



COUNSELLING IN PROFILE

SOCIAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL COUNSELLING SERVICES OF
THE STUDENT SERVICE ORGANISATIONS IN GERMANY



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FOREWORD



The counselling services of the Studentenwerke and Studierendenwerke (STWs) are a crucial element of the social infrastructure in Germany's higher education sector – they promote equal opportunities in higher education.

The 57 public student service organisations – the STWs – provide a wide range of services to all 2.8 mio students in German higher education. They provide now not only affordable student housing and food, run the federal financial aid scheme (BAFöG) and support international students, but they also provide crucial counselling services in extension of Germany's well-developed public health and social security system.

In 2006, we published the first version of our booklet on counselling in the higher education sector ("Beratung im Hochschulbereich"). Since then, studying and the campus environment have changed considerably. While the "Bologna-reforms" and their new studying structure with Bachelor and Master programmes and their challenges for students are now commonplace, parallel developments such as the internationalisation of higher education, institutions opening up to different educational biographies, or the strong increase in student numbers have added further demands on the STWs' continuous counselling for students.

In this booklet, we present an up-to-date profile of social counselling ("Soziberatung") and psychological counselling ("Psychologische Beratung") as it is offered by the STWs today. Much of this is well established and is now simply acquiring a contemporary form. But much has developed further. The counselling services expand and diversify. This booklet devotes more attention to the considerable scope of counselling services that the STWs run across Germany.

Our prediction from 2006 that the demand for counselling was set to rise has more than materialised. In psychological counselling, we have recorded 60% more counselling contacts since then, and in social counselling numbers have risen by 50%. While the STWs provide more counselling than ever before, it still does not cover demand – which is reflected in the long waiting periods and overcrowded walk-in consultations.

Generally, continuous social and psychological counselling in higher education are individual assistance services based on a preventive and resource-oriented approach. In addition to

the very individual benefit students draw from them, the STW counselling services have an economic effect. They contribute to avoiding dropping out of and prolonging studies, thus reducing the cost of a study course. Moreover, by preventing mental disorders, they lower and avoid health costs.

Students in special life circumstances are increasingly benefiting from continuous counselling services. Students with family responsibilities, disabilities or chronic illnesses as well as international students constitute important groups – but are only part of the picture. "First-generation" students, minors and students with different professional and educational biographies may also be in special need of counselling. Thus, the STW counselling services contribute to the social mission of promoting participation, integration and inclusion in higher education.

The DSW Committee on Counselling and Social Services developed this booklet – and Linda Wilken (STW Hannover), Dr. Gabriele Jungnickel (STW Cologne), Ulrike Sand (STW Essen-Duisburg) and Committee Chairman Wilfried Schumann (STW Oldenburg) were in charge. Thanks to them, we now have this convincing publication.

I am certain that all actors, including those in politics, have recognised the importance of professional counselling services for students. Nevertheless, financing issues in particular are not settled. In many places, the STW – and the students – have to shoulder the costs of counselling services on their own. A sustainable development of good, professional counselling requires sound funding involving all actors: the STW, the universities, the federal states ("Länder") and the federal government ("Bund")! This booklet shows that investing here is worthwhile.

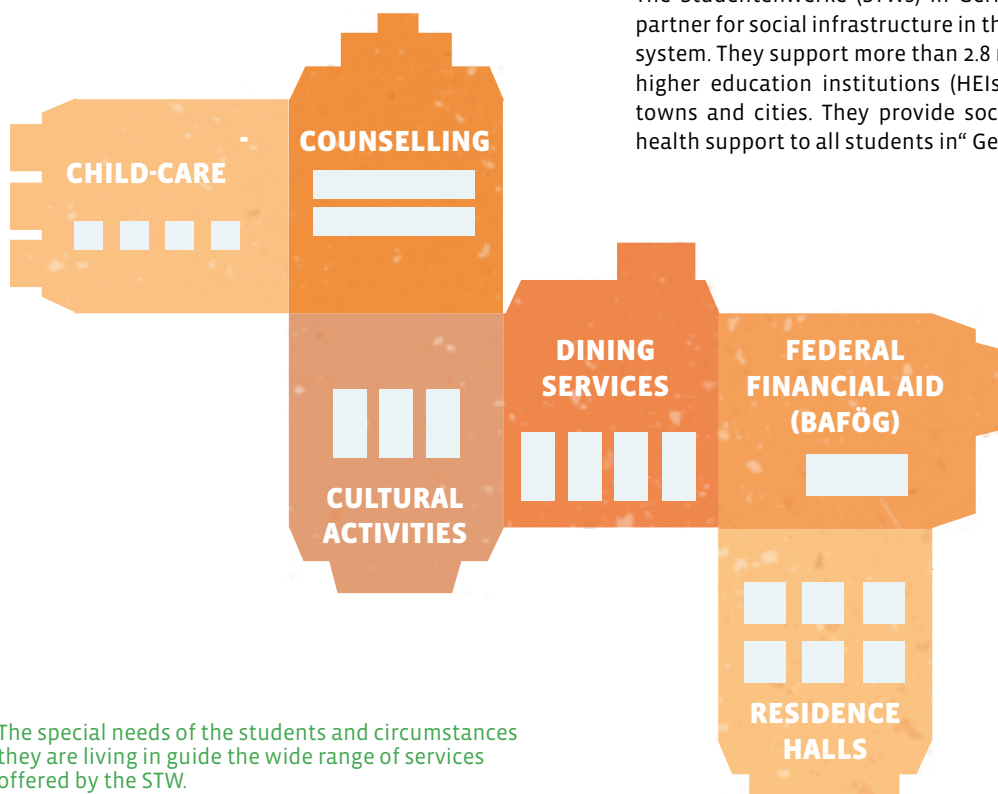
I wish you an interesting read.

Achim Meyer auf der Heyde
Secretary General, Deutsches Studentenwerk
(German National Association for Student Affairs)

THE STUDENTENWERKE:

A WIDE RANGE OF SERVICES FOR A DIVERSITY OF PERSONAL CIRCUMSTANCES

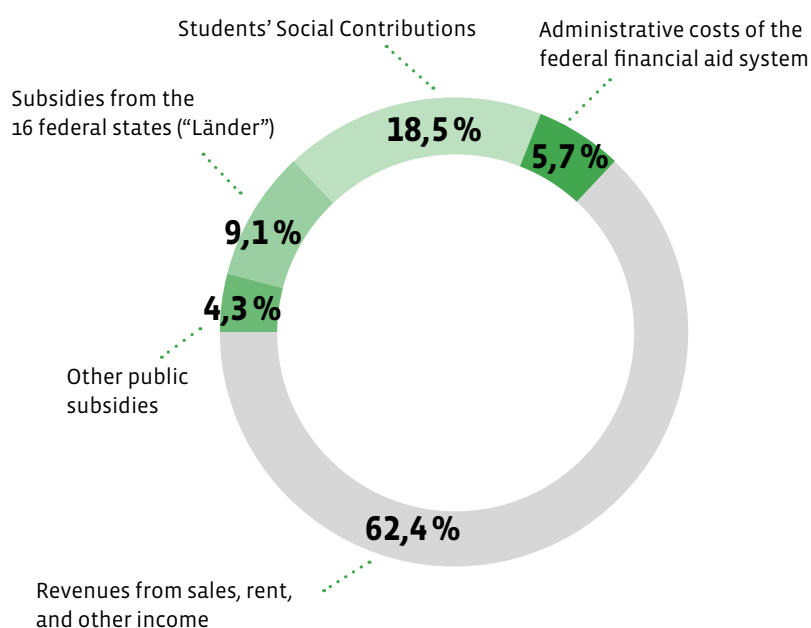
The Studentenwerke (STWs) in Germany are an indispensable partner for social infrastructure in the German higher education system. They support more than 2.8 million students at over 300 higher education institutions (HEIs) in around 200 university towns and cities. They provide social, economic, cultural and health support to all students in Germany.



The special needs of the students and circumstances they are living in guide the wide range of services offered by the STW.

STW FUNDING IN 2017 IN % (NATIONAL AVERAGE)

The STWs are public service providers with a social mission. They operate according to modern principles – including market and customer orientation, staff training and development as well as quality assurance. However, they also pursue the mission of providing constitutionally guaranteed (welfare) state public services. Therefore, the STWs also perform services in areas that are not profitable, maintaining a comparable service infrastructure in locations that do not pay their way from a business point of view.



Source: DSW 2018: Student Service Organisations – Facts and Figures, Berlin

DIVERSITY OF STUDENTS

48% of students have a non-academic family background



20% have a migrant background



13% foreign students



6% with children



11% with disabilities or chronic illnesses

BURDENS STUDENTS FACE

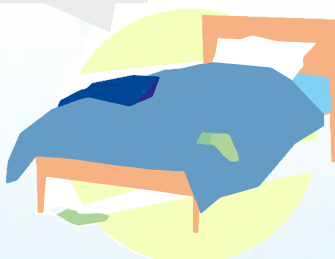
76% achievement demands



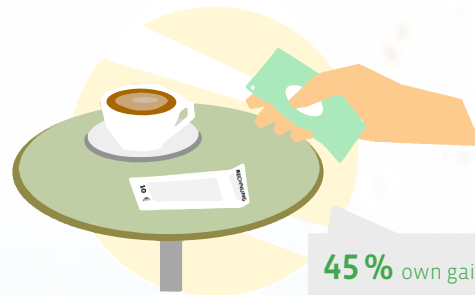
50% financial situation



43% personal problems



45% own gainful employment



Sources: 13th student survey at universities and universities of applied sciences 2017 (original title: Studierendensurvey an Universitäten und Fachhochschulen [2017], DSW/DZHW special report on international students in Germany 2012 for the 20th social survey (original title: DSW/DZHW Sonderbericht "Ausländische Studierende in Deutschland 2012" zur 20. Sozialerhebung), student statistics of the Federal Statistics Office, DZHW calculation

COUNSELLING IN PROFILE

GENERAL FEATURES OF GOOD COUNSELLING

Professional counselling – a key for student success!

