

Press release

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International students as skilled employees for the region: interim results for the Study & Work Initiative presented

As part of the nationwide Study & Work Initiative, the University launched a project in 2015 to maximise the potential for successful integration of highly qualified international students into the regional labour market. The highly promising initial project results have now been presented at the second project meeting with all regional partners.

The Vice President for International Relations, Professor Ursula Reutner, welcomed some 20 representatives from companies and organisations in the city and district of Passau, including the city council, the Federal Employment Office, companies ICUnet.AG, Micro-Epsilon, ONE LOGIC, ZF Friedrichshafen AG as well as the University and affiliated organisations – the Student Services Association, AlumniClub, kuwi netzwerk international e.V. and the AEGEE student society. All came to learn of the development of the project in the past year and to discuss their ideas for the future roadmap and, specifically, how businesses and potential international employees could enter into a fruitful dialogue.

'The University of Passau has always had firm roots in the region and, at the same time, a strongly international outlook', said Vice President Reutner. In view of the demographic trend, Lower Bavaria stands to gain much from the distinctly international focus of its university. 'The prevalent skilled labour gap affects business areas to do with computer science, information systems and business — areas in which the University of Passau trains highly qualified employees in its master's programmes. One way to address the skilled labour gap is to improve the integration of international graduates from the University,' she said.

Barbara Zacharias, who heads the International Office and Student Services Division, and Project Manager Luise Haack presented the initial results from the first six months of the project, indicating the first successes in the support and integration of international students enrolled at the University. Barbara Zacharias explained, 'Within the framework of this project we successfully introduced the iStudi Coach, a central contact at the University who is there to help international degree-seeking

students with their needs or if they run into any difficulties. Another aspect of the iStudi Coach's job is to ensure the involvement of the network partners from Passau and the wider district when it comes to preparing the students for the requirements of the Lower Bavarian labour market.'

For the past six months, iStudi Coach Luise Haack has advised numerous international students on job-finding strategies and how to apply for internships, student jobs and entry-level career positions; she has also provided a job-application checking service. Moreover, she gives advice and answers questions on living and studying in Passau. Another aspect of her job is to organise and present a rich programme of training measures, such as her workshops on applying for jobs, the German job market and the world of work in Germany; the programme also includes visits to companies. In doing so, she discovered that there is a strong interest, particularly from the international Computer Science students, in gathering first job experiences: 'A survey carried out among the international students at the start of the degree programme showed that good career prospects are an important motivation for coming to Germany. What's also interesting is that staying on after graduation to work in Passau or elsewhere in Germany comes in at first place for students' future plans.' The iStudi Coach is especially delighted that she was able to get the first internships underway in the region.

Amani Ben Hadj Hassen is enrolled in the M.Sc. Computer Science and currently works in the market town of Bad Birnbach near Passau. Tobias Fuchs, Head of Software Development for the company FotoFinder Systems GmbH, where she is employed, said: 'We are delighted that we have the chance to work with our student employee from Tunisia. She has quickly found her orientation in her research project and impressed us with her scientific approach and analytical abilities.' The Managing Director, Andreas Mayer, agreed and said that working with international students had many benefits. Amani, in turn, greatly appreciated the individual advice and support from the iStudi Coach: 'The job-seeking process is very different in Germany and international students often do not know about suitable companies. For me, the iStudi Coach's support helped me to find out which companies would fit my profile.'

About the Study & Work Project

The University of Passau has a structured support and advice programme for all international students. The project was launched in October 2015 to coincide with the start of the winter semester. Passau is one of 10 higher education institutions in Germany to receive support from the Germany-wide Study & Work Initiative, which aims to retain more international students for the German labour market.

A key role in this is played by the non-university network partners in region. Thus far, the University counts among its partner companies 4process AG, crealytics GmbH, ICUnet.AG, Micro Epsilon GmbH & Co. KG, msg systems AG, ONE LOGIC GmbH and ZF Friedrichshafen AG. Other non-company partners who are actively involved in the project are the German Federal Employment Office in

Passau, the City of Passau, the Chamber of Commerce for Lower Bavaria, Neuburger Gesprächskreis e.V., the Regional Management Sector of the Passau Economic Forum, kuwi netzwerk international e.V., the AEGEE Passau student society and the German-Spanish Society in Passau. Additional project partners are always welcome to join. If you are interested in becoming a partner or supporting this initiative, please contact Luise Haack (luise.haack@uni-passau.de).

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