

Germany top for foreign students

Is Germany better at teaching university courses in English than universities in English-speaking countries?

Germany has been named as the most supportive country for overseas students, in an international league table.

Among the attractions for international students is the increasing availability in Germany of courses taught entirely in English, so much so that students can complete degrees without ever having to speak German.

In the international zones of these classes, students from Germany, the United States and China participate in seminars conducted by German professors speaking in English.

The survey from the British Council which has placed Germany in first place is called the Global Gauge.

It comes ahead of a major British Council conference in Hong Kong examining university globalisation, called Going Global, which begins on Thursday.

The league table ranks university systems on measures such as openness, degree quality, how widely degrees are recognised, support for overseas students and how much students were encouraged to spend time abroad.

International policy

The UK was ranked in third place, with China coming fourth, ahead of the United States in sixth place, in a table showing 11 of the biggest players in the overseas student market.

The strongest overall performance was from Germany, which has promoted a deliberate policy of internationalization.

There are more students from Germany studying abroad than any other European country and it wants half of its students to spend at least a term abroad, giving Germany one of the world's most mobile student populations.

The global market in overseas students has become a highly-lucrative business. The British Council estimates that it is worth £8bn a year to the UK economy.

But one of the attractions of Germany is that overseas students do not pay any more in tuition fees than home students.

Universities in many parts of Germany do not charge any tuition fees, which mean in those places overseas students do not pay any fees at all.

No tuition fees

Freie Universität Berlin, a top-ranking research university, has been part of this internationalisation project. It anticipates that a third of its students could be from overseas in the future.

"It's a well kept secret, that students are able to come here and there are very few barriers," says David Ravensbergen.

He is taking part in a seminar at the university's John F Kennedy Institute. It's conducted entirely in English - with language skills at a level where it is hard to distinguish between those who have English as a first and second language.



German students are encouraged to go abroad: Julia Sunaric has studied in Spain, the UK and China

He is also impressed by the way overseas students in Germany do not pay higher fees. In other countries, he says it can be a case of "internationalism for those who can afford it".

"One of the strongest motivators is finance. To go to university in Canada means taking on debt. It's essentially free to do it in Germany. It's incredibly appealing not to have to mortgage your future."

Sophie Perl, a student from the United States, also echoes the appeal of being able to study abroad, while paying less than at home.

"I think the biggest factor is financial. In the US a graduate programme would cost hundreds of thousands of dollars, in Germany it doesn't cost anything. And it doesn't cost more for foreign students than it does for German students."

Dr Christian Lammert, who is leading the seminar, delivers what he says is now a "completely international" type of course. Even the noticeboards in the corridor have information in English.

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OVERSEAS FRIENDLY

- 1. Germany
- 2. Australia
- 3. UK
- 4. China
- 5. Malaysia
- 6. US
- 7. Japan
- 8. Russia
- 9. Nigeria
- 10. Brazil
- 11. India

Source: British Council