

Studying with impairments in Germany – best2

A 2016/17 survey of the situation for students
with disabilities or chronic conditions

Published by

Deutsches Studentenwerk (DSW), Berlin 2018
(German National Association for Student Affairs)
studium-behinderung@studentenwerke.de

Authors

Deutsches Zentrum für Hochschul- und Wissenschaftsforschung (DZHW)
(German Centre for Higher Education Research and Science Studies)
in collaboration with
Institut für Höhere Studien (IHS), Wien
(Institute for Advanced Studies, Vienna)
Jonas Poskowsky (Poskowsky@dzhw.eu)
Sonja Heissenberg
Sarah Zaussinger
Julia Brenner

Sponsored by

Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung (BMBF)
(Federal Ministry of Education and Research)

Internet: <http://best-umfrage.de/enderbericht-best2/>

best2 – Key Results

Christine Fromme, Informations- und Beratungsstelle Studium und Behinderung (IBS) at Deutsches Studentenwerk

The IBS is the national centre of competence for the inclusion of students with disabilities.

As already known from the 21st Social Survey: 11% of students in Germany have a study-relevant health impairment. They are the main focus of the survey “Studying with impairments - best2”. We are particularly interested in:

- How do disabilities influence the choice of study?
- Which study difficulties develop in relation to the disabilities?
- How are these difficulties compensated?
- Which consultation and support services are used?
- How does the type of disability/health impairment influence the development and compensation of difficulties?
- How can study conditions be improved?

Students with study-relevant impairments: Who are they?

Health impairments are study-relevant when they prolong and, in combination with existing barriers, make studying more difficult and limit participation possibilities in accessing and completing academic studies. This case refers to disabilities while studying. The data on impairments and regarding the extent of impairment-related difficulties while studying are based on information provided by the students.

Students with study-impairing disabilities form a heterogeneous group

One quarter of students reported more than one impairment. According to the self-assessment by the participating students the following impairments/health conditions affect the students alone or most while studying:

- 53 % mental health conditions,
- 20 % chronic-somatic conditions (e.g. chronic-inflammatory bowel conditions, MS, rheumatism, chronic pain),
- 6 % other prolonging conditions/impairments (e.g. tumour diseases, autism-spectrum-conditions),
- 4 % motor impairments,
- 4 % partial performance conditions (e.g. dyslexia),
- 3 % hearing/speech impairments,
- 3 % visual impairments.

For 7% of the interviewed students two or more than two impairments have an equally strong effect on their studies:

- 2 % mental and chronic-somatic conditions,
- 5 % other multiple impairments.

Compared to 2011 the share of students who state that they are affected most by a mental condition while studying rose considerably by eight percentage points from 45 % to 53 %.

Impairments affect approx. two-thirds of students markedly while studying

The proportion of students whose impairments severely or very severely affect studying remained more or less constant at 62 % compared to 2011 (59 %). A considerable proportion of students with mental conditions – also in combination with other impairments – reported severe study impairments.

A disability pass is no criterion for study difficulties

The proportion of students with a disability pass remained more or less constant at 9 % compared to 2011 (8 %). Most of the participating students have not yet applied for a disability pass. It does not give any detail regarding study difficulties.

Impairments are only noticeable on first sight among 4 % of the students

Over two-thirds of students (67 %) report that their impairments are not instantly noticeable (2011: 63 %). This includes in particular students whose study is affected most severely by a mental, chronic-somatic or other prolonging health condition such as a tumour disease. Only 4 % of students consider they can be instantly identified as students with impairments (2011: 6 %).

Five out of six impaired students had acquired their impairment before they started studying

Only for 17 % of students the impairment occurred after having started their current studies (2011: 25 %). Two out of three students acquired their impairment during their school career. Considerably more frequently than in 2011, students stated that they already had a mental condition before they had started studying (2017: 73 %; 2011: 62 %).

How do students with study-relevant impairments differ from other students?

