



Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst
German Academic Exchange Service



Evaluation of the digital DAAD funding programmes

Key results and recommendations

July 2023



Content

- Executive summary I**
- Key results of the evaluation 1**
- Recommendations 4**
- 1.1 Federal and state government..... 5
- 1.2 Funding organisations 5
- 1.3 Universities 6



Executive summary

To support the digital internationalisation of teaching and learning, the DAAD has developed **three funding programmes** with different focus areas: "International Mobility and Cooperation through Digitalisation" (IMKD), "International Programmes Digital" (IP Digital) and "International Virtual Academic Collaboration" (IVAC). This report summarises the **key results of the accompanying evaluation** and presents **recommendations for the digital internationalisation of teaching and learning**.

The evaluation results show that the respective programme objectives have been **successfully addressed**: In IMKD, digital international courses were developed, methodological knowledge expanded and the framework conditions for digital international teaching improved. In IP Digital, international Master study programmes were digitalised, while innovative, digital teaching and learning formats were successfully tested in the IVAC projects. This demonstrates that many of the DAAD projects were able to make important **contributions to the implementation of university strategies**, in particular by generating content-related and methodological impulses in the field of digitalisation and by establishing and expanding international networks.

Overall, the DAAD projects take up various **opportunities of digitalisation for the internationalisation of teaching and learning**: International teaching can be made more flexible through digital offerings by enabling participation in teaching and learning independently of location and time. Digital and intercultural skills are also promoted among students, which supports their preparation for the modern labour market. At the same time, digital formats contribute to the promotion of internationalisation across the respective universities because they can be easily integrated into courses with a low degree of internationalisation and enable all groups of students to gain experience abroad.

The expansion of digital international teaching and learning continues to be an important field of action. **Various recommendations** can be derived:

- At **federal level**, it is recommended to express a clear commitment to the topic of digital internationalisation in order to strengthen the long-term attractiveness and competitiveness of Germany as a study location. In addition, a conducive and transparent legal framework for blended mobility should be created at **federal state (Bundesländer) level**. Clear recommendations for the practical handling of data protection guidelines in international university cooperation are also advisable. In addition, university didactics should be more highly valued at federal state level to support teachers in the implementation of digital international courses.
- Funding organisations such as the **DAAD** should continue to support universities in the field of digital internationalisation. In particular, long-term programmes with a corresponding funding volume – such as IP Digital and IMKD – can provide structural, sustainable impetus for the modernisation of teaching and learning. The networking and dissemination of good practices in the German university landscape and beyond, which is perceived extremely positively in the digital funding programmes, should also be (increasingly) supported.
- In **universities**, the respective university leadership should create strategic perspectives for digital internationalisation and make use of incentives for teachers to promote the broad implementation of digital international formats. In the implementation process, all relevant actors at the working level should be included - from international offices, teaching staff, computer centres to didactic centres - so that the various facets of digital international teaching can be addressed by the responsible units.

1

Key results of the evaluation

1. KEY RESULTS OF THE EVALUATION

OVERVIEW OF THE DIGITAL DAAD FUNDING PROGRAMMES

International Mobility and Cooperation through Digitalisation (IMKD)



International Programmes Digital (IP Digital)



International Virtual Academic Collaboration (IVAC)



Technopolis Group

The German Academic Exchange Service e.V. (DAAD) supports universities in using the opportunities of digitalisation in international university cooperation and in the global acquisition of knowledge and skills. With funds from the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF), the DAAD has developed **three funding programmes** with different focus areas: "International Mobility and Cooperation through Digitalisation" (IMKD), "International Programmes Digital" (IP Digital) and "International Virtual Academic Collaboration" (IVAC).

In this context, the DAAD commissioned Technopolis Germany with the **accompanying evaluation of the three funding programmes**. The aim of the evaluation is to analyse the effects of the funding programmes, to contribute to the further development of the DAAD funding portfolio and to prepare the results for dissemination in the university landscape and beyond. The **key results of this evaluation** are presented below.

The evaluation showed that the programmes contribute to the intended focus areas: In IMKD, methodological knowledge and digital skills were expanded among university staff and students, and structures and processes in teaching and administration were improved in order to promote digital internationalisation at universities as a whole. In

accordance with the programme objective, entire international study programmes were (largely) digitalised in IP Digital. Innovative, digital teaching and learning formats have been successfully tested in the IVAC projects.

Many of the DAAD projects were able to make important **contributions to the implementation of university strategies in the field of internationalisation and digitalisation**: Almost all projects succeeded in providing content-related or methodical impulses (e.g. new didactic concepts) as well as establishing and expanding university networks, contributing to strategy implementation. As IP Digital and IMKD are multi-year programmes, more strategic impulses could be generated within these programmes since the project managers are often directly involved in university strategy processes. Relevant impulses for digital international teaching and learning were also developed in IVAC, the programme with a comparatively shorter duration and funding volume. In addition, a majority of the projects plan to integrate the results in the respective teaching offerings or initiate follow-up projects.

