



This is an excerpt from the publication

“Wissenschaft weltoffen 2023”

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.

IMPRINT

Publisher

Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst
German Academic Exchange Service
Kennedyallee 50, D-53175 Bonn



The DAAD is an association of German universities and their student bodies. It is institutionally funded by the German Federal Foreign Office.

Strategic Planning – S1

DZHW

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Overall production

wbv Publikation
A division of wbv Media GmbH & Co. KG,
Postfach 10 06 33, D-33506 Bielefeld

ISBN: 978-3-7639-76492

DOI: 10.3278/7004002view

Order no. 7004002view

Photo credits

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DZHW/Nölle (p. 82)

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Configuration and evaluation of the *Wissenschaft weltoffen* web information system:
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Bibliographical information of the German National Library

The German National Library catalogues this publication in the German National Bibliography; detailed bibliographical data are available online at https://www.dnb.de/EN/Home/home_node.html.

SPONSORED BY THE



Federal Ministry
of Education
and Research



Federal Foreign Office

The project on which this brochure is based and the publication thereof were funded by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research and the Federal Foreign Office.

International applicants wishing to be admitted to undergraduate studies in Germany, usually a bachelor's degree or state examination programme, require a university entrance certificate (*Hochschulzugangsberechtigung* or HZB) that is considered equivalent to a German HZB.¹ As a rule, applicants from countries of the European Economic Area (EEA) have obtained an equivalent qualification to the HZB. However, this is not true of applicants from many other countries.² Regardless, a (small) number of candidates who are nationals of an EEA country or Germany also do not have a university entrance certificate considered equivalent to the HZB as they obtained their school-leaving qualification in a country of which they do not hold citizenship, for example. These applicants have the option of attending a preparatory course at an international preparatory and language centre (*Studienkolleg*) and passing an assessment test (*Feststellungsprüfung*). Generally speaking, passing the assessment test is regarded as a (subject-specific) university entrance certificate.

Given the growing interest among international applicants in studying for an undergraduate degree in Germany, different types of international preparatory and language centres (*Studienkollegs*) or preparatory courses offered by various organisations have emerged in recent years.³

- General state-run *Studienkollegs*: free of charge and either affiliated to a public university and a ministry or directly subordinate to a science ministry. The assessment test (*Feststellungsprüfung*) is carried out by the *Studienkollegs*; on passing the test, applicants are awarded an HZB that is valid throughout Germany.
- State-run *Studienkollegs* for specific federal states: they are also state-run *Studienkollegs* at public universities with free courses.⁴ However, the HZB thereby awarded is only valid for applications to universities in the respective federal state.
- Church-run *Studienkollegs*: independent *Studienkollegs* sponsored by the church, whose final examination is state accredited and results in an HZB that is valid throughout Germany. The courses are free of charge.
- Private *Studienkollegs*: they offer fee-based preparation for the assessment test. Some are state accredited, meaning that participants can take the assessment test (*Feststellungsprüfung*) directly at the centre. In the case of other private *Studienkollegs*, the assessment test must be taken on request at state-run *Studienkollegs* or as part of examinations held by the official educational administration. Several private *Studienkollegs* are affiliated to certain private or state universities and, in some cases, only prepare candidates for admittance to a particular university.⁵

* Footnotes

- 1 If a candidate can demonstrate adequate study experience in their homeland or another country, an equivalent HZB may be waived as an admission requirement. However, they will be required to provide formal proof of their proficiency in German and/or English.
- 2 The Central Office for Foreign Education (ZAB) of the Secretariat of the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the Länder is responsible for assessing foreign qualifications in Germany on a regular basis, also with regard to the equivalence of a foreign university entrance certificate.
- 3 See also Ramirez, R., Laska, O. & Korthase, S. (2023). Studienvorbereitung internationaler Studieninteressierter an staatlichen Studienkollegs. Angebot, Nachfrage und Bedarf. DAAD Forschung kompakt, May 2023. Bonn.
- 4 The *Studienkolleg :prime* at the Academy for Higher Education Access Development (HERE HEAD) in Bremen plays a special role in this regard. It is a cooperation of the state universities in the federal state of Bremen. After successfully graduating from :prime, participants can apply to all state universities in Bremen. However, the two-semester programme is fee-based (in addition to the mandatory semester fees).
- 5 Fee-based, private preparatory courses also include the *Studienkollegs* at state universities in Dresden, Jena, Mittweida and Paderborn, whose assessment tests are state accredited.
- 6 There are various different forms of preparatory courses, e.g. in Morocco, in cooperation with the *Studienkolleg* at TU Berlin, and in Indonesia, in cooperation with the Privates *Studienkolleg* Leipzig.
- 7 These digital formats are currently being trialled in selected destination countries as part of an initial pilot phase, e.g. for the DAAD project VORsprung. See <https://www.daad.de/en/the-daad/what-we-do/digitalisation/vorsprung/>.

Besides these forms of *Studienkolleg*, other developments can be seen in terms of preparatory courses for international applicants. Preparatory courses have been established in applicants' home countries in cooperation with both state and private *Studienkollegs*.⁶ Moreover, options for online courses are being explored, not merely to prepare candidates for their studies but also to enable them to take the assessment test in their home country.⁷

At all *Studienkollegs*, preparation takes place in the form of core courses that are geared towards participants' intended study programmes. However, not all *Studienkollegs* offer all core courses. In essence, the following courses are available:

- M course: for medicine, biology and pharmaceutical programmes
- T course: for mathematics, science or technical programmes
- W course: for economics or social science programmes
- G course: for the humanities or German studies
- S course: for language studies or law

In 2022, there were a total of 22 general, state-run *Studienkollegs*. All federal states operate state-run *Studienkollegs* apart from Brandenburg, Bremen, North Rhine-Westphalia and Saarland. Instead, special *Studienkollegs* have been set up in Brandenburg, Bremen and Saarland, which prepare candidates to study at universities in the respective federal state. North Rhine-Westphalia has two church-run *Studienkollegs* as well as private *Studienkollegs*, like other federal states. It is not possible to calculate the exact number of private *Studienkollegs* in operation as there is no supporting verification or exhaustive lists. Following extensive online research for *Wissenschaft*

BS2.1 Preparatory courses for university admission (*Studienkollegs*) in Germany by federal state, funding body and state accreditation, in 2022



Source: DZHW research

weltoffen, a total of 35 active private *Studienkollegs* or independent facilities of private *Studienkollegs* can be documented in 2022, each offering the complete range of preparation courses.⁸ 17 of them are state accredited, meaning that they are permitted to carry out the assessment test autonomously.

