

Working in International and Diverse Teams

Integration, Legal Affairs, Support, Leadership

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In cooperation with Lena Benjes from the
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Globalisation and mobility in academia is not just a reality, but increasingly becoming a requirement.

Although many universities have an **International Office** or **Welcome Centre**, this does not ensure that researchers feel welcome within their own research group.

Additionally, there is increasing recognition — and respect — towards human diversity.

As group leaders, we have a responsibility towards the welfare of our employees.

People perform best when they feel respected, supported and understood.

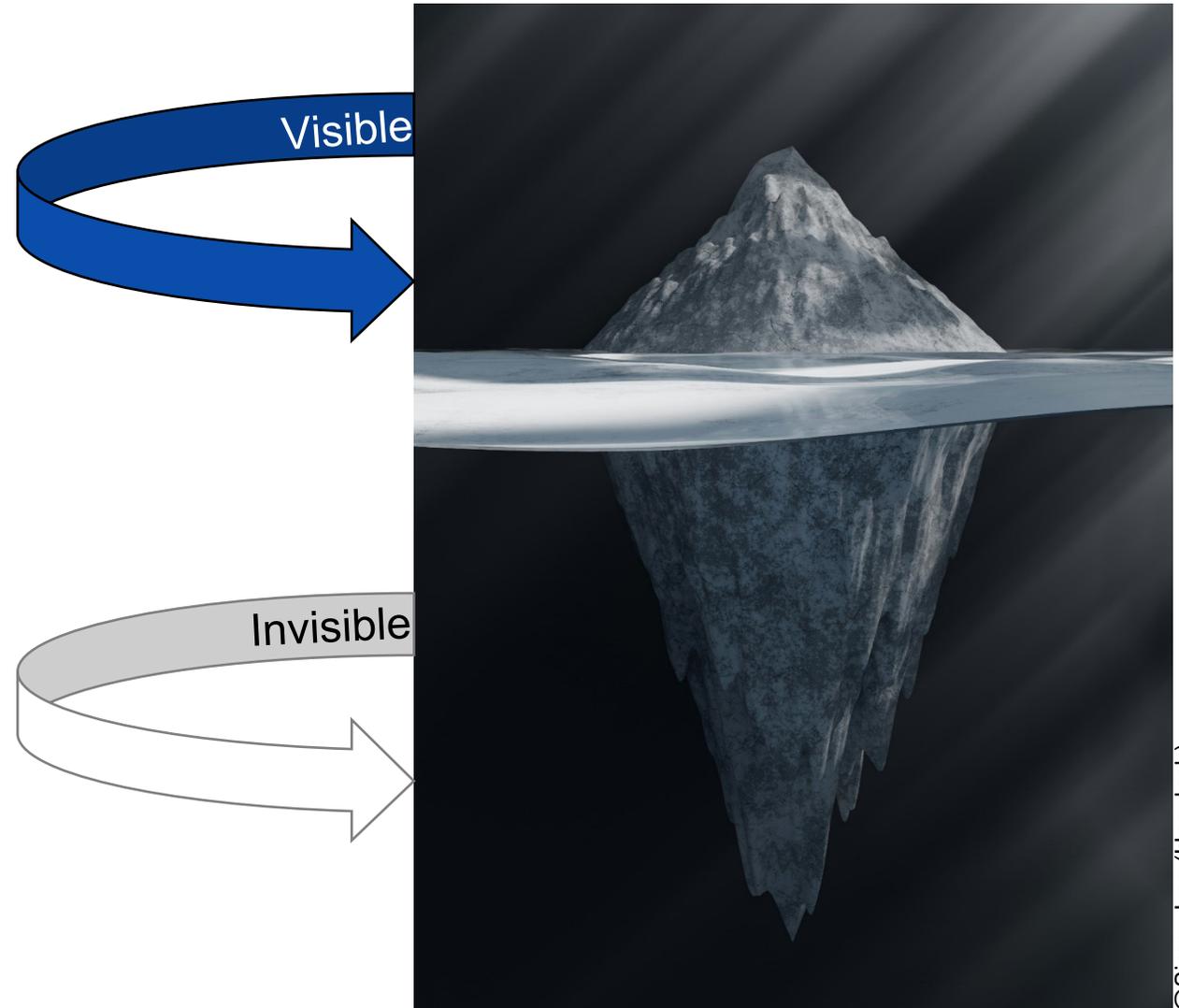
Aims:

- Understand different aspects of diversity
- Awareness of issues that disproportionately affect international or minority researchers
- How to provide appropriate support and leadership
- Signposting —> which resources are available that you can direct people towards

Brainstorm

In what ways are people diverse?