The following **opportunities of digital internationalisation of teaching and learning** were taken up in the DAAD projects:

- **International teaching** was made **more flexible** through digital courses, in particular through the possibility of participating in teaching and learning offerings independently of location, as well as through the combination of asynchronous and synchronous elements.
- Digital international teaching and learning approaches promote - depending on the didactic concept - the **enhancement of digital and/or intercultural skills** among students, which helps to prepare them for the increasingly digitalised, international labour market.
- **Innovative didactic concepts** that were tested can lead to an increased quality of international teaching, for example by implementing student-centred formats (including international group work) and students being closely supervised.
- Digital formats enable **access to international experiences for a more diverse student body**.

The results of the accompanying evaluation show that **blended mobility**, i.e. the combination of virtual and physical mobility, is particularly effective. With blended mobility, the advantages of digital learning formats, e.g. the acquisition of teaching content independent of time and location, are combined with more intensive opportunities for interaction and intercultural exchange during on-site learning phases. Blended mobility is particularly popular against the background of the (in the accompanying evaluation observable) trend towards short-term mobility: They make it possible to combine short physical stays abroad with necessary other activities, e.g. student jobs or care responsibilities. Digital formats can also be used specifically as low-threshold international offerings for students who cannot or do not want to take part in physical exchanges or are still unsure about it. Although many of the DAAD projects could not implement physical stays as planned due to the pandemic, some projects were carried out e.g. (physical) summer/winter schools that were digital-ly prepared and followed up.

Accordingly, digital formats can contribute to purposefully promote **internationalisation across the university**: They can be used in study programmes

with a low degree of internationalisation, and international experiences can be facilitated for students with less flexibility or less intrinsic interest (e.g. in STEM subjects).

However, there are currently particular **challenges** in the practical implementation of digital international teaching:

- The development of suitable didactic concepts and the implementation of teaching and learning formats (particularly student support) is usually considered to be **highly time-consuming for teachers**. In the DAAD projects, a central impetus for the development and implementation was guaranteed by the project funding (including the funding of supporting academic staff). Nevertheless, the effort in formats without funding or after the end of funding remains high.
- Current **higher education policy or administrative/legal framework conditions** pose a challenge for the digital internationalisation of teaching and learning. This includes questions of data protection in international cooperation, using tools and platforms and the general handling of digital students (student status) in study and examination regulations. In some cases, the framework conditions at university level - especially in IP Digital and IMKD - could be improved (e.g. through a revision of examination regulations).
- An explicit **linking of the cross-cutting issues of digitalisation and internationalisation** in higher education strategies currently tends to be rare. Ideas as to how digitalisation can be used more strategically for internationalisation were primarily generated in IP Digital and IMKD.

To what extent digital international teaching and learning contributes to climate protection by reducing travel activities - and thus realising CO₂ savings - could not be analysed in the accompanying evaluation due to a lack of empirical data. With fully digital formats, there are no travel activities. With blended mobility approaches, this depends on the specific implementation. The added value of physical travel lies in the acquisition of comprehensive

1. KEY RESULTS OF THE EVALUATION

intercultural skills on site, which is why **virtual and physical formats should be combined in a sensible way**. Compared to students, a higher savings potential is expected for university staff by increasingly implementing digital international project meetings.

As a result, the evaluation shows that digital teaching in general and its use for international teaching and learning contexts in particular are still evolving. They are stimulated by the digital DAAD funding programmes and European initiatives such as the European Universities Initiative, but also by the ad hoc conversion to digital teaching in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. The majority of universities in Germany are not yet extensively and integrally relying on digitalisation for the purpose of internationalisation.

Digital teaching is of great importance for the **positioning of German universities as internationally attractive, modern study locations**. Nevertheless, according to current studies (including the Monitor Digitalisation 360° of the Hochschulforum Digitalisierung), the number of innovative teaching and learning settings at German universities is still limited. The fundamental importance of digitalisation for the higher education system differs from federal state to federal state. The expansion of digital international teaching and learning is therefore still an important field of action for German universities. For this, universities depend on the support of funding organisations (e.g. the DAAD) and on improved framework conditions (see recommendations below).

2

Recommendations

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

In the following, the central recommendations derived on the basis of the evaluation results are presented with reference to three target groups: the federal and state governments as institutions shaping the framework conditions, the DAAD as supporter and initiator, and the universities themselves.

