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Facts and Figures on the International Nature of
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(see notes on p. 4)

2022

DZHW German Centre for
Higher Education Research and Science Studies

This is an excerpt from the publication

“Wissenschaft weltoffen 2022”

Since 2001, the DAAD has been analysing data on the internationalisation of studies, research and higher education from Germany as well as from particularly relevant countries and regions such as the USA, the United Kingdom or Asia. The current edition presents the most important results and graphics.

These include figures on international students in Germany, data on mobility behaviour, an overview of students' countries of origin and host countries as well as developments in the field of doctorates. Special data analyses shed light on the status quo and trends at universities and research institutes during the Covid-19 pandemic.

The study integrates international data from OECD and UNESCO as well as national data from the Federal Statistical Office in Germany. In combination with other indicators, it provides a valid basis for long-term analyses.

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Up-to-date national¹ data are now available in the four key host countries for international students; therefore, it is possible to measure the impact of the first year of the pandemic on the number of international students in these countries. However, these observations may only be regarded as a preliminary review of the short-term, direct effects of Covid-19. What cannot be predicted at this time are the longer-term repercussions, some of which are also indirect, that are based for example on the national pandemic management or changed entry regulations in the various countries and their concrete implementation.

Marked downturn in the number of international students in the US and Australia

The most noticeable fallout of the pandemic on the development in the numbers of international students can be seen in two host countries, the US and Australia. According to data published by the US Institute of International Education (IIE), the total number of international students at US universities dropped by 15% in the 2020/21 academic year, compared to the previous year, from approximately 1.1 million to roughly 914,000. This negative Covid-19 effect becomes even more apparent among international first-year students, where a slump of 46% was recorded.

Statistics released by the Australian Trade Commission (Austrade) on the total number of international students in Australia indicate a comparatively minor decline of just 5% between 2019 and 2020. Nonetheless, among international first-year students enrolling for the first time in 2020, there is also a substantial drop of approximately 23%. Given the draconian entry restrictions to Australia, this downturn would probably have been a great deal more extreme, had the travel ban not only been enforced from 20 March 2020. Consequently, some of the students who were newly enrolled for 2020 had already entered Australia beforehand.

The Covid-19 effect is relatively minor by comparison in the United Kingdom and Germany

Official student data on the United Kingdom published by the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) for the 2020/21 academic year reveal a surprising finding: rather than a reduction in the total number of international students compared to the 2019/20 academic year – as in the two other major Anglophone host countries – there is an increase of around 9%. Even the numbers of international first-year students, enrolled for the first time in the United Kingdom in the 2020/21 academic year, are up by approximately 4%. Consequently, by closing its borders for a relatively short period and thanks to the exceptional commitment shown by British universities in recruiting international students during the coronavirus crisis – for example by organising special charter flights from major countries of origin – the United Kingdom has obviously succeeded in bucking the pandemic-related trend of declining numbers of international students found in other major host countries.

Database

The evaluations considered here are based on the national statistics available on the number of international and first-year students in each case. The UNESCO statistics on which the regular analyses on international student mobility in Chapter A1 are based are not applicable for this purpose as, at the time of preparing this edition of *Wissenschaft weltweit*, they were still at the level of the 2019 reporting year and thus did not reflect the impact of Covid-19. When interpreting these national student data, it should be noted that the definitions of international students thus recorded differ from country to country, as well as from the corresponding UNESCO definition. As a result, the figures may deviate significantly from the UNESCO data presented in Chapter A1.

Finally, a closer look at the key non-English speaking host country Germany shows that the shift in student numbers can be placed somewhere between the decreases and increases described above. Year-on-year, the total number of international students rose by roughly 2% in the 2020/21 winter semester, while approximately 22% fewer international students enrolled for the first time in German universities in the 2020 academic year (the 2020 summer semester plus the 2020/21 winter semester), compared to the 2019 academic year. Arguably, the pandemic's fairly negligible impact on the total number of international students in Germany can be chiefly attributed to the fact that Germany's borders were only closed for a relatively short time – at least for international students. After the first wave of Covid-19 in 2020, exceptions were introduced to allow international students to enter the country, who then commenced their studies in Germany during the 2020/21 winter semester.

