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Cost Sharing and Funding of International Student Career Services: Public-Private Partnerships in the German Context

By Jessica Schueller, Miami University (Ohio)

In some countries, employers are viewed as beneficiaries of international student mobility and thus as a funding source for supporting international student programming. In this study, higher education institutions in Germany were surveyed about career services for international students. From the responding institutions (n=141, 33.6%), one key result revealed that over 10% of career services for international students at German universities are funded in whole or in part by local employers, regional development agencies, or employer associations. This cost-sharing model exhibits that employers are increasingly active in providing support and that there is a tendency to fund services instead of scholarships.

Keywords: *international student mobility, cost sharing, Germany, career services*

Career services are key to attracting and retaining international students to higher education institutions (HEIs) (Choudaha & Schulmann, 2014; Luo, 2013). Career services for international students, also referred to as international career services (ICS), are specialized support for preparing international students to find work in home, host, or third countries. In Anglophone countries, ICS are often linked to student retention and institutional success (Andrewartha & Harvey, 2017; Balin et al., 2016; Loo, 2016; McFadden & Seedorff, 2017; Walter-Samli & Samli, 1979; e.g., Yang et al., 2002). In Europe, the emphasis on career services for international students began in the past decade (Rickmann et al., 2020; Zeltner, 2018). As one of the main European destinations for international students, Germany has seen more activity in this area (DAAD & DZHW, 2022).

Funding for international student mobility usually supports individual students through scholarships (Campbell & Neff, 2020). This brief discusses select results from a study on ICS in Germany, which reveals an emerging interest from companies and industry partners to subsidize career services for all international students at a particular institution. The examples presented illustrate that those who benefit from international student mobility—including employers—can also contribute to it.

Background of the Study

Germany's higher education system is mostly tuition-free and primarily funded with public resources. International students in Germany include domestic students and scholars with migration backgrounds, international degree-seeking or exchange students, and refugees (Wolter, 2020). As of winter semester 2020/2021, German HEIs hosted 324,729 international students; Chinese students account for 31%, followed by students from India (20%) and Syria (17%) (DAAD & DZHW, 2022).

Career services for international students in Germany have received attention from German policymakers and stakeholders (Böhm et al., 2021; Morris-Lange et al., 2021) due to the combined challenges of demographic decline and labor market shortages, as well as a 75% increase in international student enrollment between 2000–2021 (DAAD & DZHW, 2022). The internationalization of career services in Germany is better documented than in other European countries (Rickmann et al., 2020). Surveys conducted by the German Rector's Conference, the Career Service Network Germany e.V., as well as the Expert Council of German Foundations on

Integration and Migration indicate high levels of institutional interest in internationalizing career services and identify international students as a key target group (Böhm & Brandl, 2014; CGFIM, 2015; CSND, 2015).

While the number of international students in English-language programs is increasing, most German employers require their workers to possess a high level of German proficiency and familiarity with German culture. Universities have noticed this disconnect, and as mediators between students and the labor market, have created career programming for international students (Schueller, 2022a). Some of these programs are supported in part by industry actors with a vested interest in international student retention.

State baseline funding and third-party funding constitute the main pillars of Germany's state-dominated financing model (Hüther & Krücken, 2018). German HEIs continue to be funded by taxpayers, although there has been a nominal increase in tuition-bearing private institutions (Teichler, 2018). In recent years, third-party funding has increased, although two-thirds of such funds are public money that is rerouted to institutions through competitive selection processes, such as those for temporary research projects. This is key to understanding the public nature of public-private funding partnerships, since separating public and private funds is often difficult.

Method

This study encompassed a website review and a survey. The website review entailed a quantitative analysis of ICS at all 420 state-recognized German universities, as well as qualitative reporting of the areas in which ICS provided support. ICS was defined as providing career services specifically for international students by an individual employee, as part of a project, or as a separate office (Schueller, 2022b). Five areas of service provision were identified that distinguish ICS from domestic career services: labor market, networking, applications, skills and work experience, and culture (Schueller, 2022b). In these areas, the support provided is different for international and national students.

The results of the website review were used to design the survey, which included 17 categorical and two open-ended questions. The questions involved reporting the state and structure of an HEI's ICS and further support needed. Responses of international office professionals from 141 of the 420 HEIs (33.6%) were included in the analysis.

In this brief, select results that speak to the funding mechanisms for ICS are analyzed descriptively. Over 10% of respondents indicated their ICS were funded by private parties: local employers, regional development agencies, or employer associations. Two respondents left comments specifically about public-private funding. Web-based research was conducted to triangulate the survey results.

The surveyed institutions were guaranteed confidentiality of their responses so as not to incite any form of benchmarking or impact funding. Thus, they have been anonymized here, with this brief referring only to structures that multiple universities use for funding ICS; no direct reference to individual institutions is made.