Students have to master a multitude of challenges, the chief ones being academic demands, detachment from parents, developing a new social network, arranging sound financing of studies and maintenance, getting familiar with the rules and performance requirements at their institutions and the wide range of options to study and career goals to pursue. In addition, students must observe a confusing number of legal and bureaucratic regulations that the student status entails. This interaction of challenges results in a diversity of needs for assistance reaching from general information through individual, detailed counselling to intensive support or crisis intervention. Moreover, practical experience has shown that students expect a lot from counselling. Fettered by tight constraints and regulations, they have to rely on fast, accurate and relevant information and assistance.

This booklet provides an update on the impressive efforts behind the increasing demand for counselling among students. Setting out from the standard foundations of professional counselling, we outline the ideal-typical features of psychological and social counselling services for students in higher education.

In the day-to-day activities of the STW, these features assume various forms. Different counselling models develop and adapt to the individual locations. The counsellors in this booklet illustrate this diversity. Often, higher education institutions run academic advisory services, while the STW provides psychological and social counselling in separate contexts, depending on the respective tasks to be dealt with; in some places, however, integrated services are run.

THE SOCIAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL COUNSELLING SERVICES ...

... SPECIALISE IN ADDRESSING STUDENTS' CONCERNS.

As part of the world of higher education, the counsellors are familiar with the concerns of each student generation and already recognise new trends at an early stage that they can respond to with appropriate assistance methods. They can address perennial problems of students drawing on tried and tested experience.

... CONTRIBUTE TO STUDENT RETENTION AND SUCCESS AND PREVENT DROPOUTS.

Financial, social or mental health problems and crises can jeopardise student retention and success. The counsellors assist in coping with these crises and problems by providing sound information and applying professional counselling methods. The focus is always on the individual options and interests of those seeking advice.

... ARE OPEN TO ALL STUDENTS ON ALL LEVELS.

Students generally need a lot of advice and information – regardless of whether they happen to be facing particularly challenging circumstances. They are going through a phase in life that involves key steps in their development, a situation of biographical transition, and a time of financial insecurity.

... SUPPORT AND PROMOTE DIVER- SITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION.

Information, counselling and support for students in special circumstances is a traditional STW activity. Experience with different student groups and the counsellors' specialist knowledge provide good framework conditions for successful studying among a diversity of students.

... ARE INDEPENDENT OF THE INTERESTS OF OTHER INSTITUTIONS.

Psychological and social concerns bring about a special fear of stigmatisation and self-revelation. This is why those seeking advice need a specially protected environment. Being independent of higher education institutions and authorities for social services, the counselling centres provide precisely such an environment. Especially in the case of psychological counselling, independence from the statutory health insurance system is crucial. Students' concerns at the STW are not invoiced or registered by health insurances.

... ARE CENTRAL INTERFACES IN THE STWs AND IN THE LOCAL COUNSELLING NETWORKS.

Within the STWs, the counselling centres are organised in a network with other services and areas of activity. This includes, for instance, childcare services, the BAföG or financial aid department or student halls of residence. In addition, they cooperate with specialist, counselling and information services of the higher education institutions themselves and local authorities. These network activities include regular communication and joint events with the central academic advisory services, the international students' office, student government and representation, the commissioners for students with disabilities and for equal opportunities as well as local authorities such as the employment agency or the "JobCenter". Such network activities enhance basic procedures in HEIs and authorities.



GENERAL STANDARDS OF PROFESSIONAL COUNSELLING

THE COUNSELLORS

- act transparently
- guarantee confidentiality
- apply scientifically sound counselling methods
- continuously check and develop their quality

COUNSELLING

- is understood as “help towards self-help”, i.e. it encourages the individual to act and take decisions
- focuses on the individual concerns of those seeking advice
- is based on an appreciative attitude towards those seeking advice and the diversity regarding their background, biography, personality and life concepts
- is voluntary

These standards guide both the psychological and the social counselling services of the STW.

STUDENT RETENTION AND SUCCESS – THE CORE TARGET OF STUDENT COUNSELLING SERVICES?

Studying is not the suitable form of higher education and training for all students. Some consider ending their studies, while others are forced to drop out. Whatever the case, student dropouts have become an attractive target group for politics and industry – especially since demographic change leaves open many vacancies in the German apprenticeship and vocational training system.

The student counselling centres can be a crucial factor in this context. They are able to support students in taking a decision and – should they opt for ending their studies – finding a fitting transition to other supporting actors such as the employment agency. One significant challenge in this context is to provide counselling with an open outcome.



20%

of students in German higher education consider dropping out of studies.

Source: 13th Student Survey (Studierendensurvey 2017)



PSYCHOLOGICAL COUNSELLING

IN PROFILE

Psychological counselling provides targeted and methodical support for students to develop their personal potentials and apply them in their studies in the best way.

PSYCHOLOGICAL COUNSELLING IN PROFILE

FACTS AND FIGURES

MISSION AND GOALS

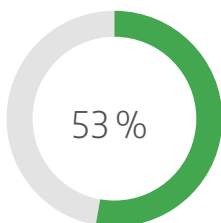
INDIVIDUAL

- supporting the identification of individual resources that those seeking advice already have
- encouraging them to become aware of their potentials and apply them self-determinedly (and effectively)
- strengthening individual skills to act and take decisions
- strengthening individual work and performance capacities as well as a self-conscious handling of achievement-related demands
- promoting social skills and the development of healthy social relationships

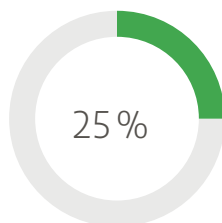
INSTITUTIONAL

- supporting well-considered use of study programmes
- reducing sickness periods and downtime
- avoiding or reducing social costs that would arise if unresolved mental crises were to become chronic or lead to dropping out of studies
- strengthening individual work and performance capacities as well as a self-conscious handling of achievement-related demands

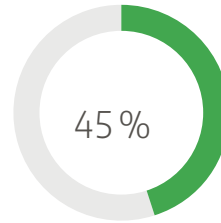
EXAM ANXIETY AMONG STUDENTS



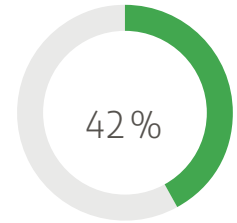
are familiar with exam anxiety



fully agree with the statement "I usually feel anxious before tests"



of students declare that they are worried that they won't complete their studies



have already experienced a blackout during a test and forgotten what they had learnt because of over-excitement

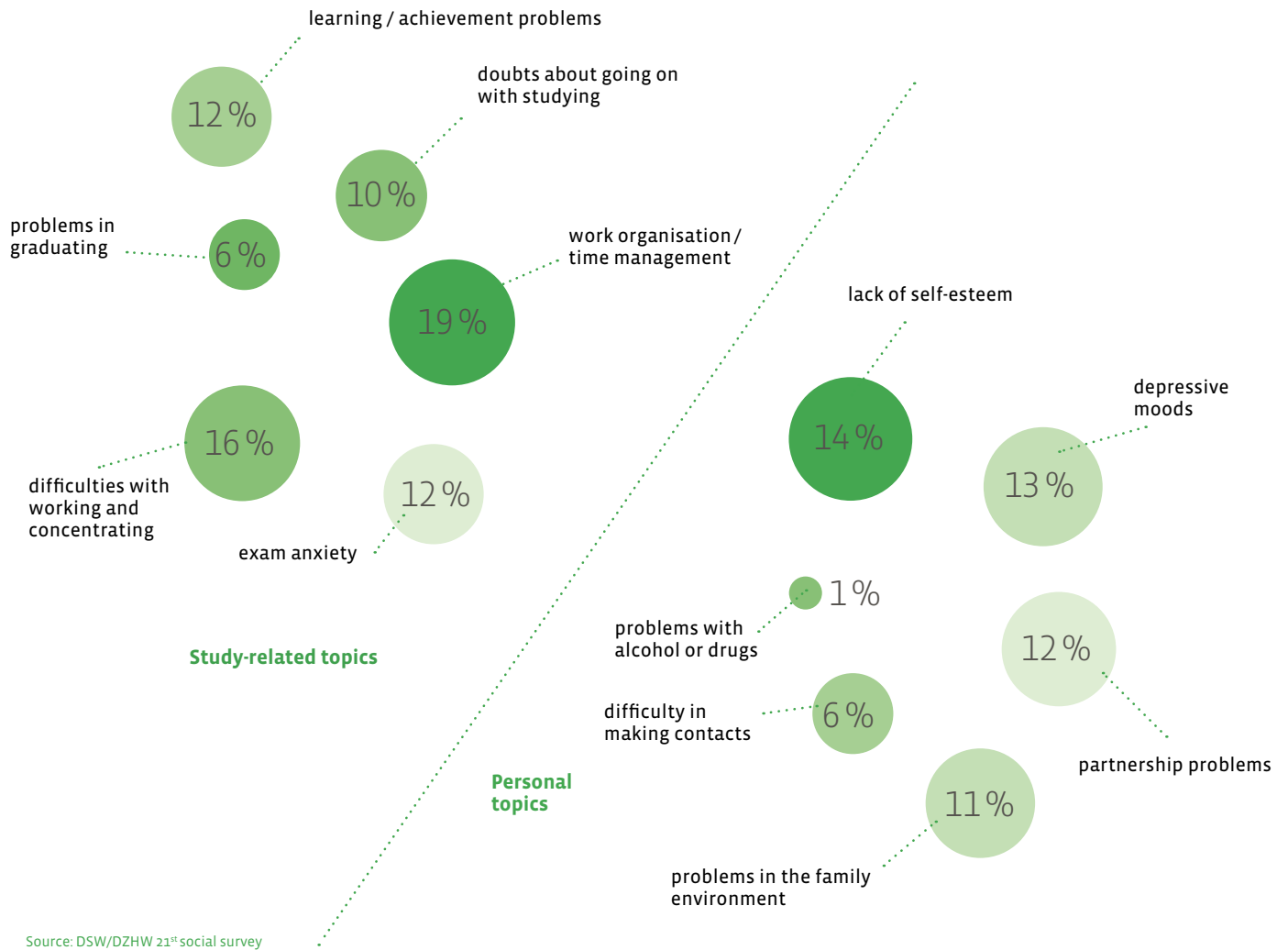
Source: 13th Student Survey (Studierendensurvey 2017)(several answers were possible)