– Remember to think about the visible and invisible



Brainstorm

In what ways are people diverse?

Nationality

Ethnicity

Gender

LGBTQ

Native language

Family status

Neurodiversity

BIPOC / BAME

Disability

Religion

In what ways are people diverse? – Added in the workshop

- Nationality
- Gender
- LGBTQ
- Ethnicity
- Native language
- Family Status
- Neurodiversity
- BIPOC/BAME
- Disability
- Religion
- Class
- Behaviour
- Style of Clothing
- Educational background of the parents (possibilities for further generations)
- Opinions (work related / social topics / etc.)
- Out of work interests / hobbies
- Caring responsibilities
- Financial responsibilities
- Common skills
- Religion
- Culture
- Age
- Language
- Sexuality
- Nutrition

Which issues disproportionately affect international researchers?

Brainstorm



- short term contract (and the visa connected to it)
- knowledge of the academic system
- language
- Different academic background
- Different standards
- context regarding to science
- Different understanding of hierarchy
- translating documents

Which issues disproportionately affect international researchers?

Brainstorm



- Navigating German bureaucracy and taxes
- Language barrier
- Visa
- Ease of travel
- Finding housing
- Residence permits
- Time needed to move and settle locally
- Health insurance
- Bank account
- Cultural integration
- Public discrimination

Which issues disproportionately affect international researchers?

Brainstorm



- **Navigating German bureaucracy and taxes:** registration etc.
- **Language barrier** —> many universities offer language courses for students and employees
- **Visa** —> needed prior to arrival, the duration depends on the contract details
similarly, contract renewal is often required prior to visa renewal
- **Ease of travel** —> Visas often needed in advance for conferences or work trips.
Keep in mind when planning! Which countries are easier to visit?
- **Finding housing** —> can be competitive and many landlords prefer German-speaking tenants
- **Residence permits** —> need time to obtain, many rules and requirements (can be difficult to navigate)
- **Time needed to move and settle locally** —> many universities offer financial support for relocation
- **Health insurance** —> transferring medical information and history from one country to another
- **Bank account** —> catch-22 situations: e.g. needing an address prior to opening an account, but also needing an account number prior to signing a rental contract.
- **Cultural integration** —> awareness of when public holidays occur, when shops are open etc.
- **Public discrimination** —> depending on the location, not all locals are welcoming

What integration schemes exist?

Suggestions?



Making colleagues and their families feel welcome

Isolation from friends and family —> local support is important, especially early on

No ready-made support system —> clearly advertise and communicate local opportunities

Examples:

- Mentoring opportunities
- Buddy schemes
- Language exchange
- Stammtisch / regular social meetings
- ...

Showing an awareness of cultural differences or needs at work

Signposting —> knowing where resources are or who else to contact
Including e.g. assistance with the visa process in general.

Willingness to address **unconscious bias**

Ask people about any questions or concerns they may have proactively

Preparing (e.g.) invitation letters for visa applications in good time

Make administration and communication available in English

Encourage German-speaking or more senior colleagues to help or accompany new employees e.g. in finding accommodation

Mentoring or buddy schemes — especially for people from underrepresented groups

What about hiring internationally?

Can be challenging to assess objectively due to different schemes used in different countries

Ask colleagues!

Which schemes / institutes are reputable?

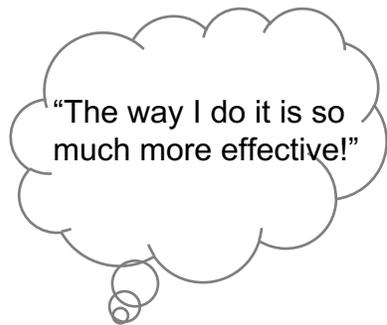
How does the grading scheme work?

How well is academic research supported locally?



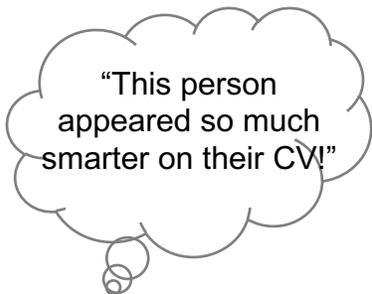
-> Realising that others might have different views, values, working methods etc.

“That looks unfamiliar, I will approach and carefully ask why this person choose this way.”