At present, there is no central register of the number of participants nor that of graduates at *Studienkollegs*. From the mid-1980s to the 2020/21 winter semester, the Federal Statistical Office calculated the number of attendees at *Studienkollegs* for a nationwide survey. Accordingly, in the winter semester 2000/01, some 9,500 participants were enrolled in the *Studienkollegs* under review. Numbers remained at this level until 2004, before falling to 5,000 participants over the next five years. This decrease was chiefly due to the closure of all state-run *Studienkollegs* in North Rhine-Westphalia. In the 2019/20 winter semester, 5,800 participants were attending preparatory courses. One year later, the Federal Statistical Office registered just 4,800 attendees.⁹ Nonetheless, this significant reduction and previous fluctuations are not always based on actual developments. On the contrary, these figures also reflect further closures and opening of new facilities as well as difficulties in maintaining consistent statistical records of the *Studienkollegs*.

Overall, in the 2022/23 winter semester, some 3,500 candidates had signed up for preparatory courses at the 22 state-run *Studienkollegs*.¹⁰ With a share of 46%, almost half were attending T courses, preparing

for a mathematics, science or engineering degree. M courses and W courses accounted for 19% each, while another 17% were registered in G/S courses.^{11, 12} The attendees' key regions of origin were primarily Eastern Europe and Central Asia (31%), Asia and Pacific (27%) plus North Africa and Middle East (24%). 10% were from Latin America and 5% from Western Europe. Surprisingly, participants from Sub-Saharan Africa played a subordinate role (2%). Central and South Eastern Europe and North America were likewise of minor importance as regions of origin (approximately 1% each).^{13, 14} In terms of regional origin, Iran,

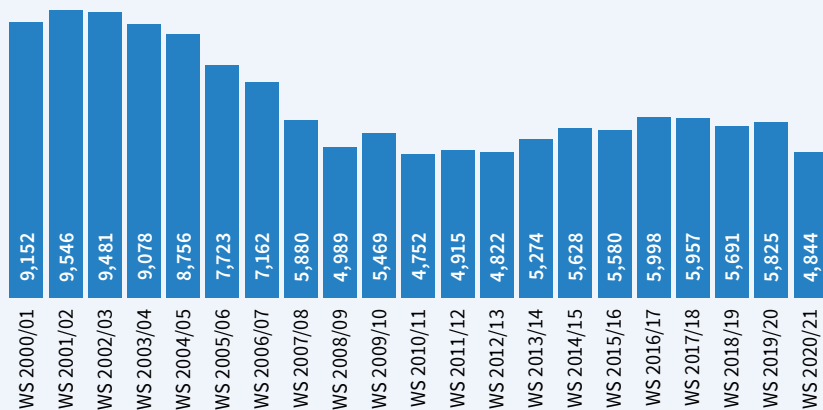
Ukraine and Russia were the key countries of origin, with roughly 11% of participants each. As a result, these three countries, which are also key countries of origin for international students in Germany (see pp. 40/41), made up one third of all attendees at state *Studienkollegs* alone.

Other major countries of origin were Vietnam (9%), Indonesia and China (5% each). With a share of 4%, Germany was also among the front-runners. *Studienkollegs* are thus not to be underestimated as an option for prospective German students to obtain the German HZB.

As regards state-run *Studienkollegs* for specific federal states, data are only available for the network of colleges and universities in Brandenburg known as "ESiSt" (Erfolgreicher Studieneinstieg für Internationale Studierende im Bundesland Brandenburg). In the 2022/23 winter semester, approximately 60 participants were preparing for their studies at a Brandenburg university. They were fairly evenly distributed across G/S courses (39%), T courses (31%) and W courses (30%). The key regions of origin were Eastern Europe and Central Asia

“ In 2022, a total of 3,500 participants were enrolled at general, state-run *Studienkollegs*.

BS2.2 Participants in preparatory courses for university admission (*Studienkollegs*) in Germany between the winter semesters 2000/01 and 2020/21