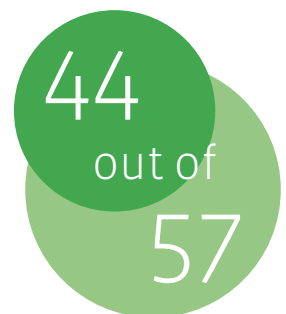
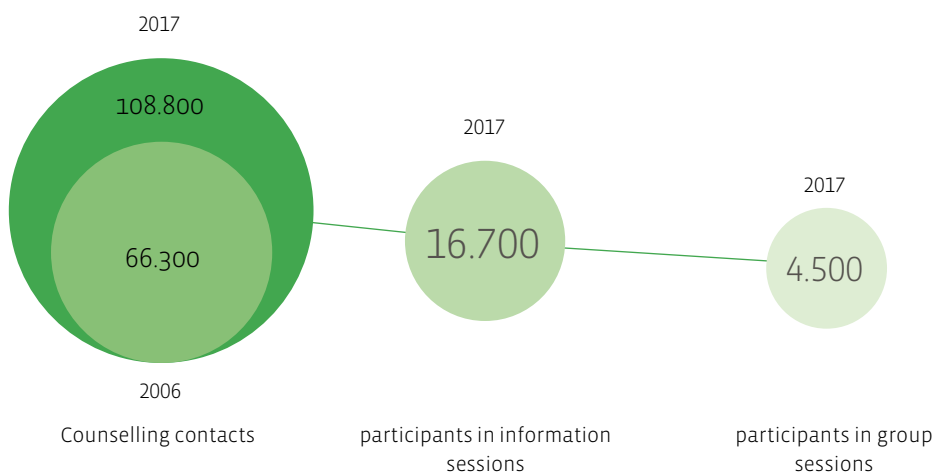
SPECIAL STRUCTURAL FEATURES OF STW PSYCHOLOGICAL COUNSELLING

- independent of psycho-therapeutic care offered by the public health systems
- short- to medium-term sequences in counselling
- in individual cases, longer or intermittent counselling processes
- mostly free of charge

HOW THE STW PSYCHOLOGICAL COUNSELLING SERVICES ARE USED



INCREASE IN COUNSELLING CONTACTS IN PSYCHOLOGICAL COUNSELLING



STWs provide Psychological Counselling

Source: Student Services Organisations – Facts and Figures 2017/2018

PSYCHOLOGICAL COUNSELLING IN PROFILE

KEY FEATURES

THE STW PSYCHOLOGICAL COUNSELLING SERVICES ...

... ARE THE FIRST PORT OF CALL FOR STUDENTS IN MENTAL CRISES.

Students are still in the process of developing their personalities at several levels. They often lack experience and solution patterns to master their problems. They question the meaning and objectives of what they are doing, they trouble themselves with self-doubt and they are looking for orientation. In this phase of life, mental health crises are particularly probable. In such uncertainty, students need a low-threshold settling of their situation. The counsellors can assess the degree of severity of mental health problems, and in most cases, they can provide suitable support for those seeking advice in the context of counselling.

Psychological counselling
can help

80 %

of those seeking advice

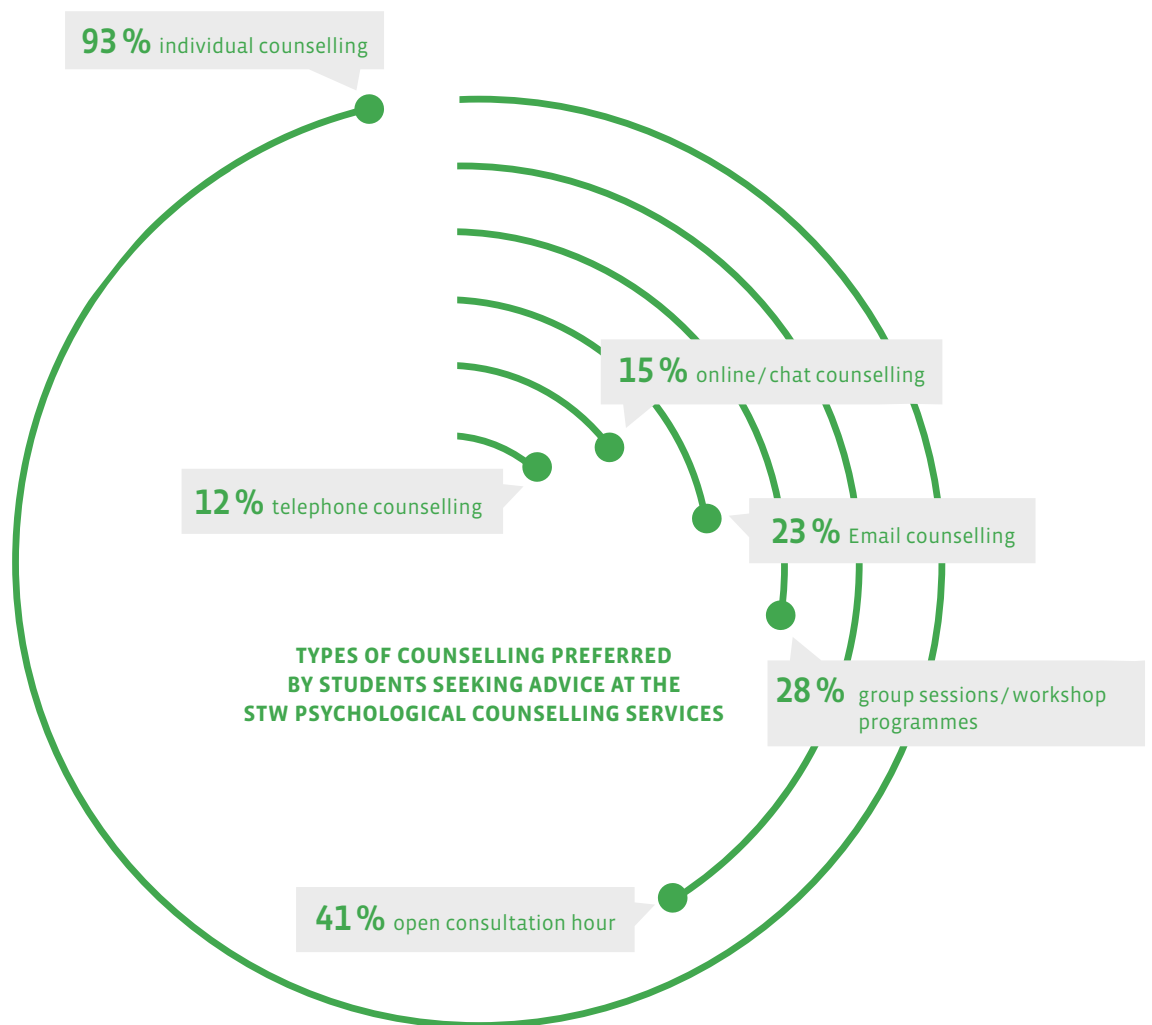
Source: internal survey by Deutsches Studentenwerk

... CONTRIBUTE TO PREVENTING MENTAL ILLNESSES.

Mental health crises among students can bring about undesirable developments such as addiction, social retreat, isolation and self-exhaustion and result in serious mental health disorders. Psychological counselling can intervene at an early stage with sound methods and thus counter, or ideally even prevent, the (chronic) development of mental illnesses.

... ARE INTERFACES WITH FURTHER TREATMENT WHEN NEEDED.

The counsellors support transfers to external psychotherapeutic or medical assistance – provided the problems of an individual seeking advice require this. Counselling offers the opportunity to inform students about treatment methods and the formal procedure of applying for therapy in a confidential context. In Germany, waiting for psychotherapeutic treatment may take several months, and psychological counselling in the STW can bridge this waiting period.



Source: DSW/HIS Counselling for bachelor students during studies and in day-to-day life (original title: Beratung von Bachelorstudierenden in Studium und Alltag 2013).

... CENTRE ON INDIVIDUAL COUNSELLING, SUPPLEMENTED BY VARIOUS OTHER FORMATS.

The focus of psychological counselling is a confidential conversation with an individual. In addition, psychological group counselling, psycho-educative workshops and courses can be helpful. Furthermore, students seeking advice receive information through lectures and special material e. g. on preparing for exams and learning techniques. More and more counselling centres are offering psychological counselling online. The supplementary formats are not conceived as alternatives to individual counselling – rather, they are meant to make access to it easier or to support individual assistance.

... PROMOTE STRENGTHENING AND MAINTAINING THE ABILITY TO STUDY.

If an individual's personal resources to cope are not enough to master the demands of studying and everyday life, this can inhibit the ability to study and possibly even jeopardise a successful outcome of studies. In this situation, psychological counselling supports individuals seeking advice in developing new options for action and scope for designing and trying out new approaches. Every crisis is individual, and the process of coping with it proceeds in different ways. Psychological counselling strengthens social and health-promoting skills, lifestyles, working styles, and the ability to pursue one's own values and realise one's own goals.

PSYCHOLOGICAL COUNSELLING IN PROFILE

VOICES FROM PRACTICE

Sabine Köster

DIRECTOR OF THE PSYCHOTHERAPEUTIC COUNSELLING CENTRE OF STW KARLSRUHE

What I particularly like about this work is that each case really is an individual one. For instance, if someone visits us because he has failed two tests, this may have very different reasons. Perhaps the academic subject is not the right one, external factors could be to blame, or maybe the wrong learning strategy was chosen. In all cases, we can become active as counsellors. Seen from the outside, the students of a certain branch are a homogeneous group with the same prerequisites. But this is not the way things really are. Correspondingly, there is no one-size-fits-all solution, even if problems appear to be similar at first sight. Behind each individual seeking advice, there is always an individual story. We have enough time to deal with this story in each individual case. And that's what makes this profession so much fun. The target is counselling, and not merely giving advice.

The demand curve is climbing. In 2016, we registered more than 1,500 students' contacts and held around 5,000 counselling sessions. In 2006, there had been 713 students and about 2,900 counselling sessions. We are trying to find out why this is the case with questionnaires. One aspect is mouth-to-mouth propaganda. The more students come to us, the more students will recommend us to others.



“There is always an individual story behind each person who is seeking advice.”

“I would like to have more scope for prevention work.”