Comparisons between students with and without study-relevant impairments indicate whether and, if relevant, in which areas there are barriers for an equal participation in studying. The 21st Social Survey (“21. Sozialerhebung”) provides important details, which are referred to in the following sections. “best2” focuses in greater depth on these findings.

There are considerably more women than men among students with study-relevant impairments

21st Social Survey: Among students with study-relevant impairments, the percentage of women (54 %) is considerably higher than among students without study-relevant impairments (47 %). Students who cannot or do not wish to allocate themselves to a gender comprise 1% of all students.

best2: The participants in best2 are 55 % female, 43 % male and 3 % did not want to or could not define a gender for themselves. Depending on the type of impairment, the gender ratio varies considerably. There are only proportionally more men than women among students with hearing/speaking impairments, vision impairments, partial impairments and “other conditions/impairments such as tumour diseases or autism-spectrum conditions”.

Students with study-relevant impairments are considerably older than other students

21st Social Survey: Students with study-relevant impairments are on average two years and at study begin one year older than their student colleagues without study-relevant impairments.

best2: The average age of students participating in “best2” is 26.9 years. The largest share is between 25 and 30 years old (41 %). Students with multiple and motor impairments as well as “other conditions/impairments (e.g. tumour diseases, autism-spectrum conditions)” are older than the average. Students with visual impairments have the lowest average age.

Slight differences regarding the educational background

21st Social Survey: Students with study-impeding impairments originate slightly less frequently from an academic family household than students without study-relevant impairments (50% vs. 53%).

best2: In contrast, among those students involved in best2 the students with partial performance conditions and hearing/speech impairments considerably more often originate from academic households than students with other impairments (55% or 53% vs. Ø 50%).

Hardly any differences in the type of university entrance qualification

21st Social Survey: Students with study-impeding impairments more rarely have general university entrance qualifications than students without study-impeding impairments (81 % vs. 84 %), and slightly more frequently have entrance qualifications to universities of applied sciences, a subject-related university entrance qualification or a vocational qualification.

best2: Students with partial performance conditions have general university entrance qualifications considerably less frequently than students with study-related impairments (66 % vs. Ø 81 %).

Minor differences in the choice of subjects

21st Social Survey: The distribution of the students with study-relevant impairments across the individual subject groups mostly corresponds to the distribution of students without study-relevant impairments. Among the humanities subject group (incl. sports) and arts/art sciences, compared to students without study-relevant impairments, the percentage of students with

study-relevant impairments is higher (18 % vs. 14 % and 5 % vs. 3 %). Among the engineering sciences it is lower (22 % vs. 28 %).

best2: Students with mental conditions and multiple impairments are by proportion more frequently found in the humanities, while students with visual impairments, partial performance conditions and “other conditions/impairments (e.g. tumour diseases, autism-spectrum conditions)” are more often represented among engineering sciences.

Minimal differences regarding the anticipated higher education degree

21st Social Survey: Students with study-relevant impairments are only slightly less frequently enrolled in a master’s degree than students without study-relevant impairments (21 % vs. 23 %), and slightly more frequently in phasing-out “Diplom” and “Magister” courses (3 % vs. 2 %).

best2: Two-thirds of students are enrolled in a bachelor’s degree (65 %), one-fifth in a master’s degree (21 %) and one-tenth in a state exam degree (11 %). 2 % are still enrolled in the phasing-out degree courses.

Differences in the type of higher education institution by form of impairment

21st Social Survey: Students with study-relevant impairments study in total less frequently at a higher education institution than students without study-relevant impairments (30 % vs. 35 %).

best2: Students with partial performance conditions study proportionately less frequently at a university of applied sciences than other students with study-relevant impairments (40 % vs. Ø 30 %), students with mental conditions study proportionately less frequently at universities (72 % vs. Ø 69 %).