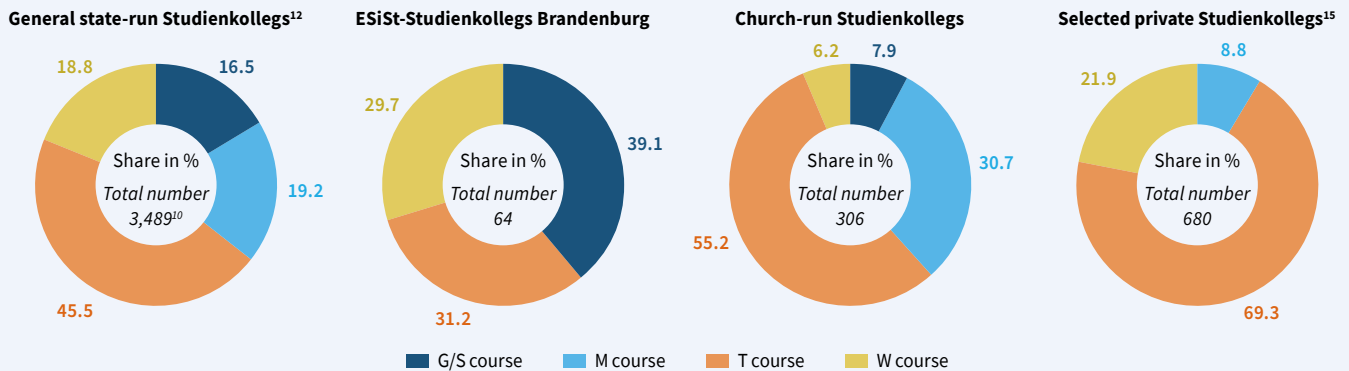


Number of Participants

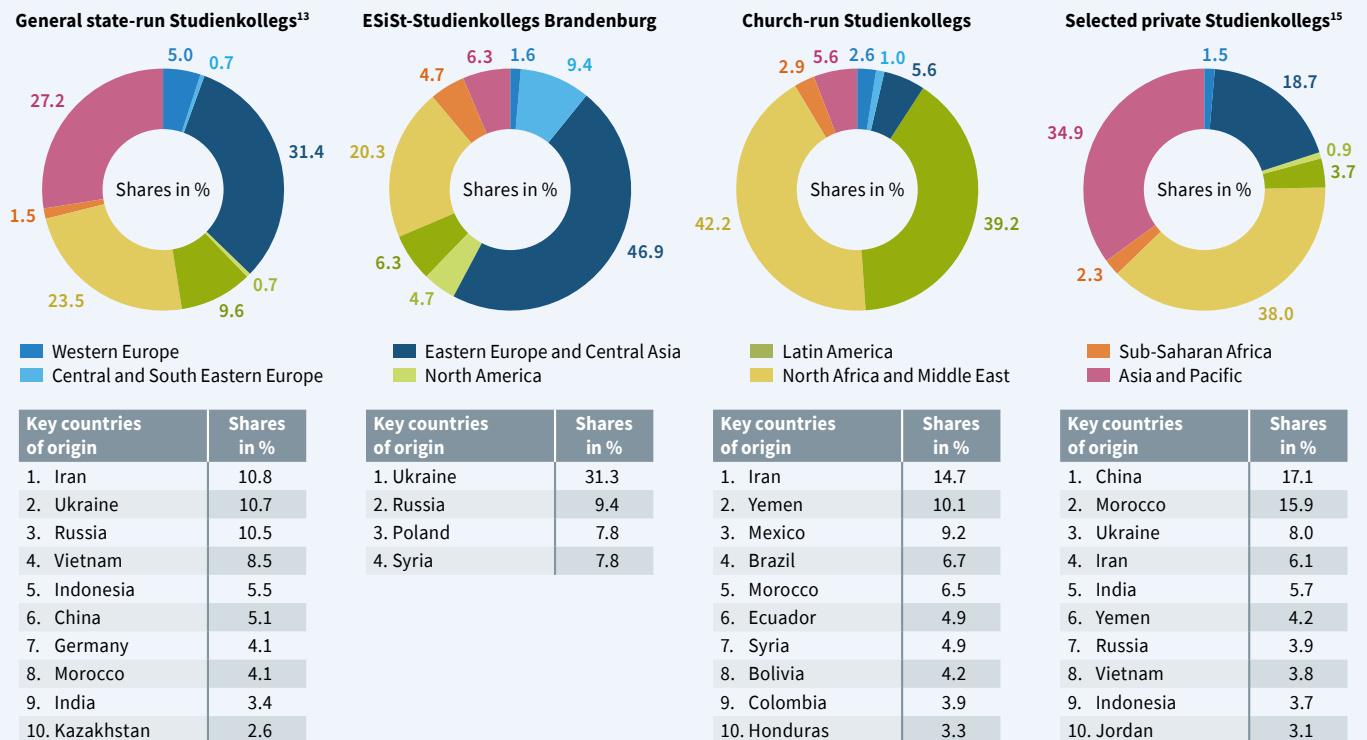
Source: Federal Statistical Office, student statistics

* Footnotes (continued)

- 8 Owing to the pandemic, several private *Studienkollegs* ceased operations between 2020 and 2022. At this point in time, it is too early to say whether and in what form they will continue to offer preparatory courses for prospective international students.
- 9 Federal Statistical Office (2021). Students at universities. Winter semester 2020/21. Fachserie 11, Reihe 4.1. Wiesbaden.
- 10 Including participants at the state-run *Studienkolleg* in Kaiserslautern, whose number for the 2022/23 winter semester was estimated on the basis of previous cohorts.
- 11 G and S courses are taught jointly at several *Studienkollegs*; it is therefore not always possible to differentiate between them.
- 12 Attendance figures excluding data for the state-run *Studienkollegs* in Kaiserslautern and Mainz.
- 13 Figures on regions of origin excluding data for the state-run *Studienkolleg* in Kaiserslautern.
- 14 Deviations from 100% are due to rounding.
- 15 Non-representative sample at private *Studienkollegs*.

BS2.3 Participants by type of preparatory course for university admission (*Studienkollegs*) and core course, winter semester 2022/23

Source: data provided by Studienkollegs, DZHW survey; DZHW calculations

BS2.4 Participants by type of *Studienkolleg*, region of origin and key countries of origin, in winter semester 2022/23¹⁴

Source: data provided by Studienkollegs, DZHW survey; DZHW calculations

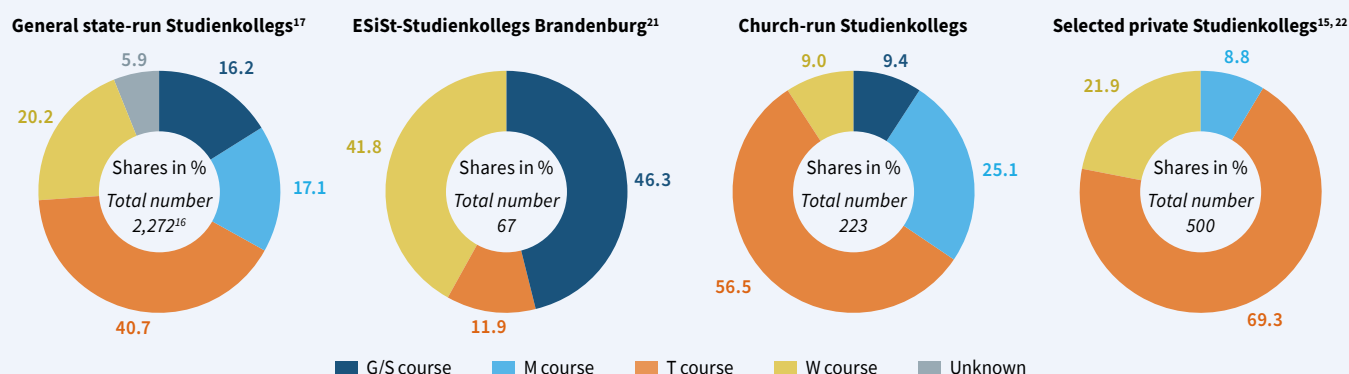
(47%) and North Africa and Middle East (20%). Ukraine (31%) led the field of countries of origin by a clear margin.