Dr. Sabine Stiehler

DIRECTOR OF THE PSYCHOSOCIAL COUNSELLING CENTRE OF STW DRESDEN

We are five counsellors – for 45,000 students. On average, we have ten requests a day – most of them via email, and many very lengthy. For us counsellors, coping with this flood of emails means a lot of work. We always try to arrange an appointment. If our capacities are fully utilised, we have the option to refer those seeking advice to the Counselling Centre of the Health Authority here in Dresden, which we cooperate with on a very confidential basis

When a student comes to us, we hold an initial interview. It comprises 25 items that the students fill in, stating how much they are suffering from a certain issue. The depressive mood is mentioned most often. This was not the case in the past. Obviously, confessing to this is easier today. This may also relate to the public debate over the topic in the media.

What I would like is more opportunity for prevention. In the past, I would go to seminars and request the professors to make use of the first ten minutes to acquaint the students with our work. I think it makes sense to get in touch with students in everyday student life in order to lower the access threshold. For students resorting to counselling have usually spent a year considering whether they want to use the service in the first place. Therefore, it is important to lower these thresholds. However, this would require more staff resources – in concrete terms, this would be two additional staff posts.

Reinhard Mack

DIRECTOR OF THE PSYCHOTHERAPEUTIC COUNSELLING CENTRE OF STW BODENSEE (LAKE CONSTANCE)

About 700 individuals seek advice from our counselling centre each year. Since 2005, we have been offering online counselling in addition to our consultation hours. Around 35 individuals seeking advice make use of this service each year – that is about five per cent. Messages via online counselling vary considerably. Some are very short, comprising just three sentences, such as: “I am lovesick. Don’t know how to carry on. What shall I do?” This puts the onus on the counsellor to find an approach. Others may write very detailed accounts of one to five pages. Here, it is important to concentrate on the important items. Contrary to what one may have expected, this often makes online counselling quite a lot more work-intensive than a direct conversation. In spite of this, my experience is that it constitutes an important supplement to face-to-face counselling.

Online counselling has several positive effects. We use a special software that is completely anonymous. Although we offer the option to write under a real name, nobody really does this. Most individuals seeking advice do not state their gender, either. In addition, counselling is bound neither to a certain time nor to a certain locality. Moreover, we have the possibility to reach out to students seeking counselling who would never have come to the counselling centre. The internet offers people with social phobias a different opportunity to communicate with others, for instance in forums and networks. It is the usual communication medium among young people. It is so important for counselling to take advantage of the communication channels that its target group also uses for other purposes – and these are online! In the course of counselling, some of those seeking advice decide to switch to personal conversations – especially when the problems involved are severe. This shows that online counselling can also establishing a good confidential relationship between the counsellor and the individual seeking advice.

“With online counselling, we have the possibility to reach out to students seeking counselling who would never have come to the counselling centre.”



“Students nowadays approach the topic of psychological counselling much more pragmatically and self-confidently.”



Wilfried Schumann

DIRECTOR OF THE PSYCHOLOGICAL COUNSELLING SERVICE OF THE STW AND THE UNIVERSITY OLDENBURG

In Oldenburg, we work successfully in collaboration with the other counselling centres of our STW: Social counselling, counselling for students with disabilities and with chronic illnesses and with the financial aid centre. We have good personal contacts, and today, we are all together in one building. This enables us to refer those seeking advice directly to the colleagues of the other counselling centres, should this be required. We notice that students nowadays approach the topic of psychological counselling much more pragmatically and self-confidently. Like when a car breaks down, you go to a garage and have a mechanic look at it. If you can’t find a solution to a personal problem on your own or with your friends, why not consult an expert?

Still, there are differences. Engineering students tend to come more rarely than those studying social sciences. Regarding women and men, we have a ratio of about two to one. All these factors influence the contents of our work. Men start with counselling significantly later than women – often, the horse has already bolted and they are in a rather bad state when they visit us for the first time.

Things are different again with international students. Depending on their cultural context, they may not be familiar with counselling services or may view them sceptically. Given this threshold problem, it has proven very useful in our centres that we supervise and coordinate the work of the STW student tutors in residence halls. The tutors themselves are international students, which gives them credit of trust among their fellow students. Their chief task is activities focusing on social interaction and integration of people of different cultures in the residence halls. At the same time, they also act as multipliers of our work and can convincingly demonstrate that psychological counselling is performed confidentially and can really be helpful.

PSYCHOLOGICAL COUNSELLING IN PROFILE

FOCUS ON HEALTH PROMOTION

Psychological prevention services and health promotion

In the Prevention Act (“Präventionsgesetz”), which entered into force in July 2015, the Federal Government now explicitly refers to studying as one of the fields in which health promoting and preventive measures can have an impact. This is a step in the right direction. Studying represents a phase in life in which young people develop individual coping, work and lifestyles. These have different qualities. They can fit in well with a life making a multitude of demands – but in the end they can also make people ill. This means that studying bears a greater potential than just a high education level. Actively designing one’s own life as life expectancy grows, becoming part of society and meeting the demands of the working world, whether it be high flexibility or life-long learning, requires life skills that maintain and promote individual health. Developing them can be actively supported during studies.

Promoting the mental health of students is part of the mission of the STWs’ psychological counselling services. Even if they are used to bridge waiting periods, they are explicitly not services run in parallel to the psychotherapeutic services of the statutory (national) health insurances. Neither are they meant to compensate for insufficient psychotherapeutic counselling services in a city or town, nor is psychotherapy meant to make up for insufficient counselling services. Health insurance accounting is tied to formalities demanding a translation e.g. of essential questions or decision-making dilemmas into “disturbances representing illnesses”. This is neither in the interest of healthy students seeking advice nor in that of the service-providing system. Students seeking support through coaching or psychotherapy outside the statutory health system have to reckon with high costs.

The psychological counselling services of the STW see themselves explicitly as a field of activity in its own right. Unlike the services supported by the national health insurance system, they offer very low-threshold counselling and coaching services with which we can prevent the development of disorders attaining the level of an illness in time. Regarding study-related problems, the Psychological Counselling services differ significantly from the university services supporting the ability to study. Not only are general studying techniques or ways to reduce stress imparted. We always create an intensive reference to the individual and the situation the individual is in with his or her respective resources. This provides an important basis for successful change and coping processes.

Only a good intermeshing of services offered by the different actors (with appropriate prerequisites!) enables a sound prevention and health promotion concept at HEIs. Psychological counsellors can provide important impulses for the development of these concepts.

MENTAL DISORDERS AMONG STUDENTS

17 %

are at least sometimes affected by a mental disorder

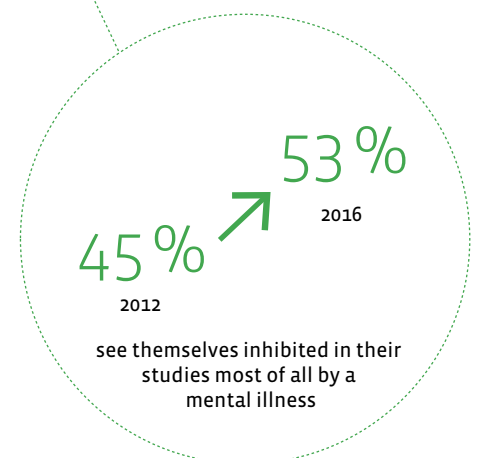
5 %

are affected by depressive disorders

The risk of depression is growing among students. Setting out from a very low level at the age of 18 years, it grows considerably as age progresses. At the age of 29 or 30 years, it rises significantly above the risk of non-students to develop the illness.

Source: BARMER physicians' report (Arztreport der BARMER – 2018)

11 % of students have an impediment relating to their studies



Sources: DSW/DZHW 21st social survey “studying with disabilities 1” (2011) and “studying with disabilities 2” (2016/2017) (21. Sozialerhebung; DSW/DZHW “beeinträchtigt studieren 1” [2011] und “beeinträchtigt studieren 2” [2016/2017])



SOCIAL COUNSELLING

IN PROFILE

Social counselling provides students with sound knowledge as well as guidance and decision-making support regarding entitlements to benefits and services and social regulations – and it provides further access to higher education and resources for studies.

SOCIAL COUNSELLING IN PROFILE

FACTS AND FIGURES

TARGETS AND MISSION

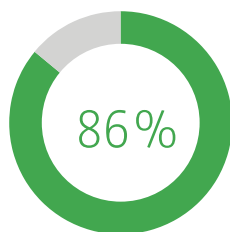
INDIVIDUAL

- establishing the social and economic circumstances and developing suitable financing and study structures as a prerequisite for making studying less of a strain
- imparting comprehensive knowledge of the rights and duties that the status of a student entails
- support if needed, e.g. in a conflict situation, or in enforcement of claims

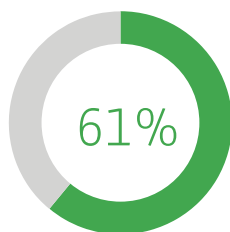
INSTITUTIONAL

- recognising and referring to insufficient or unclear legal regulations for students
- avoiding or reducing debt through financing strategies

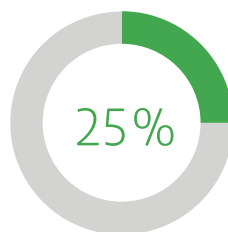
SOURCES FOR STUDY FINANCING



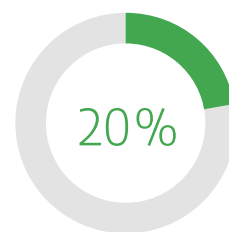
parental support



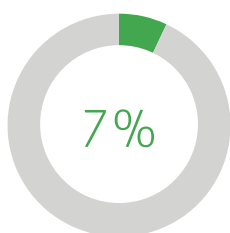
own income



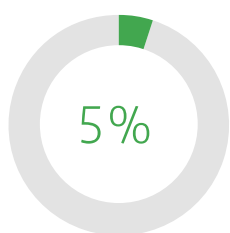
Federal Financial Aid (BAföG)



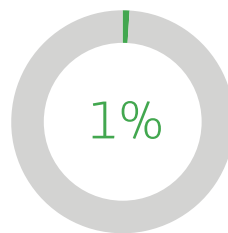
relatives / acquaintances



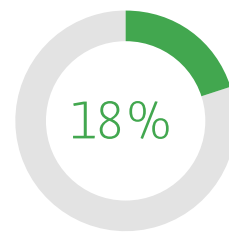
loans



grants



partner



savings

Source: 21st social survey of DSW (multiple answers were possible)



