

They are keen to develop their personality and hope for better opportunities on the job market: a stay abroad is a great way for students to get ahead. When choosing a university, students mainly base their decisions on a university's good reputation, the attractiveness of a location, and ranking results. These were the findings of a survey conducted by the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD). A total of 580 students from SRH University Heidelberg, most of them German nationals (65 per cent), took part in the study entitled "Benchmark Internationale Hochschule" (Benchmark International University). They rated the support provided by their university's International Office (IO) as positive, giving it an average score of 4.36 out of 5.

The vast majority of SRH students have no doubt that they will be able to complete their degree within the standard period of study, in spite of the pandemic situation. In fact, 80 per cent of them said as much. In many aspects, SRH University Heidelberg was rated more highly by its students than the reference group, comprising 14 higher education institutions, most of which were state-run. "We are delighted about this positive result," stated Bettina Pauley, Head of the International Office (IO) at SRH University Heidelberg. The IO provides assistance to students wanting to go abroad, helping them to choose the right partner university or internship. The IO team also helps incoming students – those wishing to study at SRH University Heidelberg – in their efforts to find accommodation or sort out visa issues. Besides offering language courses, the IO also organises lots of cross-cultural events to help international students get to know their fellow students.

Study abroad in spite of the pandemic?

It goes without saying that the coronavirus pandemic played a key role in the DAAD study. Asked whether they could imagine using the relevant services online instead of actually studying abroad, the overwhelming majority of students replied in the negative: they would not be able to learn the language as effectively, they would be unable to build a network and, ultimately, they would not gain any intercultural experience. This is exactly why the work of the IO is such an important form of support. Consequently, the international students at SRH University Heidelberg were very satisfied: "The International Office was very supportive during the pandemic situation," was one comment. Another student added: "The International Office has excellent resources, the team is always receptive and goes out of its way to ensure that students have the best possible experience abroad, even during challenging times."

Lots of international activities in spite of the pandemic

At the start of the year, the IO regularly organises a campus rally for all international students; whether on campus or digitally, they all got to know their university and fellow students better. In an effort to promote intercultural exchange, the IO has launched a buddy programme. Local students accompany their international counterparts, helping them find their way around their new university. More than 40 buddy pairs have already been matched. In addition, student ambassadors, acting as central contact persons for the relevant degree programmes, ensure that all international students are made to feel welcome. Joint online courses and an Easter egg hunt, with social distancing and masks, were also held during the year of the pandemic. And if international students had to quarantine for a while upon arrival on campus, the IO made sure they were supplied with provisions and offered online options for getting to know other students.

“A period abroad is a unique experience for all students. It is up to us to ensure that this remains the case in times of the pandemic, too,” remarked Bettina Pauley. “Even though we plan to return to more face-to-face classes at the university from winter semester 2021/2022, we are keeping an eye on the specificities of individual countries, enabling us to respond very quickly to the situation at hand. We are in close liaison with our partner universities, and hope that our students will soon be able to go abroad again without any difficulty, observing all health precautions.”

All about your studies

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