Overall, roughly 300 participants were enrolled at the two church-run *Studienkollegs* in the 2022/23 winter semester, 55% in T courses, 31% in M courses, 8% in G/S courses and 6% in W courses. North Africa and

Middle East (42%) and Latin America (39%) were the predominant regions of origin, while the key countries of origin were Iran (15%), Yemen (10%), Mexico (9%), Brazil and Morocco (7% each).

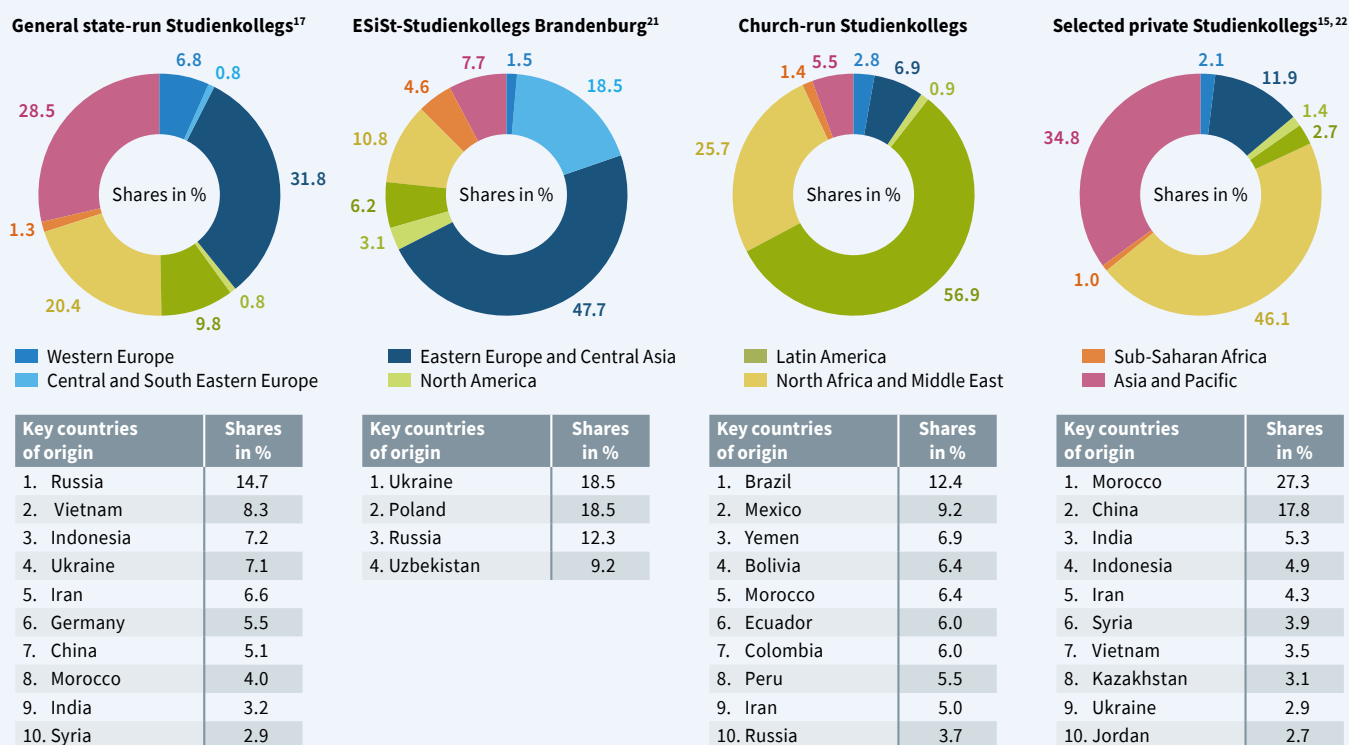
As valid data have only been supplied for eight of the private *Studienkollegs*, this sample is in no way representative. The results

BS2.5 *Studienkolleg* graduates, by type of *Studienkolleg* and core course, in the 2022 graduation year¹⁴



Source: data provided by *Studienkollegs*, DZHW survey; DZHW calculations

BS2.6 *Studienkolleg* graduates, by type of *Studienkolleg*, region of origin and key countries of origin, in the 2022 graduation year¹⁴

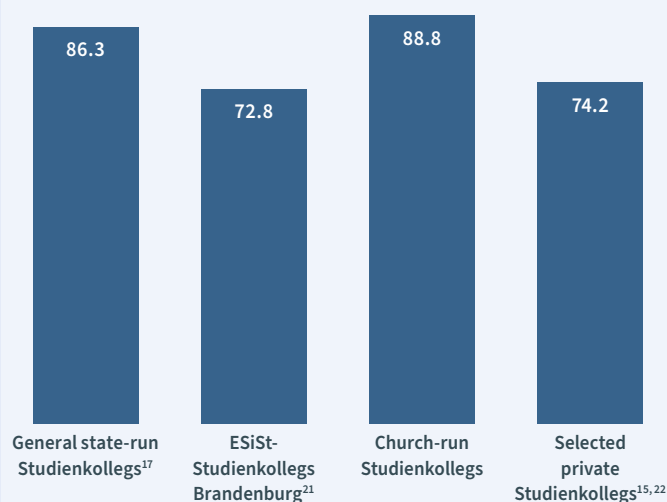


Source: data provided by *Studienkollegs*, DZHW survey; DZHW calculations

are being presented nevertheless in order to highlight the special nature of preparatory courses at private *Studienkollegs*. In the 2022/23 winter semester, the eight *Studienkollegs* were preparing a total of 680 candidates for the assessment test. Given this statistic, it may be assumed that the 35 private *Studienkollegs* operational in

2022 were instrumental in helping prepare prospective international students for their undergraduate studies in Germany. Most participants, namely 69%, opted for T courses, with 22% favouring W courses and 9% M courses. The key regions of origin were North Africa and Middle East (38%), Asia and Pacific (35%) plus Eastern Europe and Central Asia

BS2.7 Pass rate in the assessment test (*Feststellungsprüfung*), by type of *Studienkolleg*, in the 2022 graduation year¹⁹



Shares of successful examinees in %

Source: data provided by *Studienkollegs*, DZHW survey; DZHW calculations

(19%). Unlike at state-run *Studienkollegs*, China (17%), Morocco (16%), Ukraine (8%), Iran and India (6% each) topped the league of countries of origin.¹⁵

“ In 2022, 86% of participants at general, state-run *Studienkollegs* passed the assessment test.