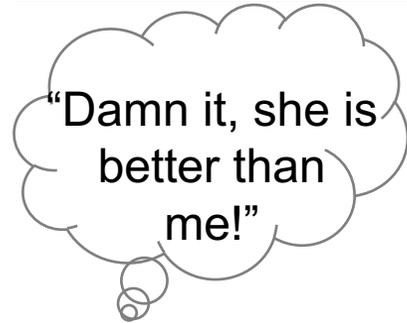
-> Consciously deconstructing comparisons by including the persons background & not seeing everything “different” as something “bad”.

“They might do it differently and I am interested in finding out why before judging. Maybe we can learn from each other.”



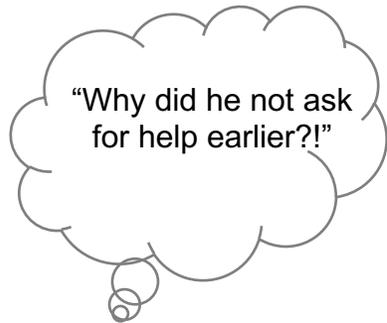
-> Notice language and culture shocks as a barrier for professionalism.

“This person just arrived in a new country and left their family and friends behind, maybe they need a bit of time to settle and get into research 100%.”



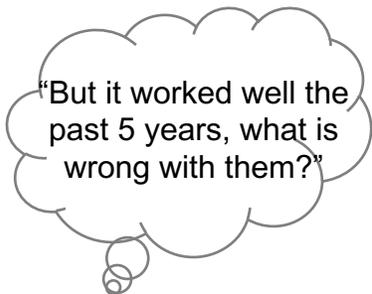
-> Realising that different potential and talents is not a threat but an opportunity to learn.

"I always wanted to be able to do what she does so well, I will ask her to help me get better and I can offer to help her to improve in XY, which is my expertise."



-> Communicate clearly and directly (but notice that also communication skills vary greatly depending on the background)

"Maybe where he comes from disturbing others by asking face-to-face is considered impolite, I will ask him and if needed offer clearly to send any questions via e-mail."



-> New people in the team might need new rules and routines to successfully work together. Just because someone does not fit in a working system 100%, it does not mean that they are wrong.

"Probably this person never worked from home so I might offer them to come to the office everyday and call me in case of any questions."

Approaches to international integration

Two sides

ME

- responsible to reach a goal
- have my expectations
- have my own background
- might have always worked in certain ways
- don't have enough energy to include everyone
- have stereotypes about other nationalities
- bring my personal background

@Johannes Krupinski (Unsplash)



COMMUNICATION IS KEY

THEM

- come into a new surrounding
- have expectations about the position
- have their own background
- might have worked in their own way
- might not understand certain behaviours
- have stereotypes about Germany / certain positions
- bring their own unique experience

Funding schemes for international researchers

Supporting people moving to Germany for a position and/or for exchange trips



DAAD — German academic exchange service <https://www.daad.de/en/>

Euraxess <https://www.euraxess.de/>

DFG Walter Benjamin Programme

DFG initiation of international collaboration or Initiation of a research training groups

<https://www.dfg.de/en/research-funding/funding-opportunities/programmes>

Horizon Europe Marie Curie Actions

<https://marie-sklodowska-curie-actions.ec.europa.eu/>

Humboldt-Forschungsstipendium <https://www.humboldt-foundation.de/bewerben/foerderprogramme/humboldt-forschungsstipendium#h1268> (PostDocs, erfahrende Forschende)

Philipp Schwartz-Initiative: <https://www.humboldt-foundation.de/bewerben/foerderprogramme/philipp-schwartz-initiative#h6384> (gefährdete Wissenschaftler:innen)

DFG refugee researchers positions <https://www.dfg.de/en/research-funding/funding-initiative/refugee-researchers>
— supplemental proposals can integrate into current projects.

For stays of more than 90 days

Typically fixed term and awarded for education or employment purposes

Spouses and children can apply to accompany the person under the “Familiennachzug” rule, provided that the person has permanent residency and can prove sufficient income and living space to support family members.

Usually, a Visa is issued for ~90 days, within which time the residency permit must be applied for.

Waiting times are typically long — apply and book an appointment well in advance!

To apply:

- Proof of registration to live in Germany
- Rental contract
- Employment contract
- Proof of health insurance
- Passport
- ...photos, fee...

Residency — EU Blue Card

Especially relevant for academics and people trained in “MINT” / “STEM” subjects

Valid for up to four years

After 27 months (21 months) holders of the EU Blue Card can apply for permanent residency (depending on knowledge of the German language, A1 or B1)

Must have a job offer in advance of the application

Must hold a qualification corresponding to the line of work of the job offer

At a Glance: EU Blue Card

Visa and entry procedure for immigrants from third countries subject to visa obligation. General entitlement requirements (Section 5 of the Residence Act [AufenthG]): passport, proof of financial means, no existing reason for expulsion.