Students with study-relevant impairments interrupt their studies more often

21st Social Survey: Students with study-relevant impairments interrupt their degree course twice as often as students without study-relevant impairments (32 % vs. 13 %). On average they also interrupt their studies for longer (Ø 2.8 vs. Ø 2.0 semesters).

best2: Of those students participating in “best2”, 7 % stated that they had “unofficially” interrupted their studies in the 2016/17 winter semester due to health reasons. Half of those had already interrupted for more than one semester without taking official leave of absence. Students with mental health conditions (9 %) and multiple impairments (11 %) especially often interrupted their studies this way in the 2016/17 winter semester.

Students with study-relevant impairments more often change their degree course

21st Social Survey: Students with study-relevant impairments change their degree course considerably more often than students without study-relevant impairments (31 % vs. 21 %).

best2: A good third of those students participating in best2 (34 %) have already changed their degree course once. Almost one third of them (= 13 % of all students participating in “best2”) stated (also) impairment reasons for changing their degree course. By proportion students with mental and multiple impairments most often state this reason (16 % vs. 17 %).

How relevant is the impairment regarding access to the studies?

This study can only provide very limited information regarding the decision processes of students with impairments and the effectiveness of balancing out disadvantages during the admission process, as rejected applicants or those who decide against a degree due to reasons of impairment did not partake in the study. However, it may highlight existing barriers and specific requirements in the education sector by examining impairment-relevant aspects of the choice of study by the students. 83 % of the participating students stated that their impairment already existed before they were admitted to the current degree course.

The influence of the impairment on the study decision is declining

For almost one fifth of students whose impairment already existed before their current study course (19 %), the impairments had a (very) strong influence on their degree course decision (2011: 25 %). Especially students with hearing/speech disabilities and mental health conditions stated considerably less frequently than in 2011 that their study decision was (very) strongly influenced by their disability. At the same time, in the 2016/17 winter semester 40 % of students stated that their impairment that existed before they began their studies did not influence their choice of study (2011: 33 %).

Favourable conditions for studying a degree course with disabilities are gaining importance for the choice of study

Among those students whose impairments very strongly affected their choice of study, the relevance of the favourable study conditions of a degree course has increased significantly compared to 2011 (2017: 47 %; 2011: 27 %). Favourable study conditions with impairments are especially relevant for students with motor impairments and multiple impairments as well as for students with partial disorders. For students with motor and multiple impairments as well as for students with chronic conditions, congruity of the impairment with later professional activity is of equally high relevance. In contrast to 2011, the amenability of the social environment (2017: 28 %; 2011: 36 %) and low entrance barriers (2017: 23 %; 2011: 29 %) were relevant for fewer participating students in their choice of study.

Students are more often not enrolled in their study course of choice compared to 2011 due to impairment related reasons

The share of students for whom the impairment affected the choice of study and who are not in their study course of choice has more than doubled since 2011 (2017: 20 %; 2011: 9 %). These are 12 % of students whose impairments existed before starting studying, and approx. 10 % of all participating students. The rise in students with visual impairments and with “other impairments/conditions (e.g. tumour diseases and autism spectrum condition)” is particularly high. Also, those who did not study their original course of choice due to impairment-related reason blamed the restricted accessibility to the study degree course proportionately more often. Compared to 2011 this group has risen considerably by 20 percentage points from 41 % to 61 %. The second highest reason is poor job prospects due to an impairment (2017: 29 %; 2011: 26 %). The lack of support at the site of the higher education institution is also gaining

importance (2017: 20 %; 2011: 15 %). Discouragement by the personal environment (2017: 23 %; 2011: 7 %) or external consultants (2017: 9 %; 2011: 15 %) has become less relevant since 2011. Lack of considering in the admission processes the impairment-relevant requirements for these possibilities are criticized by the same proportion of affected students as in 2011 (12 % or 15 % respectively).

Supplementary application forms during the application process are only an option for very few students

9 % of students whose impairment had influenced the choice of study and who have applied for a study place in an access-restricted course of study (=3 % of all participating students), have submitted a hardship case application or a different supplementary application while taking into account the impairment-related requirements during the application process (2011: 7 %), of which two of five students held a disability pass. As in 2011, 40 % of the users of supplementary applications had experienced difficulties with the application process.