Data on successful graduates are also available for 19 state-run *Studienkollegs*, with about 2,300 passing the 2022 graduation year.¹⁶ Estimates of graduates from the missing *Studienkollegs*, based on the number of students, suggest that state-run *Studienkollegs* produce as many as 2,700 successful candidates. 41% of these graduates completed a T course, 20% a W course, 17% an M course and 16% a G/S course.¹⁷ This corresponds largely to the course distribution among attendees enrolled in the 2022/23 winter semester. Moreover, there are no significant differences with respect to the regions of origin. Variations are only found among the key countries of origin. In 2022, Russia (15%) headed the list, followed by Vietnam (8%), Indonesia, Ukraine and Iran (7% each).¹⁷

Approximately 3,000 candidates took the assessment test in the 2022 graduation year at state-run *Studienkollegs*, considerably more than the number of successful graduates.¹⁸ Roughly 86% of those taking

BS2.8 Pass rates of examinees in assessment tests (*Feststellungsprüfung*), by type of *Studienkolleg*, core course and selected regions of origin, in the 2022 graduation year¹⁹

Core course	General state-run <i>Studienkollegs</i> ¹⁷	Church-run <i>Studienkollegs</i>	Selected private <i>Studienkollegs</i> ^{15, 22}
	Shares in %		
G/S course	89.8	–	–
M course	79.1	81.2	–
T course	85.5	90.0	74.4
W course	92.5	–	74.2
Region of origin			
Western Europe	88.9	–	–
Eastern Europe and Central Asia	90.6	–	85.3
Latin America	91.2	91.2	–
North Africa and Middle East	78.5	83.6	73.1
Asia and Pacific	86.3	–	74.2

Source: data provided by *Studienkollegs*, DZHW survey; DZHW calculations

the assessment test went on to pass.¹⁹ However, there are differences between the various core courses: W courses (93%) and G/S courses (90%) ended with above-average pass rates, while the rate was below average in M courses (79%) in particular. Similar contrasts can also be observed between the various regions of origin. Participants from Latin America, Eastern Europe and Central Asia (91% each), Central and South Eastern Europe (90%) and Western Europe (89%) achieved

* Footnotes (continued)

- 16 Excluding data for the state-run *Studienkollegs* in Frankfurt am Main, Kaiserslautern and Mainz.
- 17 Excluding data for the state-run *Studienkollegs* in Darmstadt, Frankfurt am Main, Kaiserslautern and Mainz.
- 18 Including estimated figures for the state-run *Studienkollegs* in Frankfurt am Main, Kaiserslautern and Mainz.
- 19 Unsuccessful participants include those who did not pass their assessment test or – if retaking it – finally failed it, as well as those who were certified unable to take the test, e.g. due to sickness. Some *Studienkollegs* also included the number of those who did not (re)take the assessment test here.
- 20 Only countries of origin with at least 50 examinees taking the assessment test.
- 21 Including examinees with an equivalent university entrance certificate, who completed a linguistic and methodological preparatory course at the *Studienkolleg* Frankfurt (Oder).
- 22 Excluding figures for the *Studienkolleg* of the Alpha Aktiv Language School Heidelberg.

BS2.9 Pass rates of examinees in assessment tests (*Feststellungsprüfung*) at general state-run *Studienkollegs*, by country of origin, in the 2022 graduation year^{17, 19, 20}

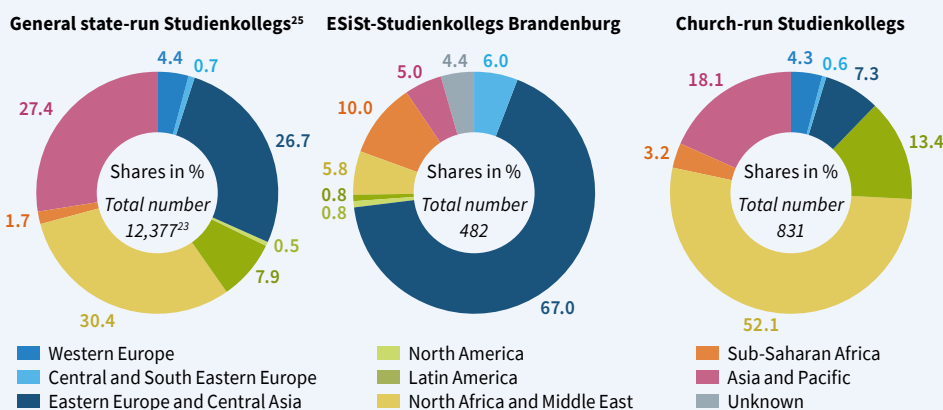
Country of origin	Pass rate of examinees in %
1. Morocco	98.8
2. Kazakhstan	96.4
3. Russia	93.2
4. Vietnam	92.6
5. Ukraine	92.1
6. Brazil	92.0
7. Indonesia	90.0
8. India	88.3
9. Germany	86.8
10. Nepal	86.5
11. China	78.3
12. Iran	77.0
13. Syria	73.0

Source: data provided by *Studienkollegs*, DZHW survey; DZHW calculations

above-average pass rates; by comparison, those from Sub-Saharan Africa (77%) and North Africa and Middle East (79%) received below-average scores. As regards the countries of origin, state-run *Studienkollegs* reported particularly high pass rates of over 90% for candidates from Morocco, Kazakhstan, Russia, Vietnam, Ukraine, Brazil and Indonesia.^{17, 20}

In 2022, some 70 graduates passed the test at organisations in the ESiSt network, specifically for Brandenburg universities, first and foremost in G/S courses (46%) and W courses (42%). The pass rate was 73%.²¹ Meanwhile, the church-run *Studienkollegs* indicated that 220 candidates passed the assessment test in the 2022 graduation year. The overwhelming majority had completed T courses (57%) and M courses (25%). The pass rate was 89%. From the non-representative sample of private *Studienkollegs*, only figures provided by state accredited organisations

BS2.10 Applicants taking an entrance examination, by type of *Studienkolleg*, region of origin and key countries of origin, in the 2022 academic year¹⁴



Source: data provided by *Studienkollegs*, DZHW survey; DZHW calculations

* Footnotes (continued)

23 Estimated figures for the state-run *Studienkollegs* in Kiel, Kaiserslautern and Mainz.

24 The admission process at the *Studienkolleg* in Hamburg does not include an entrance examination.

25 Excluding data for the state-run *Studienkollegs* in Darmstadt, Kiel, Kaiserslautern and Mainz.

26 Only countries of origin with at least 50 applicants.

27 Unlike German first-year students, international first-year students in one academic year include a high percentage of master's students in their first university semester who were admitted to university by virtue of a bachelor's degree obtained abroad and not on the basis of a university entrance certificate. These master's students bias the relevant data on undergraduate studies.