STRUCTURAL SPECIALITIES OF STW SOCIAL COUNSELLING

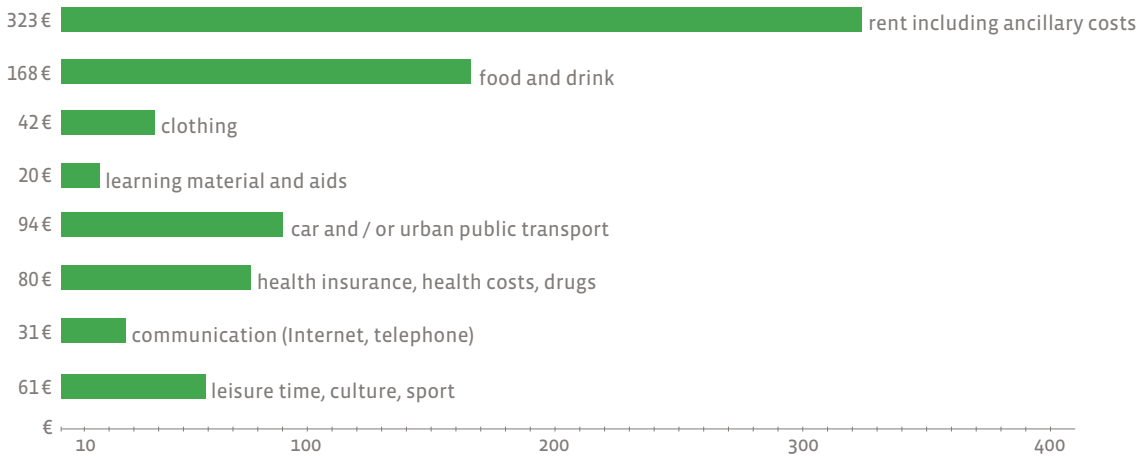
- free of charge
- anonymous upon request
- consultation hours
- preferably single appointments instead of long counselling sequences

Outreach work in socio-pedagogical assistance and support in social crises

In addition to social counselling, some STWs offer socio-pedagogical assistance and support. These services help students in very problematic situations to find their way to counselling or to other support services, e.g. via home visits.

In severe crises, they refer students to crisis intervention measures run by the local authorities.

MONTHLY EXPENSES OF STUDENTS (NATIONAL AVERAGE)



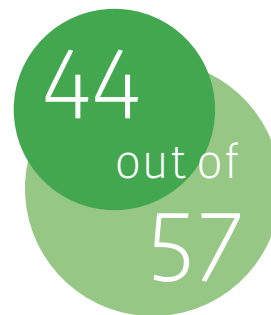
Source: 21st Socialsurvey of DSW

THE MOST IMPORTANT TOPICS ADDRESSED IN STW SOCIAL COUNSELLING

- 1 social benefits (e. g. social security code, housing allowances, parental allowance, child benefits for students)
- 2 information on federal financial aid (BAföG)
- 3 credits and loans
- 4 reduced charges & financial benefits
- 5 employment and jobs
- 6 grants & scholarships
- 7 statutory health insurance
- 8 study organisation
- 9 financing graduating
- 10 leave/ exams procedures

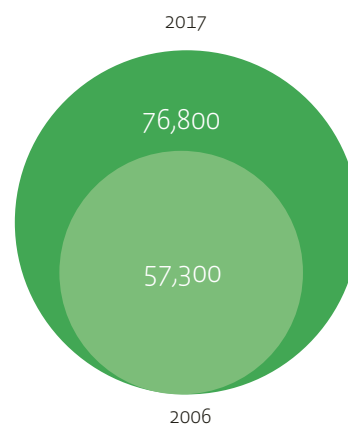
ISSUES IN SPECIAL LIFE SITUATIONS:

- studying with children, e. g. supplementary child allowance, childcare
- studying with impairments, e. g. integration support, compensation for disadvantages
- international students, e. g. right of residence issues, work permits



STWs run Social
Counselling

INCREASE IN COUNSELLING CONTACTS IN SOCIAL COUNSELLING



Source: Student Services Organisations – Facts and Figures 2017/2018

SOCIAL COUNSELLING IN PROFILE

KEY FEATURES

THE STW SOCIAL COUNSELLING SERVICES ...

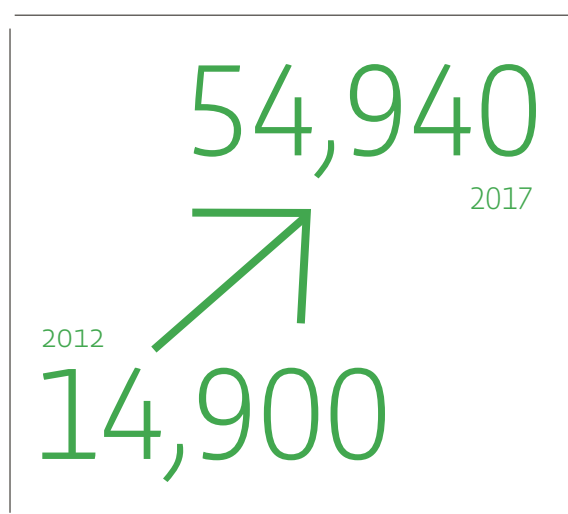
... GUIDE STUDENTS THROUGH THE JUNGLE OF LEGAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE REGULATIONS.

The individual social concerns of students frequently relate to different fields of topics and law. Assessing the concrete individual case, the counsellors explain possible approaches and provide necessary information that those seeking advice can understand. The counselling centres act as moderators in conflict situations – also in those involving authorities – and help enforce claims.

... SUPPORT SOUND PLANNING OF STUDIES AND THE PREVENTION OF SOCIAL HARDSHIP.

Social counselling supports students in developing strategies to secure those social and economic foundations for their studies that suit their personal life situation and the respective stage of their studies. Thus, students can organise their studies on a long-term basis, are more able to comply with regulations and meet deadlines, make optimum use of rights they are entitled to – and have more resources for their studies.

PARTICIPANTS REACHED BY INFORMATION EVENTS

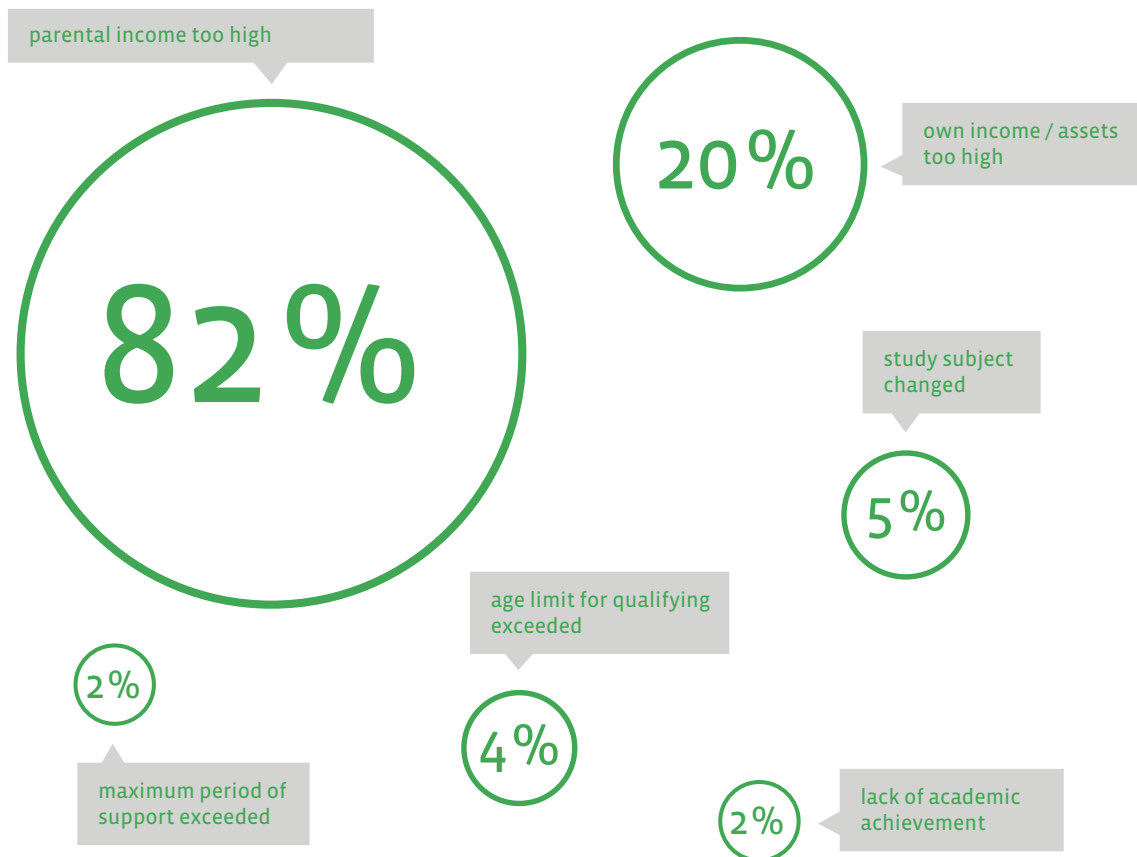


Source: Student Services Organisations – Facts and Figures 2017/2018

... PROVIDE STUDENTS WITH THE BASICS OF SOCIAL REGULATIONS FOR STUDENTS VIA MEDIA AND EVENTS.

Social Counselling provides basic information on legal, financial and social framework conditions relating to the student status via one-on-one conversations and lectures and information events such as trade fairs. The key information media are the Internet sites of the counselling centre and print material.

REASONS FOR A BAFÖG APPLICATION TO BE TURNED DOWN (MULTIPLE REFERENCES, IN %)



Source: 21st social survey of DSW

... PROVIDE COUNSELLING THAT IS ADAPTED TO THE INDIVIDUAL SITUATION ACROSS THE ENTIRE RANGE OF FINANCING SOURCES DURING STUDYING.

Social counselling focuses on the issue of financing studies. Many students do not have a comprehensive overview of their financial situation. Social counselling provides fundamental information on BAFÖG benefits and other possible financing sources such as social benefits, parental income, gainful employment, grants and general reductions in charges to loans. Thus students can develop suitable financing models and avoid debt.