Which impairment-related difficulties result during the studies?

Students with and without study-relevant impairments have difficulties in carrying out their studies. In many cases the underlying reasons are identical. In comparison with the impairments, there may be structural, communicative, constructional barriers that may have a considerably more severe impact on studying. The impairment-related difficulties when studying were examined in considerably more detail in the 2016/17 winter semester than in 2011. For the first time the difficulties in social collaboration were also recorded.

Nine out of ten have experienced impairment-related difficulties while studying

89 % of participating students - equal women and men - stated impairment-related difficulties with organising and performing their studies in examination and learning situations. They are almost as many as in 2011 (88 %). Impairment-related difficulties were stated by 65 % of participating students in context with exams, homework and other tests, 57 % in the field of study organisation, teaching and learning, and 44 % with their social interaction, contacts and communication at higher education institutions.

In addition, 25 % of students who are dependent on constructional accessibility and/or appropriate equipment experience difficulties with restricted accessibility and usability of buildings and rooms in the higher education institution context (=7 % of all questioned students).

Out of the 11 % of students who reported having currently no impairment-related difficulties in performing their studies, there is an above-average number of students with (very) slight study difficulties. In addition, there are those students who have only recently started studying and whose impairments have only recently been determined. Well four-fifths of those reported having found ways by themselves to compensate their impairment-related

difficulties. One out of eight in this group stated that their individual requirements were accounted for by the higher education institution, which adds up to 1.5 % of all participating students.

Impairment-related difficulties most often develop due to a high frequency of examinations

Impairment-related difficulties particularly often develop as a result a high frequency of exams (41 %), irrespective of the type of impairment. The second and third most frequent reasons were found in the difficulties with “exams, home assignments and other proofs of performance”, with exam durations/the hand-in deadlines (30 %), as well as with exam repetitions and rescheduling (29 %). In addition, regulations regarding the type of examination (26 %), registration and cancellation modalities for exams (18 %) and for the exam environment (8 %) can result in study difficulties in combination with the impairment. The difficulties vary depending on the type of impairment. Students with mental health conditions, multiple impairments and especially students with partial performance conditions, reported impairment-related difficulties in the field of “exams, home assignments and other proofs of performance” proportionately more often than other students, and students with motor and visual impairments proportionately least.

A predefined performance workload and compulsory attendance are difficult to combine with impairments

Impairment-related difficulties regarding study organisation, teaching and learning especially often occur as a result of the scope of achievements and attendance requirement. One third of all participating students (35 % or 34 %) stated to have corresponding difficulties. One in five, regarding their own impairment, also reported difficulties with requirements concerning the course of studies and inflexible schedules. Difficulties in specific learning and teaching situations are stated proportionally less often: 28 % of all participating students stated difficulties with self-learning phases, 20 % with team and groupwork, 16 % with lack of consideration by teachers and 15 % with the lack or loss of fixed learning groups. The difficulties vary considerably depending on the type of impairment. The students who by proportion most often stated one impairment-related difficulty from the area of study organisation, teaching and learning were students with mental health conditions (63 %), also in combination with chronic-somatic conditions (73 %) as well as students with other multiple impairments (66 %), and least students with hearing/speech impairments (31 %).

Already in 2011, impairment-related difficulties in performing studies developed most frequently due to the requirements regarding the performance workload, the attendance requirement and the high concentration of exams.

Fear of rejection and stigmatisation complicate communication and contact to teachers, fellow students and administration staff

More than three-quarters of students with difficulties in social collaboration took advantage of the possibility to specify their difficulties using their own words. From almost 7,000 entries the combined result was a complex illustration of the social climate at the higher education institution. Here, openly dealing with impairment with the resulting fear of rejection and

stigmatisation, as well as concealing their impairment, were almost equally detrimental to students as a concrete negative experience with teachers, fellow students and administration staff. The individual reports made it clear that the contact and communication problems resulting from fear or disappointments of the students on the one hand, and from disinterest or ignorance of some teachers and fellow students on the other hand, play a key role as a trigger or amplifier of difficulties while studying. This includes, for instance: loss of the learning group, exclusion from the usual student networks or renouncement of compensation of disadvantages.