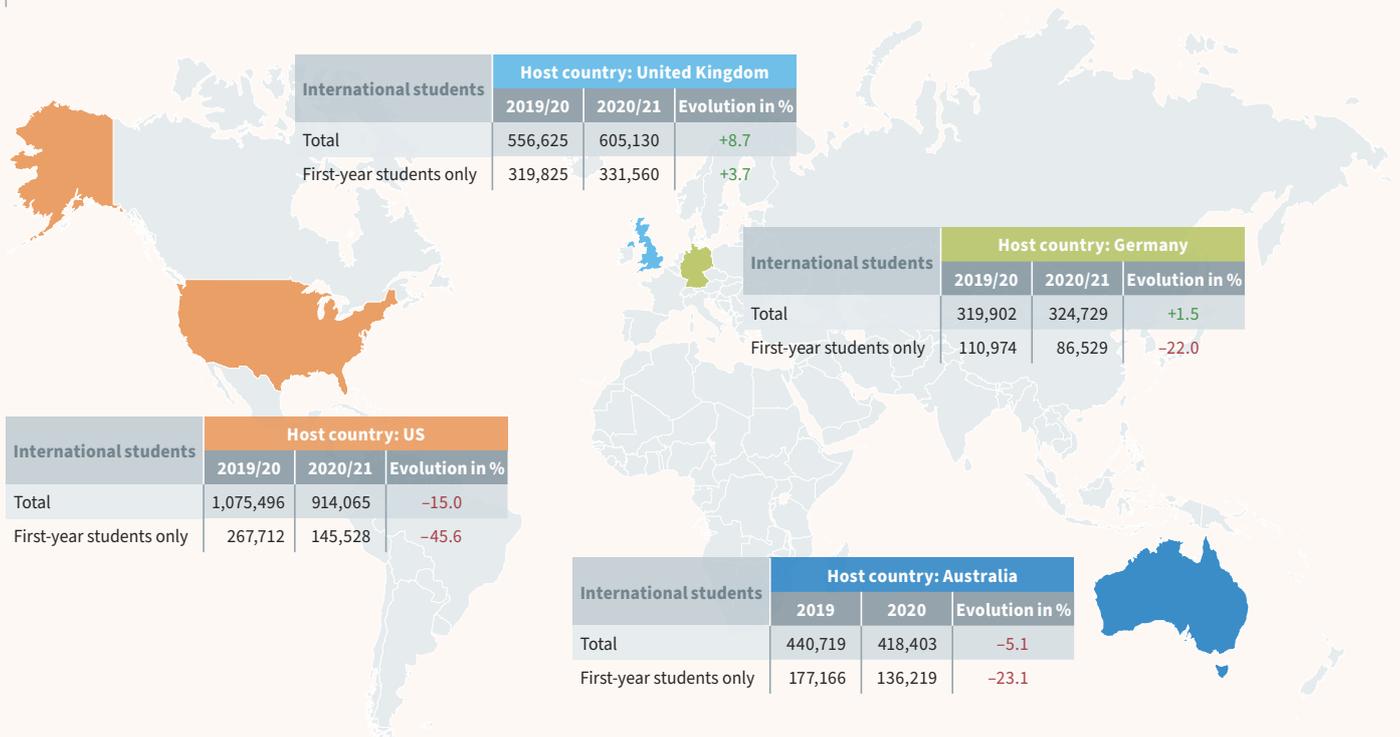
Outlook: what developments are emerging for 2021?

The question now is how the numbers will continue to develop in the above host countries after any restrictions due to the pandemic are phased out (particularly with regard to border closures). In the US, an upwards trend is beginning to emerge for the 2021/22 academic year. According to a survey conducted by IIE among more than 860 US universities (at which the overwhelming majority of international students in the US are enrolled), the 2021/22 academic year saw an upswing of 68% in international first-year students.² The survey also found a rise of 4% in the total number of international students.

* Footnotes

- 1 See also the database info box.
- 2 See IIE (2021).

AS1 Evolution of the number of international students in major host countries, 2019–2020



Sources: Institute of International Education (US); Higher Education Statistics Agency (UK); Australian Trade Commission Immigration (Australia), Federal Statistical Office (Germany); DAAD calculations

By contrast, no turnaround is in sight in Australia: at roughly 21%, the decrease in international students enrolling for the first time in 2021 is almost at the same level as the year before, while the total number of international students is also continuing to fall (-12%).

The United Kingdom has not yet released any official student data for the 2021/22 academic year. Nevertheless, the figures of the Universities & Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) can be analysed instead; if nothing else, they record all international undergraduate and bachelor's students registering for the first time and intending to graduate in the United Kingdom. Surprisingly, the number of international bachelor's students newly enrolling in 2021 dropped by 18% compared to the previous year. This decline clearly has nothing to do with the pandemic, however. It is the aftermath of Brexit, which took effect in early 2021, and the end to the right of free entry for students from the EU. As a result, the number of newly enrolled bachelor's students from EU countries plummeted by approximately 50%, while an increase of 2% was recorded from non-EU countries of origin.

Lastly, in Germany, the number of applications received by uni-assist, an association that helps around half of all German universities evaluate applications from abroad, for the 2021 academic year shows that there is virtually no year-on-year change in the number of international applicants (see also pp. 44/45). As in the United Kingdom, no data are available on the total number of students here.

In summary, therefore, at this point in time, it appears that, for both the first and the second year of the pandemic, the development in the numbers of international students varies enormously in the key Anglophone host countries and the key non-English speaking host country for international students. For the most part, the differences can be explained by the varying rigour of the entry restrictions enforced in these countries. At present, it is not clear what impact these short-term changes and other effects of the pandemic will have on medium and long-term developments in the host countries under review.