

International students at FH Münster and their local employability

This handout contains the most important conclusions from the research within the ERASMUS+ Strategic Partnership “INTERLOCALITY” on local employability of international students of FH Münster in GERMANY. You can read about the bottlenecks they experience with regard to their orientation on the local labour market (internship, side jobs) and the success factors that contribute to finding a suitable job in the region after graduation. The perspectives of local employers, employees and other stakeholders are also discussed.

In 2022, as part of the INTERLOCALITY project, interviews were conducted with international students, regional employers, third party stakeholders and staff at FH Münster University of Applied Sciences and other Universities of Applied Sciences in Denmark, Finland and the Netherlands. The aim was to analyse the needs and experiences of these different parties and to identify the necessary information for the development of further activities within the project that focus specifically on international students in Germany.

Despite a high demand on the labour market, one important potential group is often overlooked: international students. Many of them find it difficult to find suitable employment in the region after graduation, leading them to return to their home countries or look for opportunities elsewhere. The partners in the INTERLOCALITY consortium see this as a missed opportunity, as they want to keep this talent in the region.

The INTERLOCALITY project aims to support international students in Germany with orientation and integration into the regional labour market.

FACTS AND FIGURES: International students in Germany

In the winter semester 2022/23, the number of international students enrolled at German universities rose significantly to 367,578, 5% more than in the previous year. They now account for 12.6% of the total number of students in Germany, 14.3% at universities and 10.0% at universities of applied sciences.

The main region of origin of these international students is Asia and the Pacific region with a share of 32%, followed by North Africa and the Middle East with 19% and Western Europe with 17%. For the first time, India is the leading country of origin with around 42,600 students, accounting for 12% of all international students in Germany. It is closely followed by China with around 38,700 students (11%) and Syria with around 15,600 students (4%).

The vast majority (93%) of international students enrolled at German universities in the winter semester 2022/23 are aiming to complete a degree in Germany; only 7% are exchange or visiting students with no intention of completing a degree. This means that temporary mobility is almost back to pre-pandemic levels, with only a slight decrease (from 8% in winter semester 2019/20 to 4% in winter semester 2020/21).

In terms of academic goals, 36% of international students are aiming for a Bachelor's degree, while 44% are aiming for a Master's degree. Among the study subjects, engineering is the most popular at 42%, followed by law, economics and social sciences at 25% (Source: DZHW German Centre for Higher Education Research and Science Studies)

PERSPECTIVES OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS AT FH Münster

Empowering international students: Navigating the educational landscape at FH Münster

Starting a higher education programme in a foreign country comes with a variety of challenges and successes. At FH Münster, the international student journey is a web of diverse experiences, hopes and hurdles. In a series of insightful interviews conducted in 2022, we delve into the heart of international students and explore the reasons behind their decision to choose Germany and FH Münster, their successes and difficulties during their academic journey and the support systems that guide them along the way.

The attraction of Germany lies in its excellent reputation in terms of education, advanced technological infrastructure and promising career opportunities. Many of the international students at FH Münster are attracted by the prospect of studying in a country known for its academic excellence. Reasons for choosing FH Münster include the availability of degree programmes in English, the attractiveness of smaller cities and the streamlined admissions process. Recommendations from friends or relatives already living in Germany also have a major influence on students' decisions.

The first year is a time of adjustment and discovery for international students. Whilst they enjoy the community fostered by open-minded lecturers and the support of their fellow students, they face a number of challenges. Bureaucratic hurdles, cultural adjustment and the disruptive effects of COVID-19 weigh heavily on their shoulders. Loneliness and finding part-time employment are recurring themes as students try to find a balance between academic endeavours and financial stability.



"Companies often hesitate to invest in training international students without prior experience. It's crucial for companies to give us a chance to grow and develop within their teams."

International Student

Amidst the hardships of the first year, a stable support network proves to be a lighthouse of hope. The International Office at FH Münster plays a central role in providing advice and assistance, alongside the unwavering support of fellow students and family ties. However, as student feedback shows, there is still a desire for more social events to encourage socialising and combat isolation.

In addition to traditional support programmes, international students would like targeted support in their job search. FH Münster acts as an intermediary between students and potential employers and offers a range of resources such as an alumni network, a student network, a job portal, networking events, guest lectures and company visits. Local language courses, workshops on local labour culture and laws, job application training and communication training are also considered essential for improving employability. Projects with companies provide practical experience and insight into industry practices.