Lack of retreat or rest rooms also impair studying in 2017

28 % of participating students stated they depend on barrier-free access and usability of buildings and rooms. One-third of these groups (25 %) have difficulty in carrying out their studies due to constructional barriers and/or lack of equipment. They include – referring to students who have relevant requirements – especially many students with motor (68 %), visual (42 %), hearing/speaking (52%) and multiple impairments (36 %). For 12 % of students who made impairment-related requirements on the building equipment, their study difficulties arose due to lack of rest and retreat rooms. The high unfulfilled requirement of rest and retreat rooms was an important issue already in 2011.

How are reasonable accommodations of the higher education institutions used to compensate impairment-related difficulties and how effective are they?

Reasonable accommodations of the higher education institution serve to balance out impairment-related disadvantages if study-barriers exist. Reasonable accommodations include particularly: individual academic adjustments; compensation of disadvantages in exam situations and study organisation; individual adaptations in the design of the learning and teaching phases (including learning materials); as well as measures to compensate for missing or inadequate accessibility and usability of the higher education institutions' and of the Studentenwerke, the student service organisations' facilities.

Most students do without reasonable accommodations to compensate impairment-related disadvantages when studying

Only 29 % of students with difficulties in accomplishing their studies have at least once applied for individual academic adjustments or for adaptations to compensate for impairment-related difficulties, although up to 62 % of students stated they have severe or very severe impairment-related study difficulties. Compared to 2011 these proportions have remained almost unchanged. The main reason they did not apply for an academic adjustment and agreements with teachers are, as in 2011: unclarity regarding their entitlement (54 %), inhibitions against approaching responsible persons (51 %) and rejection of "special treatments" (51 %).

Academic adjustments are applied mostly for specific exam situations

By proportion, most students applied for an academic adjustment to compensate for impairment-related difficulties in specific exam situations. This involved, in particular, modifications of the exam duration/deadlines (29 %), the repetition/rescheduling of exams (20 %) and the adaptation of the exam environment (e.g. a separate exam room) 18 %. Applications for the compensation of disadvantages or requests for adaptations in the field of study organisation and teaching and learning situations are submitted by students considerably less often, most likely still in relation to a return to studying following a long break and for attendance requirements (13 % each). Compensations for disadvantages are least applied for in relation to the most frequently named difficulty of a “high exam frequency” and “performance workload”. Students with visual impairments apply proportionately most often for a compensation of disadvantages while studying, and students with mental health conditions proportionately least often. 21 % of students with difficulties due to constructional barriers have requested adequate provisions to compensate for these disadvantages. This also applies to more than half of students who depend on personnel/technical support in exam situations (57 %).

Students are often successful when applying for an academic adjustment

On average, regarding individual difficulties, 62 % of the recently submitted applications for adequate provisions for compensation of impairment-related disadvantages were approved (2011: 64 %). Those approved most often were applications for the academic adjustments in the field of “exams, home assignments and other proofs of achievements” (64 %). In the field of “study organisation, teaching and learning”, as well as in relation to the adaptation of constructional and room conditions, the rate of approval amounts to 47 % or 46 % respectively.

The chances of approval are greatest for applications to those academic adjustments which are submitted most often: Thus, four out of five applications for modification of the exam duration and submission deadlines were approved as well as three out of five for adaptations of the exam environment (e.g. a separate examination room). But also, more than half of the applications for approval of academic adjustments regarding the performance workload or a repetition/rescheduling of exams are successful, even though adequate provisions are requested for comparatively rarely.