28 The PASCH Initiative is a network of more than 2,000 schools around the world in which German is considered a particularly high priority.

were taken into account.²² In 2022, they achieved a total of around 500 successful graduates. Once again, candidates from T courses (73%) and W courses (22%) were predominant. The pass rate was 65%.

The number of applicants for the preparatory courses at *Studienkollegs* by far exceeds the number of participants actually offered a place. Overall, no less than 12,400 candidates sat the entrance examinations for state-run *Studienkollegs* in 2022.^{23, 24} Like the later participants, most applicants came from North Africa and Middle East (30%), as well as Asia and Pacific, and Eastern Europe and Central Asia (27% each). Key countries of origin were Iran (15%), Russia (9%), Indonesia, Ukraine, India (8% each), plus Vietnam and Morocco (6% each).²⁵ However, only a limited number of applicants were accepted onto the preparatory courses. Based on the number of attendees in the 2022/23 winter semester, the average proportion of successful applicants was roughly 28% in 2022. This means that, after taking the entrance examination and allowing for other criteria in some cases, fewer than one in three applicants was awarded a place at a state-run *Studienkolleg*. Candidates from North America (39%), Western Europe, and Eastern Europe and Central Asia (33% each) achieved an exceptionally good quota. In comparison, the admission rate for applicants from North Africa and Middle East (21%) was below average. Candidates from China (86%), Mongolia (72%), Brazil (56%) and Georgia (47%) were most likely to be accepted, while admission was relatively rare among those from Yemen (12%), India, Palestinian territories (13% each), Honduras (14%) and Egypt (16%).²⁶

“ In 2022, approximately 12,400 prospective students applied for a place in the core courses at state-run *Studienkollegs*.

Church-run *Studienkollegs* reported a higher admission rate in 2022. Approximately 300 candidates were accepted from 830 applicants, representing a quota of 37%. By comparison, just 13% of the mostly Eastern European applicants were granted a place at organisations in the ESiSt network specifically for Brandenburg. The admission process is structured very differently at private *Studienkollegs*, very few of which require entrance examinations that can be compared with the aptitude tests at state-run *Kollegs*.

At present, the question of what percentage of successful attendees go on to study at a German university cannot be answered with any degree of certainty. Official student statistics for the 2022 academic year include 3,100 international first-year students who obtained their university entrance certificate

BS2.11 Admission rates of applicants to *Studienkollegs*, by type of *Studienkolleg* and region of origin, in the 2022 academic year

Region of origin	General state-run <i>Studienkollegs</i> ²⁵	ESiSt- <i>Studienkollegs</i> Brandenburg	Church-run <i>Studienkollegs</i>
	Shares in %		
Western Europe	33	–	22
Central and South Eastern Europe	28	21	60
Eastern Europe and Central Asia	33	9	28
North America	39	75	–
Latin America	29	100	108*
North Africa and Middle East	21	28	30
Sub-Saharan Africa	25	6	33
Asia and Pacific	27	17	11
Total	28	13	37

*Number of *Studienkolleg* participants is higher than the number of applicants.

Source: data provided by *Studienkollegs*, DZHW survey; DZHW calculations

BS2.12 The ten countries of origin with the highest and lowest admission rates at general state-run *Studienkollegs*, in the 2022 graduation year^{25, 26}

Country of origin	Pass rate of applicants in %	
China	86	
Mongolia	72	
Brazil	56	
Georgia	47	
Ukraine	36	
Belarus	34	
Germany	34	
Uzbekistan	34	
Vietnam	34	
Russia	33	
Yemen	12	
Palestinian territories	13	
India	13	
Honduras	14	
Egypt	16	
Ecuador	17	
Morocco	18	
Pakistan	19	
Indonesia	20	
Jordan	20	

Source: data provided by *Studienkollegs*, DZHW survey; DZHW calculations

at a *Studienkolleg*, accounting for 3% of all international first-year students. However, the true significance of this figure only becomes apparent when exclusively taking bachelor's programmes into account.²⁷ Among first-year students in bachelor's programmes in 2022, some 2,900 were international graduates from a *Studienkolleg*, thereby representing 10.2% of all international

BS2.13 Share of *Studienkolleg* participants of international first-year students in bachelor's programmes, by type of university, subject group and region of origin, in 2022

Type of university	Shares of participants in bachelor's programmes in %
Total	10.2
University	11.4
UAS	9.2
Public university	12.0
Public UAS	13.3
Subject groups	
Humanities	5.3
Law, economics and social sciences	6.5
Mathematics and natural sciences	13.1
Medicine and health sciences	4.3
Agricultural, forestry and food sciences, veterinary medicine	5.8
Engineering	14.2
Art and art history	1.7
Region of origin	
Western Europe	0.7
Central and South Eastern Europe	0.9
Eastern Europe and Central Asia	16.1
North America	3.9
Latin America	14.5
North Africa and Middle East	16.5
Sub-Saharan Africa	3.5
Asia and Pacific	20.0

Source: Federal Statistical Office, student statistics

BS2.14 Countries of origin with the highest shares of *Studienkolleg* participants of international first-year students in bachelor's programmes, in 2022

Country of origin	Shares of participants in %
1. Oman	55.6
2. Yemen	54.0
3. Indonesia	51.1
4. Nepal	40.1
5. Morocco	36.7
6. Bahrain	36.4
7. Burkina Faso	36.4
8. Honduras	36.0
9. Nicaragua	35.7
10. Saudi Arabia	35.3
11. Ecuador	33.5
12. Iraq	30.5
13. Taiwan	30.2
14. Tajikistan	29.7
15. Libya	28.6

Source: Federal Statistical Office, student statistics

first-year students. This share was 11.4% at universities and 9.2% at UAS. As *Studienkolleg* graduates tend to enrol in public universities, they make up a considerably higher proportion at these institutions, namely 12% at public universities and 13.3% at public UAS in particular, compared to between 1% and 2% at private universities.