Main differences between students:

Different academic backgrounds lead to different experiences among international students. Those enrolled in international business programmes often cite practical considerations such as ease of admission as the main reason for choosing FH Münster. Engineering students, on the other hand, are attracted by the high level of technology and the wide range of career opportunities in the region. These different motivations may have an impact on the challenges faced during their studies: international business students have more difficulties in finding internships and dealing with bureaucratic matters, while engineering students are more likely to be successful in finding relevant internships and part-time jobs.

The international student experience is a journey characterised by resilience, adaptation and change. Through open dialogue, targeted support and a shared commitment to excellence, FH Münster is able to pave the way for a truly enriching educational journey for all its students, regardless of their country of origin.

PERSPECTIVES OF EMPLOYERS

Unlocking opportunities: Employer insights into international talent acquisition

Just as international students embark on a transformative journey at FH Münster, employers must also navigate the dynamic landscape of talent acquisition and integration. From an employer's perspective, we shed light on the specialities of recruiting and working with international talent, drawing on insights from the interviews.

Employers recognise the immense value that international talent brings to their business. Not only are international employees often cost-effective, but they also offer a fresh perspective and diverse skill set that enriches the work environment. For multinational companies with multiple offices, internal job transfers are also an attractive option to utilise international talent across borders.

Successful hiring efforts depend on several key factors. Employers praise the smooth recruitment process in English, which facilitates seamless communication and integration of international applicants. In addition, the high motivation of international students to work for the company emphasises their commitment and dedication. The collaboration with FH Münster further improves the recruitment process and ensures a mutually beneficial relationship between employers and international talent.

INTERLOCALITY

"International students bring fresh knowledge, diverse perspectives, and theoretical insights, which are beneficial for our company's growth and process improvements."

Employer Statement

INTERLOCALITY

"English language skills are a big issue. International talents often speak better English than our staff, leading to communication problems and knowledge gaps."

Employer Statement

Despite the benefits, employers encounter challenges when recruiting international talent. Language barriers are a significant obstacle, especially when candidates do not speak German and companies are unwilling to conduct business in English. Bureaucratic hurdles and paperwork further complicate the recruitment process, which is exacerbated by the lack of HR departments in some companies.

Added to this are difficulties in finding suitable candidates, especially if there are no other international employees. Also, problems in finding accommodation were mentioned.

Employers work with FH Münster through various channels to promote co-operation and synergies between science and business. Contacts via lecturers, participation in trade fairs, company visits and internships are used for interaction and talent acquisition. Projects and guest lectures at FH Münster offer valuable insights and networking opportunities for both employers and students. Sponsorship initiatives, such as professorships, further strengthen relationships between employers and the academic community.



Support needed and key differences:

Employers need FH Münster's support in various aspects of talent acquisition and integration: Improved contacts for internships, support with onboarding and adapting to work culture, help with networking and post-hire support are among the main areas where collaboration with FH Münster is desired. The differences between employers, ranging from small businesses to large corporations, affect recruitment strategies and support needs, emphasising the importance of tailoring support to meet different requirements.

As employers endeavour to tap into the rich pool of international talent, collaboration with institutions such as FH Münster becomes increasingly crucial. By utilising resources, expertise and networks, employers and academic institutions can work together to create pathways for international students to succeed in their careers. Together, they are paving the way for a future where diversity, inclusion and outstanding talent come together to drive innovation and success in the global marketplace.

PERSPECTIVES OF FH MÜNSTER STAFF

Empowering international students and strengthening connections: Insights from higher education institution (HEI) staff

At FH Münster, university staff are instrumental in supporting international students and their integration into the local community and labour market. The interviews shed light on the various facts of this process.

International students are attracted to FH Münster for several reasons. They appreciate the range of degree programmes offered in English and the university's reputation for providing a high-quality education. The location of FH Münster in a smaller city contributes to its attractiveness and offers a pleasant environment that is conducive to learning. In addition, the numerous job opportunities and the possibility of double degrees make FH Münster even more attractive to international students.

However, international students face challenges during their academic journey. Finding internships and dealing with local bureaucracy prove to be difficult tasks. Language barriers, especially the need to speak German for internships, present significant hurdles. Adapting to the local education system and the lack of personal networks in the local community make the work of international students even more difficult.