The chances of approval vary depending on the type of impairment

The highest rate of approval regarding the academic adjustments in exams was achieved among students with visual and motor impairments (72 % to 76 %). In relation to the compensation of disadvantages in the field of “study organisation, teaching and learning” the students with motor impairments, students with mental health conditions and students with chronic-somatic conditions were most successful (each approx. 50 %). The most difficulties were experienced among students with partial performance disturbances: by proportion their applications were approved comparatively seldom (e.g. for exams/achievement proofs: 54 % vs. Ø 64 %).

As in 2011, applications for the academic adjustments were mostly rejected due to the following reasons: “the requested academic adjustments are not considered to be compatible

with the examination regulations” (2017: 35 %; 2011: 38 %) and “Teachers do not want to change their teaching routine” (2017: 29 %; 2011: 39 %).

Reasonable accommodations are helpful or very helpful in three out of four cases

On average, the students consider three-quarters of the approved individual academic adjustments/adaptions (73 %) to be (very) helpful, 20 % to be partially helpful, and only 7 % of the academic adjustments/adaptions are considered to be less helpful or not helpful at all. (2011: 41% “fully effective”, 49 % “partially effective” and 10 % “not effective at all”). Measures to adapt the exam environment are considered to be especially helpful (e.g. a separate examination room) (81 %) and to modify the examination duration/deadlines (80 %). In comparison, measures to compensate constructional barriers and space requirements are very often not deemed to be helpful (17 %). Students with visual impairments and students with mental health conditions in combination with chronic-somatic condition are especially content with their academic adjustments (79 %), students with hearing/speech impairments are least content (61 %).

Which alternative solution strategies do students develop to compensate for impairment-related study difficulties?

Firstly, the students had the possibility to provide information on self-arranged accomplishment strategies widely independent of the achievement strategies.

Four out of five students use individual solution strategies

84 % of students with impairment-related study difficulties (= approx. 75 % of all participating students) use alternative means to compensate for impairment-related difficulties while studying. More than half of students with impairment-related study difficulties (58 %) had exclusively used these means and one quarter (26%) had used them to complement the impairment-compensating measures of the higher education institution. 13 % of students with impairment-related study difficulties have used neither the means provided by the higher education institution or self-arranged support to compensate for the impairment-related difficulties while studying. The remaining 2 % used only the reasonable accommodations of the higher education institution.

Family, fellow students and teachers/therapists are the main supporters

Support provided by the personal environment is particularly important irrespective of the type of disability. More than every second person used these resources. Support provided by doctors and/or therapists is also used by more than 50 % of students as an important building block for successful studying with disabilities. Especially students with mental health conditions also in combination with chronic somatic conditions consider this support to be even more important than that provided by the private environment (61 % vs. 69 %). Almost one out of three students uses the support provided by fellow students, by ratio most often students with motor and visual impairments. Offers provided by coaching, trainings,

alternative learning formats and fixed learning groups are used considerably less often. They are used especially often by students with partial performance conditions.

Alternative support measures are of great benefit

Three-quarters of students rated one of the used alternatives as (very) effective. The measures used most often are rated as especially helpful: support by friends and family, fellow students and by doctors/therapists (each approx. two-thirds). Even more frequently, participation in a fixed learning group is rated as helpful (69 %), which however is only used by 8 % of students. More than every second user of alternative learning formats also rates them to be helpful. Offers such as communication trainings, coaching and workshops are considerably less often rated to be helpful.

What do impairment-related consultation services offer?

Those interested in studying and students with study-relevant impairments often require specific consultation. Different consultation offices with different specialist focuses are provided for this purpose in the context of the higher education institution and the “Studentenwerke”, the student service organisations.

Impairment-related service offers are better known than in 2011

Almost nine out of ten students know at least one impairment-related service offer (2017: 86 %; 2011: 79 %). The services offered by the higher education institution officers and consultants for students with disabilities and chronic conditions are known by 57 % of students (2011: 45 %), the corresponding offers of the “Studentenwerke” by 50 % (2011: 40 %), those offered by the students’ union, students’ council by 41 % (2011: 34 %), and the offers by the psychological advice centres by 72 % (2011: 67 %).

