opinion about having been taught important specialist knowledge abroad and also about having learned a lot for their future jobs and careers. Between around a fifth and a quarter of them felt no gain at all in terms of having acquired specialist knowledge.

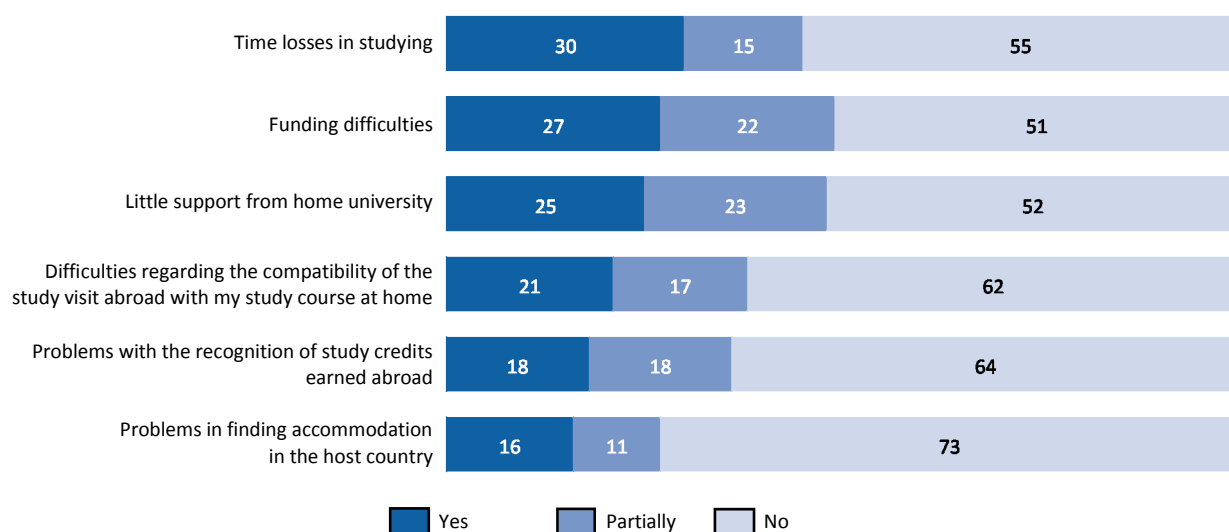
Problems in the Organisation and Execution of Study-Visits Abroad

Despite the favourable experiences made by German students, the preparation and execution of foreign visits is not problem-free. The students' biggest concern is the time possibly lost by undertaking a period of studying abroad. No less than every third person polled who had made a study-related visits abroad cited this as a big problem. Only half of those polled felt quite free of this concern.

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Problems regarding Study-Related Visits Abroad

Responses ranging from 1 = "not at all" to 5 = "to a great extent", range values 1 & 2, 3, 4 & 5 shown in %



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A similar situation exists regarding the funding of foreign visits. Around a quarter of internationally mobile students encountered great difficulties in this respect. Likewise, every fourth student complained about receiving too little support from his or her home university. In their view, had the corresponding help been available, some of the problems and difficulties would not have had to be faced at all. Only half the students polled were completely satisfied with the support experienced from their home university.

Fewer difficulties were reported regarding the compatibility of the study visit abroad with the demands and requirements of the study course at home and the recognition of credits earned abroad. Here around a fifth of students who had made visits abroad respectively experienced big problems. Even if this proportion is happily small, one should not overlook the fact that the group of students unable to reconcile their study visit abroad with the requirements of their study course at home rose by four percentage points.

The least difficulties were apparently experienced by the search for accommodation in the host country. Only 16% of those polled who had undertaken visits abroad mentioned problems in this respect.

Whereas the various shares of students in university courses ending with a "Diploma" or "Staatsexamen" (*state examination*) qualification who had experienced such problems are close to the average, particular difficulties arose in the "Magister" courses. Students in the latter courses particularly often had problems regarding the funding of the foreign visit and time losses in studying, received too little support from their home university, had difficulties regarding the compatibility of the study visit abroad with the requirements of the study course at home, and encountered a lack of recognition of credits earned abroad.