Exceptionally high proportions of *Studienkolleg* attendees can be found among the international first-year students in bachelor's programmes, in line with the differing levels of enrolment in the various core courses: engineering (14%) and mathematics and natural sciences (13%). The percentages are relatively low in bachelor's programmes, primarily in the field of art and art history (2%) and in medicine and health sciences (4%).

There are also marked differences between the various regions of origin. High proportions of *Studienkolleg* graduates are typical of first-year students from Asia and Pacific (20%), North Africa and Middle East (17%), Eastern Europe and Central Asia (16%) as well as Latin America (15%). With regard to individual countries of origin,

Oman (56%), Yemen (54%), Indonesia (51%) and Nepal (40%) achieved the highest shares. It is clear that *Studienkollegs* are the only option for many prospective students from these and other countries to embark on a bachelor's programme in Germany.

“*Studienkollegs* are a convenient way for universities to encourage international students to enrol in bachelor's programmes.

Moreover, the proportion of *Studienkolleg* attendees of all international first-year students varies enormously at different universities. Public universities on campuses with one or even several *Studienkollegs* tend to report above-average percentages of *Studienkolleg* graduates. For example, in Frankfurt am Main, the university has a share of 48% and the UAS 31%, while in Kiel, the university boasts 36% and the UAS 28%. This suggests that many successful *Studienkolleg* graduates pursue a degree within easy reach of the *Studienkolleg* they attended. Consequently, *Studienkollegs* are a convenient way for universities to encourage international students to enrol in bachelor's programmes.

Studienkollegs are sheltered centres of learning that teach the skills required to study for a degree



Gerd Fennefrohn (Studienkolleg Mittelhessen at the Philipps-Universität Marburg), Katja Wagner (Studienkolleg Coburg for Bavarian UAS), Dr. Barbara Hennig (chair of the Management Board, Studienkolleg at TU Darmstadt) and Josef Koller (Munich Studienkolleg for Bavarian universities)

An interview with Gerd Fennefrohn, Dr. Barbara Hennig, Josef Koller and Katja Wagner from the Management Board of the Association of Directors of Studienkollegs at German Universities

State-run *Studienkollegs* play a vital role in preparing international students for undergraduate studies at German universities. At the same time, however, given the new preparatory courses currently available, the need for further qualifications and the growing number of international applicants, the *Studienkollegs* are facing enormous challenges. The editorial team of *Wissenschaft weltoffen* discussed these challenges with the Management Board of the Association of Directors of *Studienkollegs* at German Universities.

Numerous preparatory courses aimed at prospective international students have sprung up in recent years. What sets state-run Studienkollegs apart in this regard?

Barbara Hennig: The *Studienkollegs* are unique in that they are closely affiliated to the universities, but also to the respective ministries. As a result, the students are optimally prepared for the demands of a degree programme. First of all, the one-year preparatory course gives the students, most of whom are still very young, time to gradually become accustomed to the culture of teaching and learning in Germany, while adapting to everyday life here. They improve their language skills and build on their knowledge in their field, obtain detailed information on their future degree course and familiarise themselves with the German

education system. Essentially, the *Studienkollegs* are sheltered centres of learning in which they can explore their new situation and the different culture, without being exposed to the hectic pace of university life. Generally speaking, as *Studienkolleg* attendees are enrolled at a university, they are part of the student body from the outset and can take advantage of all the respective university has to offer, giving them time to get their bearings and become integrated.

State-run *Studienkollegs* are well placed to meet the challenges they face because in addition to language instruction – a fundamental tool in ensuring academic success – the highly trained staff also teach subject-related skills. For example, in addition to the core courses, the *Studienkollegs* offer bridge courses to improve participants' German language skills and proficiency in mathematics, along with preparatory courses.

Unlike private organisations, the preparatory courses are free of charge and the quality of teaching is ensured thanks to the framework plan of the *Studienkollegs* and regular evaluation by the affiliated universities.

How do prospective students get admitted to a Studienkolleg?

B. H.: Applying to be accepted for a degree or directly for a *Studienkolleg* is invariably a requirement for a place at a *Studienkolleg*, either via uni-assist or to the universities directly, depending on the university. Certain criteria must be met in order to be admitted to the *Studienkolleg*: applicants' German language skills should be at least

B1 level, preferably B2, and they need a university entrance certificate from their home country. Once their certificates and language skills have been verified by the offices responsible, qualified candidates are invited to a selection process at the *Studienkolleg* in question, usually involving a German language test and perhaps an additional, subject-related test (e.g. mathematics or physics). Moreover, in cooperation with the Central Agency for German Schools Abroad, several *Studienkollegs* offer candidates the option of completing the selection process at PASCH schools²⁸ or German international schools in their home country. The examination process is supervised by specialist consultants at the respective schools.

The numbers of those applying to state-run Studienkollegs currently far exceed the number of study places at the Kollegs. In your opinion, what are the reasons for this?

B. H.: It is true that the number of applications exceeds the available capacities, particularly for certain core courses. However, nowhere near all applicants are actually qualified to study in Germany. Either their language skills are not at the level required or their subject knowledge is inadequate to be able to follow the curriculum at the *Studienkolleg*. In most cases, these two criteria are closely linked. The selection process ensures that *Studienkollegs* admit those candidates who best meet the criteria and basic requirements for obtaining a degree. In fact, demand for places at *Studienkollegs* has surged over the last twelve years. There are various reasons for this. In many countries, a German degree is still regarded as a stepping stone to a successful career. Preparation at a *Studienkolleg* and degree programmes are both free of charge and of a high standard. The first-rate preparatory courses in the core courses at *Studienkollegs* are widely recognised abroad, to the extent that they also appeal to prospective students with a direct HZB, who are also keen to attend a *Studienkolleg*. Not only has the war in Ukraine increased the number of applicants, foreign policy also plays a role, for example, in the form of foreign aid programmes or bilateral education agreements.