The use of specific consultation offers has risen considerably since 2011

The share of users of impairment-specific consultation offers has risen considerably since 2011 from 24 % to 33 %. This also means that two-thirds of students with study-relevant impairments have not sought a specific consultation until today, although already 62 % of students have stated to have a severe or very severe study impairment. Among the users of consultation offers are an above-average number of students with mental conditions as well as multiple impairments and comparatively few students with chronic somatic conditions and partial performance conditions.

Choice of consultation point depends on the type of impairment

The preferred choice of the consultation offers strongly depends on the type of impairment: as already in 2011 the students with mental conditions particularly often used the psychological counselling centres, students with motor and sensory impairments especially often used the offers of the student officers for students with disabilities and chronic conditions at the higher education institutions. The specific consultation offers of the “Studentenwerke” are used equally often by all students independent of their impairment. The consultation offers of the

students' self-administration (students' union, etc.) and the disabled persons' self-support are used considerably less often.

The main consulting topics are “dealing with disabilities” and “academic adjustments”

Irrespective of the type of impairment, the main topics of consultation are: dealing with own impairments while studying, designing and achieving personal academic adjustments and organising studies. Other consultation topics depend heavily on the type of impairment.

When using specific consultation offers, the chances that reasonable accommodations will balance out the impairment-related disadvantages rise

Students who use consultation on issues such as studying with disabilities and chronic conditions apply for academic adjustments considerably more often than their fellow students who do not use specific consultation offers (32 % vs. 17 %), particularly those students who specifically seek consultation regarding the academic adjustments (78 %). The approval rates can be improved by specific consultation: For students with prior consultation on the academic adjustments, 65 % of the applications for academic adjustments were approved compared to 60 % otherwise.

A consultation by higher education institution consultation offices for students with disabilities and chronic conditions is considered to be especially helpful

Three of five seeking advice rate at least one of the used impairment-specific consultation offers to be helpful or very helpful. The corresponding consultation offers of the higher education institution officers and consultants offered to students with disabilities and chronic conditions were those most often rated to be (very) helpful (58 %), closely followed by the specific consultation offers provided by the students' self-administration (57 %). The consultation offers of the psychological consultation officers and the impairment-specific consultation of the “Studentenwerke” are considered to be (very) helpful by approximately one out of two students.

How do additional impairment-related costs affect studying? How are they financed?

Students with study-relevant impairments consider their financial situation to be considerably worse compared to other students. By proportion they state that financing their subsistence is not secured more than twice as often as students without study-related impairments (cf. 20th and 21st social survey). The financing of impairment-related additional requirements plays a great role, as these costs cannot be reimbursed from student loans (“BAföG”) and scholarships.

Two-thirds of students incur impairment-related additional costs

64 % of participating students state that they incur impairment-related additional costs, considerably more women than men. Considerably more often, these are costs for non-study-

related additional requirements (2017: 63 %; 2011: 67 %). Additional costs are incurred in particular for medication (46 %), medical treatment (23 %), psychological and other therapies (21 % or 18 %), for impairment-related additional requirements of day-to-day subsistence (e.g. food or hygiene items: 15 %) and for impairment-related travel expenses (e.g. to receive treatment: 10 %).

Additional costs for study-related requirements (i.e. for study and communication assistance, mobility or technical aids) are incurred by a relatively small group of students (2017: 3 %; 2011: 9 %); however, they are incurred by an above-average proportion of students with visual (25 %), hearing/speech (19 %) and motor impairments (14 %).

The share of students who incur impairment-related additional costs has dropped considerably from 71 % to 64 % compared to 2011. In 2017 students with hearing/speech impairments and students with mental health conditions stated considerably less than in 2011 that they incurred impairment-related additional costs (hearing/speech impairment: 2017: 47 %; 2011: 58 %; mental health condition: 2017: 57 %; 2011: 68 %).