11 Problems regarding Study-Related Visits Abroad by Type of Final Qualification

Shown in %

Type of Final Qualification	Problems					
	Time losses in studying	Funding problems	Little support from home university	Study course compatibility difficulties	Recognition of study credits earned abroad	Search for accommodation abroad
"Diploma" courses at universities	32	25	25	20	18	16
"Diploma" courses at universities of applied sciences	16	24	24	10	8	15
"Magister" courses	42	38	31	22	25	18
"Staatsexamen" (<i>state examination</i>) courses	32	24	24	23	20	17
Bachelor's courses at universities	30	34	26	29	17	17
Bachelor's courses at universities of applied sciences	19	27	25	14	11	15

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However, one must not forget that the most frequent and longest study-related visits abroad were made by "Magister" students. This fact, taken together with studying conditions which promote time losses and poor compatibility, explains the high level of problems encountered.

The situation is different in study courses run at the universities of applied sciences – both in the "Diploma" courses and the Bachelor's courses. Students in both these course types typically have few difficulties regarding the compatibility of the study visit abroad with the requirements of the study course at home and the recognition of credits earned abroad. This also means that the visits made abroad more rarely lead to time losses in studying. These positive findings are attributable to the fact that – at a relatively low mobility level – a high proportion of the visits abroad made by those studying at universities of applied sciences are partially or entirely pre-organised. However, in this respect the Bachelor's courses do not chalk up the same positive values achieved by the "Diploma" courses. This means that internationally mobile students in Bachelor's courses run at the universities of applied sciences voice greater concerns about the recognition of study credits earned abroad and the compatibility of study visits abroad with studying requirements at home than do those in the corresponding "Diploma" courses.

Students in Bachelor's courses at the universities particularly face two difficulties regarding the organisation of study visits abroad: these students more than averagely cite financing difficulties and problems regarding the compatibility of the study visit abroad with the requirements of the study course at home. These study-related visits to other countries are apparently not similarly pre-organised and prepared as is the case in Bachelor's courses at the universities of applied sciences.

Planning of Visits Abroad

Of all first-time matriculated German students, a good third plans to make a study-related visit abroad, around a fifth is uncertain about doing so, and around half rule out a (further) study visit abroad. This result is largely in keeping with the intentions of students polled in 2007.

Quite a few of those students who have already made a study-related visit abroad plan to do so again. No less than every third internationally mobile student is determined to make another trip abroad for studying purposes. A similar proportion of those who have not yet gone abroad to study share the same intentions.

12 Planning of Study-Related Visits Abroad by Type of Final Qualification

Shown in %

Type of Final Qualification	Visit Abroad Completed			No Visit Abroad Made		
	Another visit abroad planned	Another visit abroad uncertain	No further visit abroad planned	Visit abroad planned	Visit abroad uncertain	No visit abroad planned
Total	9	5	12	26	13	35
"Diploma" courses at universities	9	7	19	20	10	35
"Diploma" courses at universities of applied sciences	8	5	16	16	14	41
"Magister" courses	11	11	27	17	6	28
"Staatsexamen" (<i>state examination</i>) courses	10	4	14	25	11	36
Bachelor's courses at universities	7	3	5	38	16	31
Bachelor's courses at universities of applied sciences	5	3	5	31	19	37

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However, a good half of them are entirely uninterested in undertaking study-related visits abroad. This means that 35% of all first-time matriculated German students have neither been abroad yet nor do they intend to make such a study-related visit abroad while still studying.

The proportion of "stay-at-homes" is particularly high at the universities of applied sciences – both in the old "Diploma" courses and the new Bachelor's courses. 41% and 37% of the students here respectively decide against participating in any form of study-related international mobility. However, whereas in the "Diploma" courses almost a third of all students have already made such visits abroad, in the Bachelor's courses the respective proportion amounts to little more than a tenth.

The Bachelor's courses at the universities not only typically have a lower number of "stay-at-homes" but, given a lower mobility level, also have a higher number of students who are definitely planning to make a visit abroad.

A differentiation between subject groups reveals that a particularly high number of students reading Medicine and Economics plan to make study visits abroad. Students in the Social Sciences and teacher courses were found to have relatively low mobility intentions. These latter two course types also exhibit the highest respective proportions of students who are not at all interested in visits abroad. 47% and 42% respectively of those polled neither intend to go abroad for studying purposes nor have they ever visited other countries with this in mind.