SOCIAL COUNSELLING IN PROFILE

VOICES FROM PRACTICE

Ulrike Sand

DEPARTMENT HEAD, SOCIAL AND INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS
STW ESSEN-DUISBURG

Over the past years, the higher education landscape has undergone continuous changes. International students are actively recruited, while inclusion concepts now provide obstacle-free access to studying for chronically ill students and students with disabilities. As a result of the Turbo-Abitur (a fast-track general higher secondary certificate of education), more and more younger students are now enrolling at colleges and universities, while pressure to perform for the new Bachelor and Master degrees has stayed at a very high level. We need highly diversified specialist knowledge to provide those seeking advice with the information they need to organise their studies effectively on a long-term basis.

Our counselling activities are organised around open consultation hours and single appointments. We hold open consultation hours twice a week and there is rising demand. Here, we take up topics and concerns; we structure them and deal with them as far as possible. Should issues be more complex, we arrange follow-up appointments. This is especially the case with financing issues, aliens' law matters and special regulations and social security benefits for students with children. Decisions taken here have a long-term impact on the economic and personal situation of the students and may even be crucial when it comes to opting for or against studies.

We have seen that students are often insufficiently or even badly informed; they come to the counselling centre at a very late stage. One of the reasons for this is that counselling centres outside the university have hardly any knowledge of the legal and economic situation of students and those students do not know whom to address with their concerns. Early and comprehensive information helps prevent wrong decisions, avoid delaying or dropping out of studies and running into excessive debt or forced expulsion. That's why it's particularly important to get in touch with students as early as possible.



“It’s important to get in touch with students as early as possible.”



“For me as a counsellor, it is important to ease pressure – especially when it comes to financial issues.”

Mike Böse

COUNSELLING AND FINANCING STUDIES, STW KASSEL

Higher education has changed fundamentally. When I was a student, the University of Kassel had 12,000 students, and now there are 25,000. Today, the primary goal for many of them is to qualify for a job. Of course, this also has a lot to do with the shortening of the standard period of studying. Students frequently think: “I have to finish my studies within the prescribed period.” This is above all the case when they are among the roughly 20% receiving federal financial aid (BAföG). There is, for example, the option to extend study financing, and one can switch to another subject within the first year.

Ultimately, the pressure that has increased here at the university reflects changes in society as a whole. Pressure to perform has increased in many areas. As an example, the social security code regulations – generally known as Hartz IV – create this pressure. I repeatedly notice this in counselling sessions. There is an enormous fear of downward mobility, of getting ground by the wheels of Hartz IV. For me as a counsellor, it is important to ease pressure – especially when it comes to financial issues. I can see that for instance with prospective teacher training students. Some of them notice right at the beginning of their studies that they dislike addressing groups or being at the centre of events – it is probably a good thing to be aware of that so early. If they go ahead with their studies because they are afraid of losing their entitlement to BAföG or other social benefits, this can have disastrous consequences – both for them and for their pupils later on. Often enough, we come across solutions in social counselling that make unconventional approaches to studying manageable that do not seem so straightforward.

Dorothea Tschepke

SOCIAL COUNSELLING, STW HANNOVER

Other STWs are organised around individual areas, such as international students, studying with a child, counselling on financing studies. At our centre, all counsellors work on all topics. As a rule, those seeking advice come in once or – at the most – three times, to settle an issue. However, there are exceptions: whenever individual circumstances affect different problematic fields, counselling takes longer. Let us take the example of studying with a child. We have to know what the Maternity Protection Act says, and we should be familiar with the Parental Allowance Act, and then there are the Child Allowance Act, BAföG, maintenance advances, social security codes (SGB II and SGB V), and Family Law. We are versed in a very wide range of legal areas so that we can show those consulting us for advice where there are options for potential social benefits. In addition, we have psycho-social skills, for the emotional area of issues is also very important. To keep up with developments, we engage in further education, either via our umbrella organisation, the Deutsches Studentenwerk (DSW), internally via the STW Hannover, or externally.

Nevertheless, we are not jurists. When things get too complicated, we consult a lawyer. Generally, networking is an important topic. We keep in touch with colleagues working in social counselling in other STWs in a special working group we have established in Lower Saxony. Locally, we have a round table for the thematic complex of “International Students”. There, once a semester, the representatives of the various higher education institutions, a wide range of counselling institutions and the city meet with us. We have initiated another round table with the “Jobcenter” Hannover – to share experience and improve services for the students.

We organise events together with Central Study Counselling, the Aliens Authority and the city’s Family Services Agency. Once a month, we meet with the social counsellors of other local actors, such as the Job Placement Centre, and church, local and government facilities, in order to discuss individual cases. In addition, our colleagues share issues with the student unions, the Employment Agency and the equal opportunities offices. While integrated in these networks, we do of course maintain our institutional independence – our aim is to represent the interests of the students.

“Networking plays an important role in social counselling.”



“I regularly contact a wide range of other counselling centres outside the STW to discuss a diversity of topics.”



Ronald Friedrich

SOCIAL COUNSELLING, STW STUTTART

Many students from very different strata in society and a diversity of backgrounds visit the counselling centre. Some of them have parents who studied, while other students are the first ones in their family to enrol at a higher education institution. Of course, someone who has an unusual educational background, having worked one’s way up from the primary school through secondary modern school to the Abitur, has performed an impressive feat. Moreover, you can take advantage of that, for example when it comes to scholarships – for unusual educational biographies need not necessarily be a disadvantage. On the contrary, students with such a background can distinguish themselves from the average. And that’s exactly what I show those seeking advice. Many are not aware that the foundations behind the scholarships like to support people representing a living example of how you can achieve upward educational mobility in this country.

One topic that crops up repeatedly in counselling is health insurance. Young students in particular are often covered by their parents’ health insurance. Many of them are not aware that they may only earn up to a certain sum because they will otherwise drop out of free-of-charge family health insurance. In that use, counselling may initially focus on a very different issue. Let us take someone seeking advice who wants to take on a student job and asks about tax deductions on his income. Let’s say he earns 500 € a month with his job, but would then have to pay for his own health insurance. This would be a losing bargain, for a certain sum is directly subtracted from the 500 € to finance pension insurance, and the student then has to pay an additional approximately 90 € for student health insurance. Ultimately, he would have more money in his pocket if he stayed with the family insurance and took up a so-called “Mini-Job” earning him a maximum of 450 €.

In the case of students above the age of 30, or with more than 14 subject-related semesters, the issue will often be that student health insurance no longer offers coverage and their contributions are then quite high. I regularly contact a number of other counselling services on a wide range of topics. Concerning the issue of statutory health insurance, these would be the counsellors of the health insurances. If somebody is planning to switch to a private health insurance policy, I readily refer to the advisory service of the consumer advice centre.

SOCIAL COUNSELLING IN PROFILE

THE INTERFACE OF FINANCING STUDIES

Most students secure their maintenance via various sources of income that are not permanently available throughout their studies. Therefore, financing their studies is a considerable challenge for many of them. Correspondingly, many students very often approach the STW with questions concerning these issues.

The office for federal financial aid (BAföG-Amt) provide information on support provided through the “Bundesausbildungsförderungsgesetz” and on further basic issues, process applica-

tions and pay BAföG allowances to the students. Furthermore, some STWs run additional study financing centres whose focus generally is on information about loans and applying for them.

The social counselling centres provide detailed advice on all options for financing your studies. Here, the pros and cons of the different modes of financing are discussed with the students and are combined to fit in with the respective circumstances an individual student is living in.

Counselling on BAföG and loans

Jens Müller-Sigl

**COUNCELLING CENTRE ON FINANCING STUDIES,
STW OLDENBURG**

With all its facets, counselling on financing studies can really be a passion. As the Study Financing Counsellor at STW, I am responsible for around 26,000 students in the Northwest, 8,000 of whom receive federal financial aid (BAföG). I work at two different locations, 15 hours at the BAföG office and 25 hours at the student service centre, in order to provide counselling on the many other financing options and perhaps on what is so special about BAföG.

Before entering higher education, I visit secondary schools and take part in many information events, for example, those run by the Job Placement Centres or the information days on higher education. Here already, I can reach out to prospective students and can highlight how important financing studies is alongside confirmation of admission to an institution of higher education. For some, paving the way to studying depends on this information.

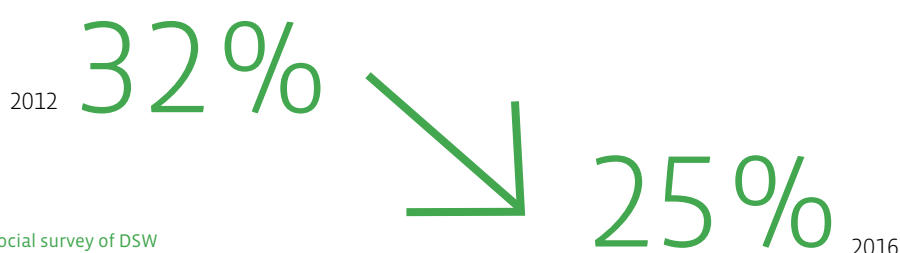


“What counts most is to avoid running into future excessive debt!”

Sources of financing studies range from maintenance payments, child allowance and student employment to BAföG and the supplementary or, if you like, substituting loans. What is important is to avoid running into future excessive debt!

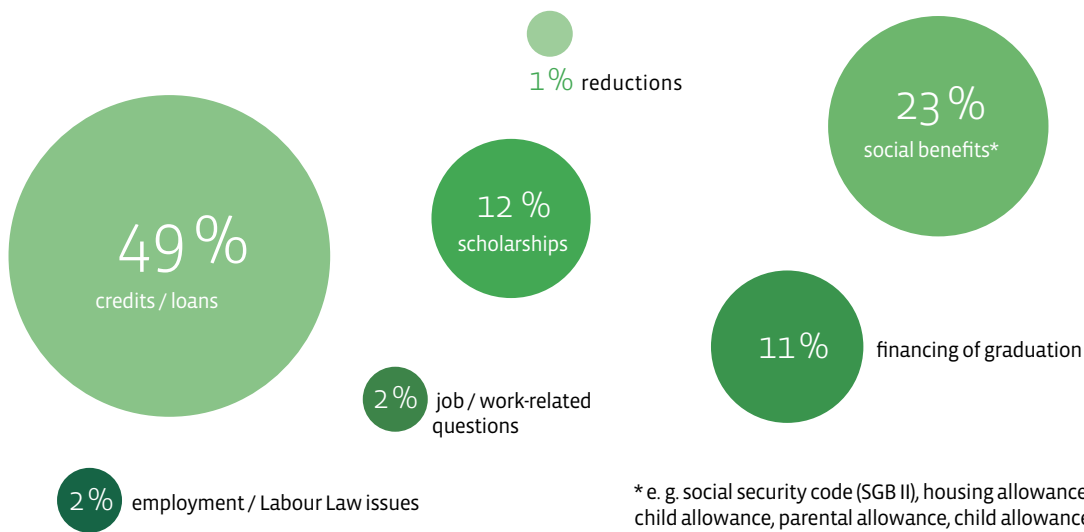
In the course of studies, I try to bridge financing gaps and make use of all options that BAföG provides, ranging from exemption from age limits through parental maintenance obligation and its limits to graduation support, in comprehensive counselling talks. The advantage is that, backed by BAföG, students can pursue a preventive strategy in terms of loans!