CHECK THE REQUIREMENTS

Step

1

- Equivalence or comparability of the foreign academic qualification (regulated professions: licence to practice required additionally).
- Concrete job offer in Germany or valid employment contract (minimum contract period of six months).
- Minimum annual gross salary of **€45,300** (as of 2024) or minimum annual gross salary of **€41,041.80** (as of 2024) for shortage occupations or higher education graduates within three years after graduation.
- **Special case:** IT specialists without formal qualification + at least three years of work experience at higher educational level + a concrete job offer as an IT specialist in Germany or a valid employment contract (minimum contract period of six months): minimum annual gross salary of **€41,041.80** (as of 2024).

i Please consider: as rule, approval of the Federal Employment Agency (BA) will be obtained during the visa procedure (exception: EU Blue Card holders with a minimum annual gross salary of €45,300).

MAKE AN APPOINTMENT AT THE GERMAN EMBASSY

- Prepare the required documents: e.g. employment contract, passport, proof of recognized academic qualification, proof of work experience (if need be), visa application form.

i Please consider: on their websites, the German embassies and consulates provide information about possible waiting times for appointments and any additional documents that may be required.

Please inform yourself of whether you have the option of accelerating the entry process via the fast-track procedure for skilled workers with the help of your employer.

Step

2

APPLY FOR A VISA IN THE COUNTRY OF RESIDENCE

Step

3

- Bring documents in their entirety.
- Fees: €75 (in local currency).

i Please consider: processing times may strongly vary depending on the mission abroad and processing workload. Please find further information on the website of the competent embassy.

ENTER GERMANY

- Issuance of entry visa for qualified employment.
- Book plane ticket / plan journey to Germany.

i Please consider: in order for an entry visa to be issued, proof of valid health insurance coverage must be presented. After entering Germany, new health insurance must be taken out.

Step

4

APPLY FOR RESIDENCE PERMIT IN GERMANY

Step

5

- Register your home address in Germany at the Residents' Registration Office.
- Book an appointment at the competent foreigners authority.
- Ask the foreigners authority for a list of the required documents and start the preparation.
- Apply for the EU Blue Card (Section 18g of the Residence Act [AufenthG]).
- Fees may add up to €100 (Sections 45 ff. of the Residence Ordinance [AufenthV]).

i Please consider: the application for the EU Blue Card must be submitted before the entry visa expires.

Can apply after living in Germany continuously for five years or having held a residency permit to four years.

This can be reduced to two years if you hold a German qualification (e.g. degree)

To apply:

- Passport
- Application form
- Data protection agreement form
- Employers' confirmation form
- Permanent work contract **or** statement about the likelihood of finding continued employment in Germany
- Three months salary statements
- B1 German language certificate
- Certificate of passing the test “life in Germany” or the Citizenship test
- Proof of health insurance
- Rental contract and bank statement showing the rent was paid
- “Vollstreckungsportal” → no outstanding debts
- Proof of two years of rental payments
- Recent biometric photo
- Fee of €113

Note: holders of a permanent residency permit will lose this title if they live outside Germany for more than six months continuously.

Note: if someone lives outside Germany for a while and then returns, the “timer” (for amount of time spent living in Germany) is reset to zero.

Note: all documents must be submitted within a 3-month period, otherwise new documents are required.

Note: this *should not* vary according to town / Bundesland

Authorities are not known for their English language skills or friendliness.

Some excerpts from a recent exchange:

E 332-2 Stadt Erlangen
AW: Niederlassungserlaubnis Beantragen
To: Alison Mitchell

Sehr geehrte Frau Mitchell,
Sie haben eine gültige Aufenthaltserlaubnis bis September 2024.
Bitte teilen Sie uns mit, was Sie beantragen möchten.
Mit freundlichen Grüßen
i.A.

E 332-2 Stadt Erlangen
AW: Niederlassungserlaubnis Beantragen
To: Alison Mitchell

Nein, wir benötigen ein **SPRACHZERTIFIKAT** einer in **DEUTSCHLAND** anerkannten Sprachschule

Von: Alison Mitchell <alison.mw.mitchell@fau.de>

E 332-2 Stadt Erlangen
AW: Niederlassungserlaubnis Beantragen
To: Alison Mitchell



Sehr geehrte Frau Mitchell,
für die Erteilung der Niederlassungserlaubnis müssen Sie **mindestens 4 Jahre** im Besitz eines Aufenthaltstitels gem. § 18d AufenthG sein.
Diese Voraussetzung erfüllen Sie aktuell noch nicht.
Mit freundlichen Grüßen
i.A.