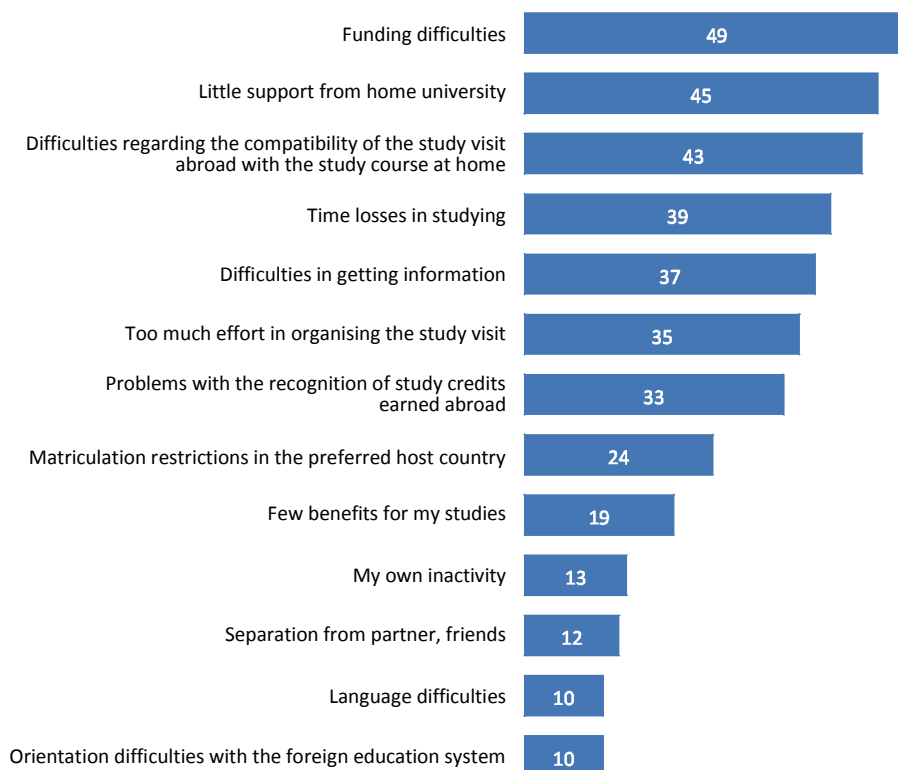
Reasons for not making Study-Related Visits Abroad

Around a tenth of all German students still fail in their attempt to make a study-related visit abroad. This proportion remains almost the same across all subject groups and course types. However, compared to the universities, the level was slightly higher at the universities of applied sciences, where it reached 12%.

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Reasons for not making Study-Related Visits Abroad

Responses ranging from 1 = "not at all" to 5 = "to a great extent", range values 4 & 5 shown in %



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The proportion of visits abroad that did not come about is unchanged compared to 2007. Hence a not inconsiderable pent-up demand for mobility is still untapped. In fact, the difficulties behind the failed attempts have evidently increased still further. In the view of the students concerned, the most important reasons for visits abroad not being made are funding difficulties, too little support from the home university, and substantial difficulties regarding the compatibility of the visit abroad with the demands and requirements of the respective study course. In each case, almost half the students whose visits abroad did not come about considers these aspects to have played a crucial role. In this connection, although the proportion of students with funding problems has diminished slightly, the other two aspects all the more frequently influence the outcome of mobility intentions. Among students in Bachelor's courses at university whose desired visit abroad failed to come about, almost two thirds even state that they had given up their plans due to the lack of compatibility of the visit abroad with the requirements of their study course at home.

Other key obstacles included the fear of time losses in studying, information problems, organisational difficulties, and problems regarding the recognition of study credits earned abroad. Between 30% and 40% of the respectively polled students cite these difficulties. All these reasons are partly given much more frequently than two years ago.

By contrast, other problems play a minor role in defeating mobility intentions. In each case, about a tenth of all students who were unable to make their visit abroad cited language difficulties, lack of orientation in the foreign education system, own inactivity, or also the unwillingness to be separated from their partners and friends for a certain time.

In addition, there is a rising tendency for students to cite matriculation difficulties in the preferred host country and doubts about the benefits of the visit abroad for the study course at home. These reasons are currently stated by a fourth and fifth respectively of all students unable to make a study-related visit abroad.