SHARE OF BAFÖG RECIPIENTS



Source: 20th and 21st social survey of DSW

COUNSELLING TOPICS ADDRESSED BY STW COUNSELLING ON STUDY FINANCING



* e. g. social security code (SGB II), housing allowance, supplementary child allowance, parental allowance, child allowance for students, integration aid, BAföG basic information

Source: internal DSW survey

Counselling on financing studies and scholarships

Birte Aye

**DIRECTOR OF THE STUDY FINANCING CENTRE,
STW HAMBURG**

I have now been working in counselling on financing studies for nearly eleven years, and since 2009, I have been heading the Study Financing Centre. What we strongly notice is that many of those seeking advice have no idea what their financial requirements are like. That is why we had the study financing computer ("Studienfinanzierungsrechner") programmed for our Internet site. With this feature, it is very easy for students to calculate how much they need once they have entered a couple of details. Counselling on federal financial aid (BAföG) is our top priority – because it is the most favourable financing option with legal entitlement for students. If that does not work, we have a look whether a student might be eligible for other social benefits, such as a housing allowance. Here, often enough, we refer students seeking advice to the social counselling centre. We have phone calls with these colleagues every day, and we share experiences face to face at the working meetings.

We also provide intensive counselling on the issue of scholarships. I would like to see individuals seeking advice approaching this topic more self-confidently and recognising the

"As a non-profit institution we always view things from the student angle."



advantages instead of reinforcing the biases. When we counsellors touch on the topic of scholarships, many students are immediately wary and say: "That wouldn't suit me. I'm not a top student." That is a popular misconception. Of course, merits and achievements play a role, but so do other factors, especially engagement. Many students do not realise that they have already volunteered for various issues, in associations, churches or at school. We encourage those seeking advice to exploit their potential and to apply for scholarships.

But there are also those for whom a loan is the best solution, e.g. if one can no longer take up a part-time job ahead of the final exams and alternative financing options are not enough. We provide very accurate advice on loans for students. What does taking out a loan mean for the student in the special situation he or she is in? What are the terms like? What about the repayment arrangements? As a non-profit organisation, our perspective is always that of the student. Those who consult the bank receive a catalogue of questions so that they are well prepared for an interview.

SOCIAL COUNSELLING IN PROFILE

SPECIALISED COUNSELLING

Students in special life circumstances require specific expertise of social counsellors. In most STWs, general social counselling covers this specialised knowledge as well. A number of STW provide specialised counselling for different groups of students.

Counselling for students with disabilities and chronic diseases

Beatrix Gomm

HEAD OF THE DEPARTMENT FOR FULLY ACCESSIBLE STUDIES AND SOCIAL COUNSELLING, STW BERLIN

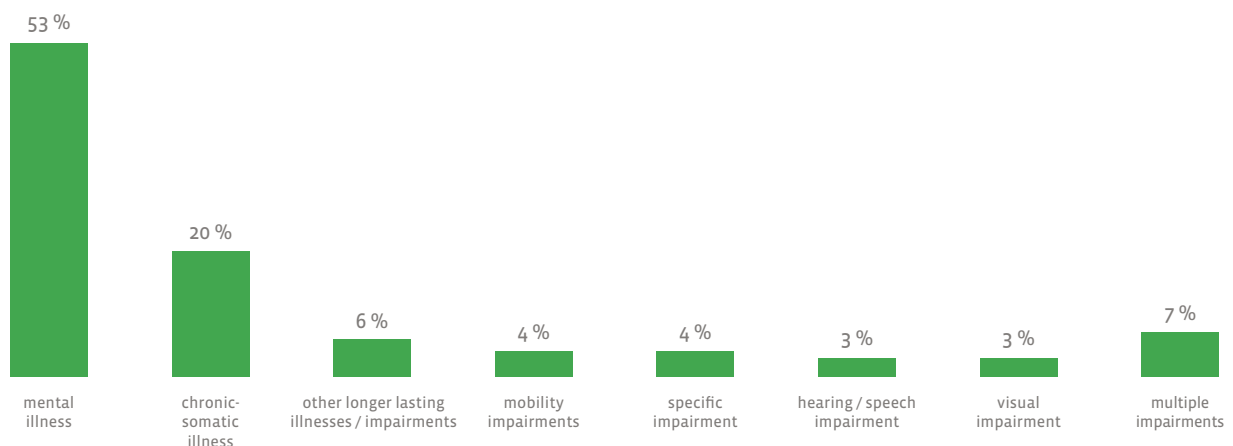


“One special feature of STW Berlin is that our counselling centre awards integration aid for students with disabilities.”

There are more and more students with disabilities at German higher education institutions. One positive factor supporting them is advances in technology, such as specially equipped workplaces for students with visual impairments. Since 2001, Berlin has had one special feature regarding this issue. Our counselling centre awards integration aids to students with disabilities. Other Federal States, allocate such support via the integration aid in general and the social security administration. The Berlin Senate Administration and the higher education institutions provide us with the money for this purpose, so that the counsellors in close proximity to the students can decide how it is distributed. Such integration aid comprises study assistance, sign language interpreters and technical aids. For our work, this can also mean that we have to consult experts to discuss the type of technical assistance needed. The aim is to ensure that the best possible affordable, technical assistance is made available, and not necessarily the most innovative. However, technical aids are not a solution to everything.

For example, there are implants for people with hearing impairments. This could potentially replace sign interpreters. However, for those who have grown up with sign language, this is precisely their first language, and as students, they find it much easier to learn matter in sign language than in spoken language. Nevertheless, we also give advice on other topics, such as on organising the need for care in studies or on the topic of housing. Parents are also a factor in the case of students with disabilities. Right from the start, we always make it quite clear that we are there for the students, and not primarily for the parents. However, they are welcome to take part in counselling.

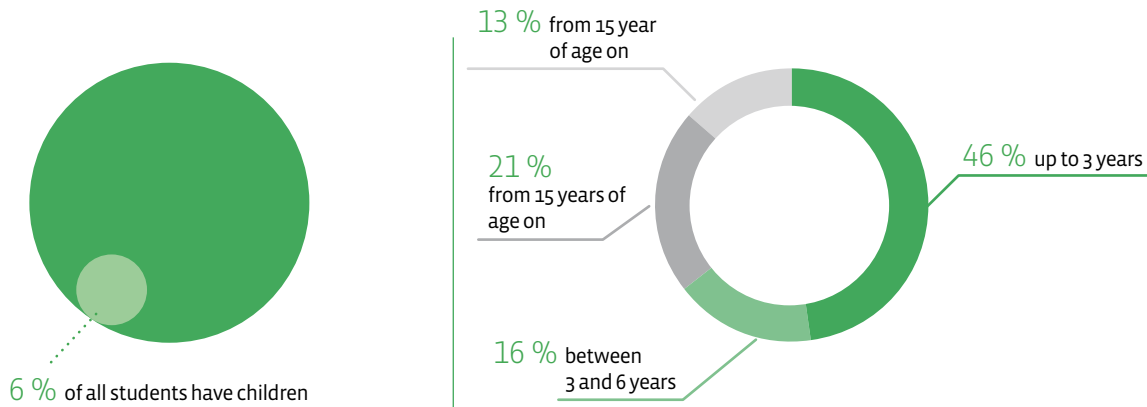
TYPE OF HEALTH IMPAIRMENT (SHARE OF THE 11 % OF STUDENTS WITH IMPAIRMENTS)



Source: DSW/DZHW Studying with impairments 2.0, 2016/2017 (DSW/DZHW “beeinträchtigt studieren 2” 2016/2017)

STUDYING WITH A CHILD

↗ increase of **30,000** students with children since 2012



Source: 21st social survey of DSW

Counselling for students with children

Sonja Simnacher

COUNSELLING ON STUDYING WITH A CHILD, STW MUNICH

As a special service within our overall counselling network, I try to show students with children how they can master their studies. Mothers, fathers or parents need a reorganisation of their studies. Moreover, this does not only affect their timetable. Whether it be the issue of housing or the financing of maintenance and studying, in the context of studies, none of these aspects is oriented on families. Studying with a child is a complex field of topics. The set of governing regulations has many individual and local facets and, what is more, is often changing. All this suggests the need for personal support in the form of counselling.

In our work, it is also important to garner understanding – with the aim of promoting a culture of family friendliness in higher education. We are the initiators of a cross-institutional working circle in which we discuss topical issues. At the same time, we attempt to enter relevant topics in the committees

“The set of regulations on students with children is complex, varies from location to location and is constantly changing. Counselling provides guidance.”



and recruit contact persons at the respective higher education institutions who are already addressing the needs of students with children locally. In addition, we have initiated a “Studying-with-a-child” discussion group, that unites all staff in higher education having to do with the topic of family-friendliness. We can look back on a longer tradition of specialising in certain groups of students. We have been active in the field of studying with a child for 26 years. For example, we have places in the student residence halls of for single parents or family flats. Now, we build a residence hall solely for families that will exclusively provide flats for single parents and families with a child. All over Munich, we provide around 500 child care places. We have significantly increased the number of available places over the last few years.

Counselling for international students

Anke Just

COORDINATOR FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS, SOCIAL SERVICES AND CULTURE, STW CHEMNITZ-ZWICKAU

Generally, the share of foreigners is not very high in Saxony, and in Chemnitz, it is at just below seven per cent. Things are quite different at the University. Out of the roughly 12,000 students, around 2,800, or approximately 23 per cent, are foreigners.