No secured subsistence in event of impairment-related additional costs

Every sixth student incurring impairment-related additional costs for subsistence states that the financing of their subsistence is not (sufficiently) secured (16 %). At the same time 25 % of students experiencing impairment-related additional costs for studying state that these costs are not or only insufficiently covered. There is no change compared to 2011.

Only 3 % of students incurring impairment-related additional costs receive social security payments

The social security payments that can also be requested by students with study-relevant impairments include, for instance, services by the health insurance provider for technical aids, inclusion assistance aids for attending a higher education institution, services by the care insurance, state blindness support payments or care assistance, basic substance payments according to "SGB XII" or payments for additional requirements and in hardship situations according to "SGB II". Although 64 % of students incur impairment-related additional costs only 3 % claim social security payments to cover their impairment-related requirements, including 14 % of students with visual, 9 % of students with motor and 8 % of students with hearing/speech impairments.

Only one-quarter of students requiring technical and personnel assistance apply for inclusion payments while studying

More than three-quarters of students who reported requiring study and communication assistance or technical aids while studying have not yet applied for such inclusion support services (77 %). Out of the students who have applied for inclusion support, two-thirds (65 %) were successful. 13 % of applications were rejected, the rest is still waiting for a letter of notification.

How can study conditions for students with study-relevant impairments be improved?

In total, four out of five students would again choose their current course of study at their higher education institution with regards to compatibility with their impairment (79 %). 6 % would “surely not” and 15 % would “probably not” choose their degree course again due to reasons of their impairment. These two student groups had an above-average share of students with mental health conditions and multiple impairments (25 % - 26 % vs. Ø 21 %), but comparatively few students had an officially certified severe disability (16 %). Despite the overall high acceptance of the current degree course many of the students participating in “best2” consider it necessary improve the study conditions for students with study-relevant impairments.

Students consider adequate support during the study entrance phase to be especially helpful

More than three-quarters of students in the advanced study phases (78 %), and two-thirds of fresher students (first and second higher education semester: 67%), on undergraduate programmes who have already enrolled into the course with an impairment, state that (more) specific support in the study entrance phase would have been helpful to carry out their studies.

Especially students who have completed at least two semesters look back to how impairment-related difficulties with studying could have been mitigated or avoided if suitable information could have been used at an early stage. By proportion, this group – irrespective of the type of impairment – would like an early support regarding the application of academic adjustments in examination situations (38 %). Only for students with mental and chronic somatic health conditions, as well as those with multiple impairments (45 % to 61 %), is the topic of “dealing with impairment-related absence” even more important. Depending on the type of the impairment, however, early support is also considered beneficial for other aspects of studying with disabilities, e.g. when dealing with own disabilities, when contacting teachers, in context with study financing or when learning adequate work techniques.

A high proportion of students with multiple impairments point out the importance of early support on impairment-related issues (88 % vs. Ø 78 %). Students with sensory and motor impairments state comparatively often that they do not need additional support in any area (49 % vs. Ø 22 %).

The data does not provide information on whether the desired support offers are lacking. Students may have overlooked or ignored corresponding offers when they took up their studies.

Students pledge for the removal of barriers while studying and for the consultation to be strengthened

All participating students had the opportunity to make suggestions on how to improve the compatibility of impairments with studying. Almost half of the students took advantage of this (approx. 9,500).

More than half of the in part very specific suggestions refer to difficulties when studying. The main focus in this case: a reduction of the barriers in the study and examination regulations, improved individual accounting for impairment-related requirements by teachers during teaching events and accounting for impairment-related requirements for good visual, hearing and ventilation conditions as well as retreat rooms.

One-quarter of the suggestions refer to the consultation offers. Easily accessible, well-findable information and consultation offers are desired. The consultants should be highly skilled and boast specialist knowledge and should also be able to provide answers to impairment-related questions.

Overarching suggestions were also submitted concerning the following themes: Sensitization for requirements of persons with study-relevant impairments/chronic conditions, dealing with their own impairment, financing, catering and organisation of self-support.