As a rule, there are a fixed number of places at Studienkollegs. Given the large numbers of applicants, it is possible for more candidates to pass the entrance examinations for the courses than there are places available. How do Studienkollegs handle such a situation?

Gerd Fennefrohn: Obviously, it would be ideal if more places were available and we could train more qualified applicants. In general, the level of interest in the core courses varies, however the demand is always very high. In any case, the *Studienkollegs* would like to

be able to offer more places, particularly for STEM subjects. Many *Studienkollegs* have been trying for years to compensate for the lack of places for qualified applicants by assigning considerably more people to a course than planned in the framework. Furthermore, several *Studienkollegs* hold external examinations, which are ultimately aimed at those individuals who were not granted a place at a *Studienkolleg*.

There are increasing numbers of online preparatory courses for international students. How important are digital formats in terms of the application, entrance examination and teaching at Studienkollegs?

G. F.: The digitalisation strategy of the university or federal state in question is crucial to the success or failure of the digital transformation. Although part of this strategy, the *Studienkolleg* must ensure its implementation autonomously. At the same time, *Studienkollegs* plan their own strategies as the requirements of a *Kolleg* do not always coincide with those of a faculty at a university or school.

Studienkollegs are increasingly taking advantage of the opportunities afforded by digital technology. Wherever possible, the application

process is carried out via application portals. Moreover, to a certain extent, classes are also offered as e-learning modules, while digital teaching and learning formats complement the face-to-face teaching. Despite the many benefits of the digital transformation, we regard classroom

sessions at the *Studienkolleg* as indispensable, central elements of teaching and the very foundation of successful student outcomes.

Preparatory courses at Studienkollegs involve not just subject-related preparation, they also help participants improve their language skills and develop proactive, independent study techniques that will stand them in good stead in meeting the requirements at German universities. How is it possible to teach such an extensive set of skills?

Josef Koller: For decades, in other words, long before the introduction of skills-based learning, the main feature of teaching at *Studienkollegs* has been a concept of education that keeps track of young people's personal development as well as their level of knowledge. Although students are guided towards the assessment test over a relatively short period of just two semesters, the idea of "teaching to the test" has never been considered. Classes do not revolve around instructions but encourage independent work while teaching the curriculum. In a nutshell: *Studienkollegs* have never concentrated merely on teaching a foreign language; instead, German has always been a working language for teaching the curriculum, which placed enormous emphasis on participants' personal and social development.

“ According to state-run *Studienkollegs*, given the large numbers of applicants, more places are needed, particularly in preparatory courses for STEM subjects.

Do you see the need for changing or re-weighting the curricula?

J. K.: Definitely. Curricular discourse is essential for the simple reason that it encourages a qualitative review of the teaching at *Studienkollegs* by taking stock, as it were, in all federal states and prompting questions that are conducive to improving the quality of the courses: is the preparation at a comparable level in all federal states? Are we making sufficient allowance for what universities expect of our students? Are we up to date in didactical and methodological terms? Therefore, the Association of Directors of *Studienkollegs* at German *Studienkollegs* launched a nationwide project that describes teaching at *Studienkollegs* for the purpose of changing and re-weighting the curricula. The result is a framework plan for skills-based teaching at *Studienkollegs*.

On a related note, what do you think of one-semester courses to prepare for the assessment test?

J. K.: The cultural sovereignty of the federal states gives individual state governments and certain universities the freedom to agree on their own, non-mainstream provisions. In some ways, the *Studienkolleg* landscape reflects the diversity of federal education.

You talked about harmonising a joint Studienkollegs framework plan. In your view, should these decision-making processes between the various Kollegs be extended?

J. K.: The Association of Directors has worked with the federal states for many years. It meets regularly to discuss legal issues and matters of content. Furthermore, the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the Länder has established a framework; in other words the federal state ministers recommend a course of action that serves as a regulatory and structural point of reference for the Association. To date, the abovementioned skills-based framework is without doubt the most comprehensive, most far-reaching result of the collaboration between the *Studienkollegs*. The framework plan facilitates and encourages their interaction, particularly with regard to improving the quality of teaching and examinations. It has already been revised and an updated strategy adopted.

What are the future tasks of the Studienkollegs?

J. K.: One main, short-term objective is implementing the skills-based framework plan throughout Germany. Obviously, medium-term goals are to step up the digitalisation of the education sector, in both structural and didactical terms (particularly in classes and examinations), as well as dealing with questions that arise from striking the right balance between federal autonomy and raising the individual profiles of the universities on the one hand, while

ensuring quality throughout Germany on the other. In the long term, however, the *Studienkollegs* will also help set the course for major socio-political and economic issues: attracting skilled workers, participating in the internationalisation process of education and studies, helping to create an open society. To put it simply, *Studienkollegs* have a tremendous wealth of expertise in this regard.

“The state-run *Studienkollegs* are now working to extend the range of courses available online.

With an eye to the successful development of state-run Studienkollegs in the future, what do you think of preparatory courses that are designed for specific universities or even disciplines, and of prospective students taking the assessment test in their home countries?

Katja Wagner: On the one hand, the core courses at *Studienkollegs* pave the way for hand-in-hand linguistic and curricular preparation for specific subject groups, such as STEM programmes in the T course; on the other hand, however, the tremendous variety of focal areas in the core courses mean that students are not limited to individual degree programmes and still have a certain freedom of choice. This is vital, particularly in light of the increasingly diverse study programmes offered by universities. Although universities understandably hope to secure international students' loyalty from an early stage by offering specially adapted preparatory courses, this does not encourage mobility. Preparing for the assessment test in the various home countries is a trend in which channelling immigration probably figures more prominently than timely integration in a German-speaking learning environment that includes day-to-day life – one huge advantage of preparatory courses in Germany from a learning theory perspective.

To what extent do state-run Studienkollegs require greater support to ensure their successful development?

K. W.: *Studienkollegs* will continue to rely on the confidence and interest in their preparatory courses of both universities and education policy. The next important step is implementing new framework plans for skills-based teaching at *Studienkollegs*. They show that *Studienkollegs* are committed to quality-driven preparatory courses. To ensure it stays that way, *Studienkollegs* need not just sufficient financial, personnel and conceptual, non-material support; it is also vital for them to join forces, in a spirit of partnership, with all major decision-makers at universities and those responsible for education policy.