I hold well over 40 counselling talks a month. Given the special mode of communication, with two individuals facing each other neither of whom are speaking in their mother tongue, counselling takes longer. This makes contact more intensive: the demands on counselling differ from those for students speaking German or students who are somewhat familiar with the German higher education system and social welfare structures. Many issues and problems centre on the right of residence. Many international students already seek our help just to fill in the Aliens Authority forms. In Chemnitz, the form exists exclusively in German. In the interest of students themselves, we work together very confidentially with the Aliens Authority, make phone calls at least once a week, and rather more frequently at the beginning of the semester. This results in good networking. There are piles of my business cards on the desks of the Aliens Authority – and vice versa. Thus we can further refer the respective student seeking advice should the need arise. Once

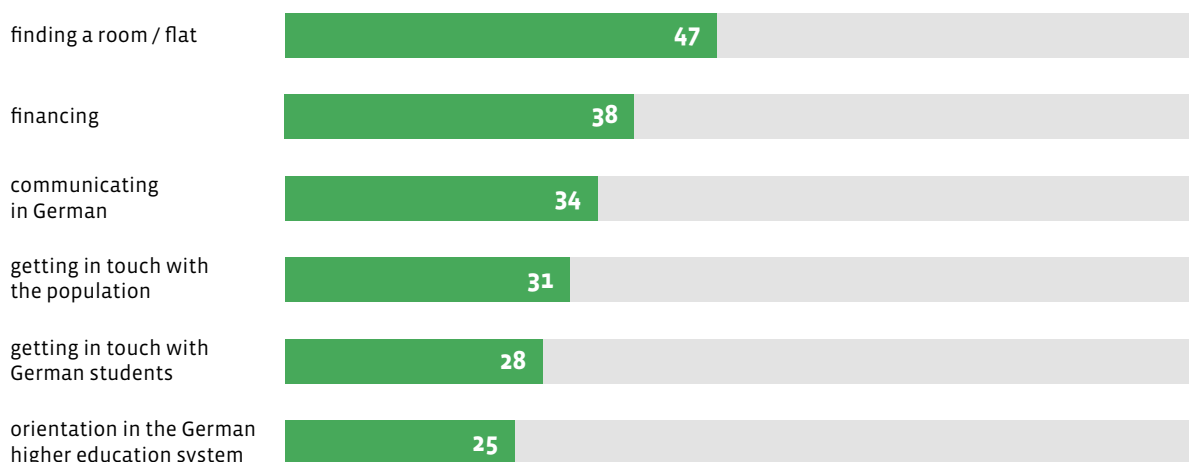
“There are piles of my business cards on the Aliens Authority desks – and vice versa.”



a year, there is a round table with various participants: the Aliens Authority, the Student Secretariat, the Career Service, and the University’s International Office. We discuss topical issues contributing to supporting international students.

Despite good cooperation with the local authorities, my work focuses on the students. All that matters is their interests. This also means that in urgent cases, I accompany students to the Aliens Authority. I settle responsibilities in advance when talking to the individual seeking advice. I like translating and help when there are cultural misunderstandings. However, I am not there to speak on behalf of a student. Our counselling concept is very straightforward: help towards self-help. We want to enable those seeking advice to cope with things on their own, while they are here in Germany. I cannot always perform this role as a communicator. When the language barriers are so high that I cannot do any counselling, I try to get hold of someone at the University who speaks and can translate the student’s mother tongue.

MOST FREQUENT PROBLEMS OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS (NATIONAL AVERAGE)



Source: DSW/DZHW Special Report on Foreign Students in Germany 2016 for the 21st social survey (multiple answers were possible)

TOWARDS A PROFILE WITH A FUTURE

GOOD COUNSELLING MUST BE SUSTAINABLE!

High demand

Psychological and social counselling have seen rising demand for years – and it is set to grow further. The reasons for this include a growing acceptance and awareness of services, an increase in the perception of strain and developments in higher education and society in general that are having an impact on study conditions and prospects on the labour market. This is confirmed by long waiting lists and overcrowded consultation hours.

Dealing with increasingly diverse and complex issues

Both the diversity of students and of the circumstances they are living in are constantly increasing – and along with it, so are the issues in counselling and the necessary expertise of counsellors. Moreover, complex counselling issues require extensive talks and more time to research special regulations. Special counselling skills are required for the growing number of students experiencing a high level of mental strain, while the increase in international students requires intercultural skills and multilingualism. In addition, demands are rising for sustainable, viable networking with an ever-larger number of actors and relevant agencies.

Access to counselling

Often, students only resort to professional counselling at a very late stage because the problems they are facing at first do not appear to be sufficiently serious, they are not aware of services available to them, or they have simply no time for dealing with them. Fears of stigmatisation and opening-up to others also represent obstacles to an early or timely involvement of counselling activities. The success of counselling depends on the severity and complexity of issues or on certain deadlines.

High expectations towards quality and efficiency in counselling

Students make use of professional counselling very pragmatically, often with the desire to solve serious problems both quickly and efficiently. Given scarce resources, the time structure and the limited character of studying as well as the high (subjective) performance demands of students, such high expectations are understandable. Study structures focused on speed and study success require a particularly efficient range of services.

Seeking counselling before studying

The STWs are there to support the students in higher education. However, parents and higher education staff also seek counselling when they require support in dealing with students in mental or social crises. In addition, there are further groups who require information and counselling. These include certain doctoral students and, in particular, those interested in studying and/or still at school. Providing information and advice in advance for school pupils without an academic family background is often the only way for them to gain access to higher education

Counselling services require quantitative expansion in order to meet rising demand.

Counselling centres need sufficient staff capacities to adequately address the various concerns of students and to meet the demands of various groups focusing on their specific circumstances – e. g. with regard to opening hours. Furthermore, consultants need more time for professional training and networking activities.

Counselling centres must have sufficient resources at their disposal to promote awareness and to take advantage of their preventive potential, e. g. in services with a broad impact, without this being at the expense of individual counselling.

Efficient counselling services require well-qualified counsellors and counselling appointments that can be arranged at short notice.

The existing expertise of the counselling centres can support social justice for non-students as well. This means that the STWs need new funding models of their own.

Maintaining good counselling – with fair and sustainable funding!

The profile of psychological and social counselling outlined in this booklet is an important achievement for the social infrastructure of German higher education.

So far, the development and operating of STW services has been funded largely via the students' social solidarity contributions ("Sozialbeiträge") to the local STW. New developments and requirements referred to above cannot be met with the existing resources and require new and fair funding models.

The counselling services are specially tailored to the STW's social mission of supporting students in higher education. Resulting from this, they also contribute to the public mission of

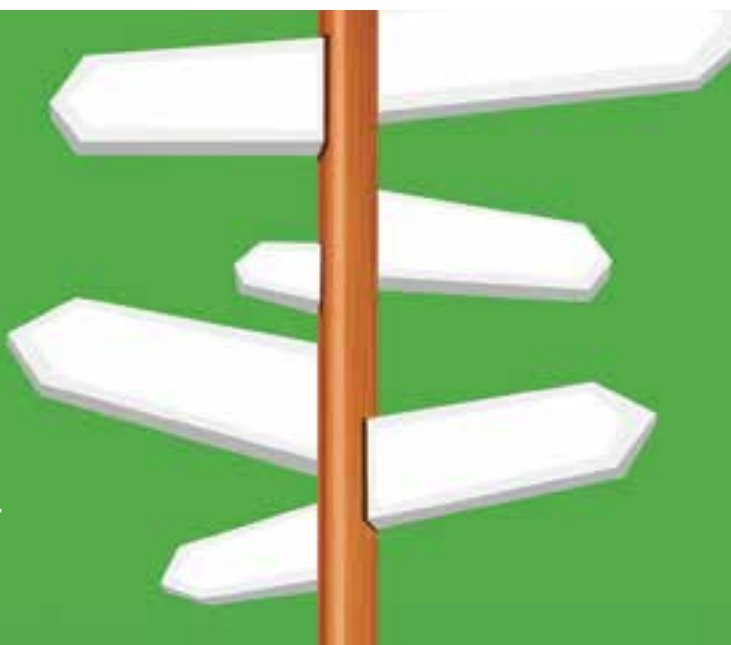
promoting health, educational participation, integration and inclusion. A profile of counselling that fits those requirements is crucial to the effective performance of these tasks.

A level of public funding that is adequate for this mission enables a strong counselling profile – also for the future. Setting out from the need for developing counselling services outlined above, concrete, local demand should be clearly established. In general terms, in order to meet development demands, investment is required particularly in the creation and sustainable operating of sound staff capacities.

GOOD COUNSELLING REQUIRES RESOURCES FOR

- short waiting times for counselling appointments
- crisis intervention at short notice
- largely free-of-charge counselling services
- counsellors with a high level of expertise
- ability to quickly respond to new developments
- preventive and health-promoting services
- low-threshold structures – e.g. online counselling services
- adequate communication channels
- a wide range of service formats
- sustainable and intensive networking
- suitable rooms for counselling

The German National Association for Student Affairs (Deutsches Studentenwerk) advocates for Federal States funding for psychological and social counselling that is on a par with the STW's funding effort and is supported and accompanied by a Federal Government Higher Education Social Pact.



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In German texts, we generally use the term “Studentenwerk” for all members of Deutsches Studentenwerk. It always refers to both the Studentenwerke and the Studierendenwerke. In English texts, we use the gender-neutral acronym “STW” in order to refer to all.

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Studentenwerke: Student Services in Germany – a public network of social service providers in higher education

Success in higher education is not just a question of quality teaching and research. There is also a social dimension: equal opportunities, financial aid, affordable housing and food, counselling & health services as well as childcare are important for students to pursue their dreams.

Deutsches Studentenwerk (DSW) is the national association of 57 public student service agencies across Germany – the Studentenwerke (STW). Together, we are shaping the social infrastructure of higher education.

The STW network provides services to 2.8 million students in more than 200 cities in Germany.

We provide:

- affordable housing in residence halls
- healthy and diverse food in restaurants and cafeterias on campus
- financial aid for students, strictly based on social criteria
- social and psychological counselling
- child care for students with children
- targeted services for students with disabilities or chronic diseases
- cultural and international events

The STW network is the cornerstone of the social, economic, financial, and cultural well-being of all students in Germany.

We work for tolerance, diversity and social justice in higher education.

Find out more on www.studentenwerke.de



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