Integration into the local labour market poses an additional challenge for international students. Often, both German and good English skills are required, and employers' narrow-mindedness and bureaucratic hurdles must be overcome. Differences in work culture and a lack of application skills further exacerbate the challenges.

To be successful in the local labour market, international students need to have a mixture of language skills, cultural awareness and application skills. A high level of proficiency in German and English, coupled with mastery of application processes such as writing CVs and cover letters and conducting interviews, are essential. Great emphasis is also placed on soft skills such as communication and punctuality.



FH Münster offers international students solid support systems to help them overcome these challenges. Services such as the International Office, the Career Service and the Student Counselling and Information Centre offer counselling and support throughout the course of studies. Mentoring by lecturers and courses in intercultural management offer further support. Networking opportunities through job fairs and extracurricular events on competence development complete the support infrastructure.

However, university staff themselves need additional support and skills to better support international students. Improved English language skills, cultural awareness and an understanding of the dynamics of the local labour market are essential. Training on diversity, equality and inclusion and an increase in the resources of the university staff are needed to strengthen the support infrastructure.

Through collaborative efforts and continuous improvement, FH Münster remains committed to empowering international students and fostering closer connections between students, employers and the local community through the INTERLOCALITY project.

INTERLOCALITY

"I need companies to offer more internships and job opportunities specifically designed for international students. Mentorship programs and assistance with visa processes would greatly ease the transition and integration into the professional world."

International Student

PERSPECTIVES OF THIRD PARTY ORGANISATIONS

Mastering challenges and breaking new ground: Insights from third party organisations

In the field of higher education, international students often face a variety of challenges on their academic journey. These hurdles range from administrative difficulties to issues of cultural adaptation and integration. From the interviews, several main difficulties emerged that international students face both during their studies and in the local labour market.

International students often struggle with bureaucratic procedures related to visas, national insurance numbers and other paperwork. In addition, unequal rights, such as lack of access to free public transport or government grants, pose a challenge. Language barriers hinder communication and social integration, and finding internships for English speakers can be tedious. In addition, a lack of knowledge about career opportunities and companies in the region combined with a smaller network and differences in work culture exacerbate the challenges for international students. Pressure to succeed from home and the feeling of not being integrated add to the difficulties.

Integration into the local labour market poses its own set of challenges for international students. Language barriers and bureaucratic hurdles often hinder the job search. Finding suitable accommodation close to the workplace makes things even more complicated. Furthermore, navigating the intricacies of local work culture and successfully applying for a job according to local customs can be daunting. Racial bias and discrimination at the recruitment stage exacerbate these challenges, while existing support initiatives are often not tailored to the needs of students or young professionals.

To be successful in the local labour market, international students need a range of skills. It is important to be flexible and proactive, to network and to show patience and perseverance in the face of rejection. Cultural awareness, language skills and the ability to present yourself effectively in CVs, cover letters and interviews are paramount. In addition, adapting to the local work culture, open-mindedness and curiosity are essential qualities.

SUPPORT FROM THIRD PARTY ORGANISATIONS FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

Third-party organisations play a crucial role in helping international students find employment. Partnerships with student associations, employment coaching and unemployment counselling are invaluable. In addition, participation in job fairs and networking events facilitates contact with potential employers. Personal support, expertise and a broad network of partners characterise the support offered by third-party organisations.

Personal support and a wealth of expertise within third party organisations contribute to their success. Mentoring programmes and employability camps have proven effective in certain contexts. However, challenges such as poor communication from universities about study programmes and insufficient staff in third party organisations hinder their effectiveness.

Third-party provider staff need better English language skills, knowledge of inclusion and understanding of the difficulties faced by international students. Training on diversity, equality and inclusion and increased collaboration with universities and government agencies are essential. In addition, more international staff and guaranteed long-term funding are needed to strengthen the support infrastructure.

This handout was created in 2024 by FH Münster Interlocality team, consisting of Sarah Schönfelder (TAFH Münster GmbH), Anna Hölscher (Career Service), Liv-Sophia Giesecking (TAFH Münster GmbH) and Nadine Pantel (International Office). The content was compiled on the basis of more than 40 interviews with international students, university staff and external multipliers. The research was carried out by Prof. Marian Thunnissen and Dr. Loes van Beuningen from FONTYS University of Applied Sciences, Institute for HRM and Psychology