1.1 Federal and state government

According to the evaluation results, the targeted promotion of digital internationalisation at German universities requires a **(higher education-) political vision for modern teaching**. A commitment by the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) and the federal states (*Bundesländer*) to digital internationalisation as a field of action for German universities is of importance. This should be backed up with relevant goals, such as making Germany more attractive as a study location or improving equal opportunities for disadvantaged students.

At the federal state level, it is recommended to create a conducive and transparent **legal framework** that supports blended mobility. This includes, among other things, regulations on a digital student status and the conversion of the exceptional pandemic regulations into new regulations in the respective states.

Uniform data standards for the exchange of student data and an **orientation for practicable data protection guidelines** should be provided **at federal and state level**. After all, existing European data protection guidelines are often interpreted in Germany more strictly than in other (European) countries, which makes international cooperation more difficult. Clear recommendations for dealing with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) in international university cooperation, which take into account a balance between data protection and the added value of international collaboration, can be of great benefit to German universities.

Last but not least, the accompanying evaluation made it clear that in the context of digitally supported teaching, the didactic conception and implementation of the formats involved great efforts.

Valuing university didactics more highly at state level (including appropriate recognition of the additional teaching workload) would make an important contribution to supporting teachers in the implementation of digital international teaching.

1.2 Funding organisations

The results of the accompanying evaluation show that the digital DAAD funding programmes have already had a wide range of effects on the digital internationalisation of the funded universities. This work **should be continued** by the DAAD and other funding organisations in the higher education sector.

The evaluation results demonstrate that **multi-year programmes with a corresponding funding volume can provide structural impetus for the modernisation of teaching and administration**. In larger projects, it is much more likely that the respective project managers can get involved in strategy processes and initiate sustainable effects at university level. Complementary to this, IVAC projects enable interested teachers to set up and expand their international cooperation. The programme has a positive effect on the further development of teaching. In most cases, however, there are fewer cross-university spill-over effects in the IVAC projects due to the short duration and the limited funding volume per project. Accordingly, for the strategic further development of universities, the **focus should be put on the promotion of multi-year projects**. Impulses at the level of digital international courses should continue to be made possible through **low-threshold one-year projects**.

In the digital DAAD funding programmes, the community-building measures were highly valued by the project managers. The **support of communities of practice and the dissemination of successful approaches** should therefore be continued and strengthened. In suitable communication and dissemination formats, university management should also be explicitly addressed as a target group in order to demonstrate the potential of the strategic

use of digitalisation for internationalisation and concrete implementation options.

Future funding programmes can also place greater consideration on **outcomes relevant to society**, in particular the issue of climate protection, in their calls for application. The promotion of climate-friendly mobility (e.g. similar to Erasmus+ Green) should be given priority as part of blended mobility approaches, even if this involves higher travel costs.

1.3 Universities

The evaluation results show that an integrated process in the universities is required for the expansion of digital international teaching. This should include the **full range of actors relevant to implementation** - including international offices, computer centres, student advisory services, didactic centres, and those responsible for course development. It is crucial that lecturers and international offices do not bear sole responsibility for the process, but rather are supported in all facets of digital international teaching (e.g. hardware and software, data protection issues etc.) within funded projects and beyond.

Good practice examples show that the **involvement of the university leadership** is necessary to **create strategic perspectives** in which the digital international teaching and learning formats are embedded. After the end of the pandemic, a return to a focus on nonvirtual settings within universities can be observed in many cases; there is a lack of long-term perspectives for the further development of digital internationalisation. A commitment from the respective university leadership is of great importance in order to maintain and further advance the dynamics for the modernisation of international teaching and learning.

The university management is also responsible for **expanding incentives** for modern, international teaching: It has become apparent that there is less a lack of support measures than of concrete incentives and freedom for teachers. The digital DAAD funding programmes offer this framework. On this basis, suggestions for the further development of university structures are generated in order to advance digital internationalisation at the funded universities over the long term. In the DAAD projects, it is particularly committed university staff who are driving digital internationalisation forward. Beyond this group, the motivation for the implementation of digital international teaching varies, given the additional effort. This should be addressed using suitable incentives (e.g. support in the form of employees and resources, financial incentives, appreciation through teaching awards etc.) in order to broadly anchor digital internationalisation.

Overall, based on the evaluation results, various programme effects have been identified: at the level of teaching modules (IVAC), entire study programmes (IP Digital), as well as broad effects within the entire university (IMKD). At the time of the accompanying evaluation, it was not yet possible to determine what long-term effects the DAAD projects will have on the funded universities and on the university landscape as a whole. But one thing is certain: With the digital funding programmes, the DAAD is sending an important signal about the importance of the digital internationalisation of German universities. In order for Germany to remain attractive and competitive as a study location in the long term, it is important to anchor this as a field of action in higher education policy.

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