AM Alison Mitchell
Re: Niederlassungserlaubnis Beantragen
To: 332-2 Stadt Erlangen

Sehr geehrter Herr/Frau,

Laut §18c AufenthG darf ich eine Niederlassungserlaubnis beantragen, weil ich eine inländische Studium abgeschlossen habe.
Wie unten beschrieben, habe ich in 2016 in Heidelberg in der Physik promoviert.

Es steht im **§18c AufenthG**:
"Die Frist nach Satz 1 Nummer 1 verkürzt sich auf zwei Jahre und die Frist nach Satz 1 Nummer 3 verkürzt sich auf 24 Monate, wenn die Fachkraft eine inländische Berufsausbildung oder ein inländisches Studium erfolgreich abgeschlossen hat."

A multiple-choice test comprised of 30 questions randomly selected from a database of 300.

A further 3 questions are randomly selected from a set of 10 specific to each Bundesland.

It is possible (and recommended) to view the questions and practice online: <https://oet.bamf.de/ords/oetut/f?p=514:1:0>

17 correct answers are required to pass.

Questions are all **in German only**.

Mainly concerning politics and history, as well as some about German law and culture.

Generally straightforward for anyone with a reasonable understanding of German and from Western cultures.

Der deutsche Staat hat viele Aufgaben. **Welche Aufgabe gehört dazu?**

- Er baut Straßen und Schulen.
- Er verkauft Lebensmittel und Kleidung.
- Er versorgt alle Einwohner und Einwohnerinnen kostenlos mit Zeitungen.
- Er produziert Autos und Busse.

Wie wird die Verfassung der Bundesrepublik Deutschland genannt?

- Grundgesetz
- Bundesverfassung
- Gesetzbuch
- Verfassungsvertrag

Citizenship by naturalisation:

Can apply after resident for five years (previously eight) with participation in integration course

Can apply after resident for three years if particularly well integrated (e.g. C1 language, professional achievements, engagement with volunteer organisations...)

Must have permanent residency

Citizenship by marriage:

Can apply after living in Germany for three years *and* being married to a German national for at least two years.

Dual citizenship:

As of 27th June 2024, applications for German citizenship no longer have to renounce their previous citizenship.
(Previously dual citizenship was only allowed with EU countries and few others)

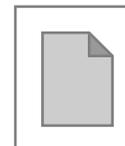
Costs €255

Common mistakes & misunderstandings

And how to avoid them

- Have a look at the work permit + travelling permit in the visa/residence permit
- “visa-free” for 90 days does not mean unlimited travelling (conferences etc.)
- §18b ≠ §18d AufenthG -> know the difference (the Foreigners Office might not)
- International Office ≠ Foreigners Office (Ausländer:innenbehörde)
- **Foreigners Office = very long waiting lists, be on time with your extension application** !!
- Check at your institution if you have an International Office / person at your institute who is responsible for international students/researchers

Overview of visa requirements/exemptions for entry
into the Federal Republic of Germany



Things that seem obvious are not obvious

Brainstorm



Checklists provided to new employees

Welcome pages for institutes

Include things such as registering an address, getting health insurance, shops closed on Sundays, public holidays etc.

Etiquette at work — Codes of Conduct

Respect that intention may not match with perception. Clarify who people can raise concerns or complaints with.

Expectations for e.g. student supervision, working times, flexibility:
typically more relaxed in Germany than in many other countries, especially Asia.

German tax number required to reimburse international visitors(!)

Every country works differently!

Respect the culture of others — e.g. major holidays

Allow for adjustments on religious or medical grounds

- If you need to recognise educational qualifications: <https://anabin.kmk.org/anabin.html>
Anabin is a database which helps to recognise educational qualifications from other countries
- If you cannot find the educational qualification, you can request a recognition directly at ZAB: zab@kmk.org (General information can be requested here: ZABService@kmk.org)
- General information:
 - > The Zentralstelle für ausländisches Bildungswesen (ZAB) is a national assessment and information centre. On behalf of the federal states of the Federal Republic of Germany, it prepares its assessments primarily for recognition authorities and educational institutions.
 - > German recognition offices and authorities can therefore apply to the ZAB for an opinion on foreign qualifications free of charge, for example if they need support in assessing the qualifications with regards to access to doctoral studies
 - > Please send all educational certificates that you have (Bachelor's certificate, Master's certificate, overview of subjects and grades, etc.) in PDF format to ZAB

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