Reasons for a General Lack of Interest in Study-Related Visits Abroad

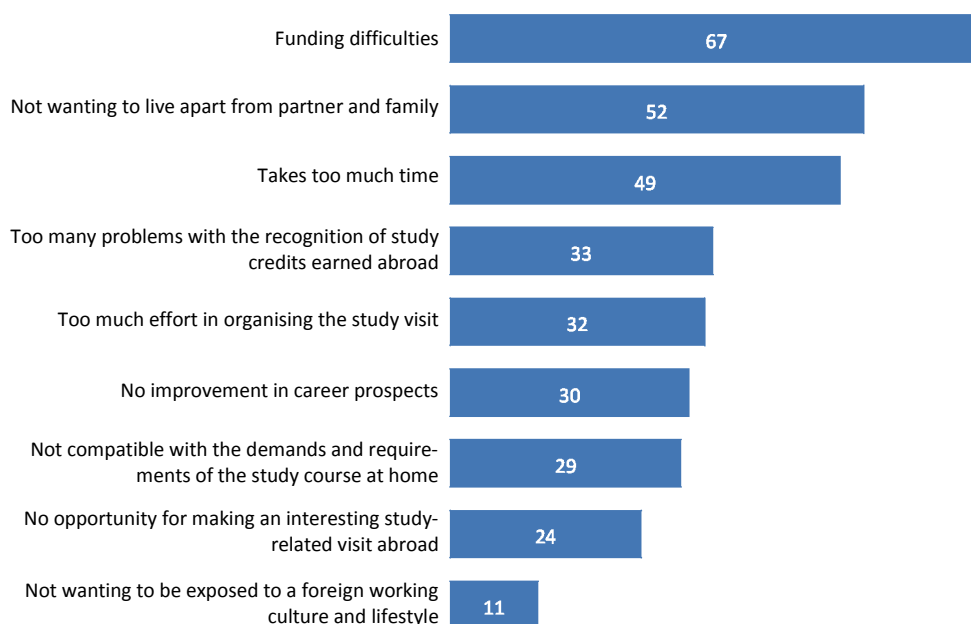
Around a third of all first-time matriculated German students rejects the idea of making a study-related visit abroad themselves. Little has changed in the reasons given compared to 2007. The biggest obstacles mentioned are funding problems, the separation from partners or friends, and feared time losses in studying. In each case, a third of these students cited too many problems regarding the recognition of study credits earned abroad and the non-compatibility of the visit abroad with the requirements of the study course at home. Especially the latter aspect has become very much more significant as a reason for rejecting mobility. It is particularly mentioned by students in Bachelor's courses at university.

Another third of the students concerned estimates that organising such a visit abroad would take too much effort and that it would not improve their career prospects. This view is particularly held by those studying in "Staatsexamen" (*state examination*) courses. These students typically see no opportunities for themselves as regards making interesting study-related visits abroad. Overall, this sentiment is shared by a fourth of all those students who have so far neither been abroad for studying purposes nor plan to make such a visit.

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Reasons for a Lack of Interest in Study-Related Visits Abroad

Responses ranging from 1 = "completely unimportant" to 5 = "very important", range values 4 & 5 shown in %



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Conclusion

The proportion of all German students who have completed a study-related visit abroad rose from 23% to 26% over the last two years. This favourable increase, however, is particularly due to certain developments in conventional study courses leading to a “Diploma”, “Magister”, or “Staatsexamen” (*state examination*) qualification. These are the courses still attended by the majority of students, albeit – due to the changeover to new higher education structures – predominantly at higher semester levels, and for this reason alone they exhibit a superproportional degree of international mobility compared to the general student average. In addition, it is particularly in these courses that an increase in the proportion of students with international experience is noted. In the new Bachelor’s courses at the universities, however, the mobility level has remained at 15%, whereas at the universities of applied sciences it has increased from 9% to 13%.

This constellation strengthens the assumption that the intensive activities undertaken to promote international student mobility have particularly reached students in the conventional courses. In the Bachelor’s courses these same activities were evidently unable to achieve the same measure of effectiveness in helping remove the hindrances to study visits rooted in a short studying period and a strong organisational structure. The findings so far lead to the conclusion that, without more forceful and direct integration of international mobility into the curriculum, no increase in the share of Bachelor students with international experience can be achieved. If corresponding measures are not taken, it is to be presumed that, after the foreseeable expiry of a large proportion of the conventional study courses, there will be a distinct decrease in the mobility level of German students.

Based on current knowledge, the Master’s courses would only be able to buck this trend to a limited extent, quite apart from the fact that the number of German students who will acquire their Master’s degree by studying at a foreign university is still unknown. Firstly, only a certain proportion of Bachelor students sign up for a Master’s course and, secondly, the mobility level in the Master’s courses is currently not all too high for students studying at higher semester levels, namely 27%, including earlier study-related visits made abroad.

The contribution made by the Bachelor’s courses is essential for achieving a high proportion of students with international experience. Specifically focused offers of visits abroad which are compliant with the studying requirements at home will definitely be taken up by the students. The number of students wishing and intending to acquire study-related international experience is no less in Bachelor’s courses than in other course types.

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