Results and Analysis

The respondents were given eight options regarding ICS funding: university funds; associations or labor market organizations; local companies or businesses; state government; federal government; private sponsors or supporters; the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD); and others. From the 141 responding institutions, 78 (55%) replied to this question. Table 1 summarizes ICS funding sources.

Table 1*Funding sources of ICS in Germany*

Source	N	%
DAAD	43	58.9%
Institution	33	45.2%
Private sponsors/supporters; associations/labor market organizations; local companies and economic organizations; other private actors*	14	12.3%
State government	12	16.4%
Federal government	7	9.6%
No answer	4	5.5%
Others	3	11%

Source: Author's own computation based on study results.

*The categories listed have been combined to protect respondent confidentiality.

Respondents were from state-recognized public and private institutions. Further, there were no location patterns, with funded ICS in Baden-Württemberg, Thuringia, Sachsen, Berlin, and Hessen. This is noteworthy because, while some states face grave regional labor market shortages, others do not. When asked why an ICS was established, only five institutions (3.5%) responded that the reason was labor market needs.

Cooperation between universities, students, and employers, mostly as company visits, was among the top five most frequently offered services. All institutions reported they worked with international and national employers, employer associations, and/or the chambers of commerce. The funding amount provided by the private organizations was only publicly accessible in one case, which included €4 million over multiple years to study success measures overall, not only ICS.

Institutions using cost-sharing or employer-backed funding models to finance ICS did not report issues with financial resources, contrary to those using alternative funding sources. Those receiving wholly private funds or a public-private funding mix were grouped into three categories:

- 1) Single employer or employer foundation;
- 2) Employer/business association; and
- 3) Regional business development agency.

The first case involves funding by a single employer, who matches funds and/or finances concrete initiatives. Sometimes, the funds are sourced from the company's foundation; this may include funding for programs that offer services for a broad range of students. ICS programs funded through these agencies tend to focus on retaining and supporting students interested in working in critical industries within a particular region.

The second case is funding by regional development agencies and, sometimes, local banks as well. These agencies develop the region, including foreign talent attraction. The ICS programs funded through these agencies have a heavy focus on bringing international students and companies together, for example, through networking events.

The third case entails funding by employers or business associations. These associations exist across the country to represent industry interests from the local to the international level.

Companies may pay a membership fee to the organization and get voting rights. The form of organization differs, meaning that some are conceived as non-profit organizations and others as profit-generating ones. In the cases in the study, the HEI receiving funding from business associations was from general associations. Programs funded through these agencies have a mixed focus on academic and career support.

In merging the commonalities among all three cases, a unique model for funding international student services emerges, which can be characterized as employer-backed public-private partnerships. This model has four defining components, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2

Public-private partnerships for funding ICS in Germany

Nr	Category	Description
1	Employer as a stakeholder	The employer's role as a stakeholder is emphasized from the perspective of their being a partner and beneficiary in international student mobility.
2	Final study phase	The focus is on funding the last phase of the international student life cycle, which may include support with final academic work (e.g., thesis advice), as well as career services. The goal is to support degree completion.
3	Support services	The emphasis is on funding support services as student-worker positions or professional staff. In either scenario, a service or support structure is offered.
4	Funding for all students	The centrality of funding services that all international students at a particular institution benefit from.

Source: Author's own computation based on study results.

These findings are novel in that they signal a tendency to fund services instead of individual students (e.g., scholarships) and that employers are active in providing support. Since many private organizations also receive public funding or are in some capacity connected to public institutions, this trend is best represented as a public-private partnership. Support, in most cases, is not solely private.

Implications for Policy, Practice, and Research

Sustainable, scalable career services for international students remain a challenge despite the centrality of career support for internationally mobile students (Rickmann et al., 2020). These results shed light on how public-private partnerships can be a means to fund international student support structures. Employer cost sharing, including public-private partnerships, could help create a more equitable, affordable international education space, and it remains an untapped funding strategy. Institutions and programs may consider key employers, business associations, or international alumni for soliciting funding for ICS. Support consolidation at the end of studies may be pertinent, considering individual scholarship funding has been critiqued as less effective than other methods that benefit wider groups of students (Campbell & Neff, 2020).

More research is needed to understand how widespread public-private partnerships fund international student services in Germany and other countries. In this study, ICS were investigated;

other services for international students may be funded partially or in full by private organizations. Exploring such partnerships in other countries may yield important comparisons and insights.

Conclusion

Select results from this study on ICS in Germany reveal a unique and emerging trend of private actors providing financial support for international student services. Support from public-private partnerships involving German employers emphasizes short-term funding for establishing services that support international student labor market integration. This form of state-employer cost sharing represents a model based on four components: 1) employer as stakeholder; 2) focus on the final study phase; 3) emphasis on student support; and 4) funding for all students. Employers across the globe benefit from international student mobility, and in the German context, this dynamic is especially relevant considering labor market shortages and demographic changes. The results emphasize that those who profit from international student mobility can also contribute to it.

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