

## **ballot fzs** (federation of student unions)

### **Note:**

The discussion about the ballot on joining the fzs set off a highly polarizing debate in the student parliament. There seem to be extremely controversial opinions on this. In order to do justice to both sides, we decided to have the respective side write a text on the pros and cons. Accordingly, these texts tend to represent opinions and therefore do not necessarily claim to present the facts in a factual and sober manner. The following are these texts.

### **PROS**

The **fzs (federation of student unions)** is currently the only general, party-independent, nationwide student association in Germany. It represents students at the federal level and ensures that student needs are taken into account in federal politics. Its members comprise about one third of the students in Germany. This makes the fzs the largest student association in Germany.

The political orientation and topics of the association are determined at the twice-yearly general meetings. Here it is clear that the fzs, as a democratic interest group, takes majority decisions that do not always correspond to the individual opinions of all students. Basically, it can be said that the resolutions, demands and positions of the fzs in recent years have had a strong student connection and would bring better study conditions and financial relief to the majority of all students in Germany. The fzs fights against tuition fees, for a better BAföG, sufficient equipment and financing of universities, good study conditions and teaching & learning quality, a good social situation of students, better perspectives for students in the corona pandemic and much more.

Only as a full member can the KIT student body again have a stronger say in the positions and the issues of the fzs, which is now already often perceived (e.g. in the media) as the official voice of German students.

In the recent past, the fzs has had several successes, among others, with the Action Alliance against Tuition Fees, which it leads. The Action Alliance has been campaigning for the nationwide abolition of tuition fees for years. For example, the general tuition fees in Baden-Württemberg of 1000,00€ per year (500,00€ per semester) were abolished in 2012 also due to this pressure. Likewise, the Action Alliance against tuition fees for international students is currently taking legal action in Baden-Württemberg.

For the representation of student interests, the fzs is in regular contact with the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF), the German Student Union (umbrella organization of the individual student unions) and other actors. Again and again, the fzs is also asked by courts and parliaments to comment on legislative or court proceedings. For example, in recent years in the Bundestag on the topic of BAföG, rents or the minimum wage law, the state parliament of Baden-Württemberg and the Federal Constitutional Court. Furthermore, the fzs does valuable lobbying work with federal politicians\*, draws attention to the needs of students in the media and organizes

election committee  
c/o AStA am KIT

Adenauerring 7  
76131 Karlsruhe  
E-Mail: [wahl@asta-kit.de](mailto:wahl@asta-kit.de)  
Telefon: 0721 608 48460

[wahl.asta.kit.edu](http://wahl.asta.kit.edu)

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Michael Khal

political campaigns. In addition, the fzs has a higher education policy education program that is open to all students.

The fzs also represents German students at the European level in the Bologna process and in the European student umbrella organization ESU.

By joining, the KIT student body would support this work and thus advocate for student needs nationwide and throughout Europe. Although education is first and foremost a state matter, the federal government has a great influence on universities and students throughout Germany via federal-state agreements, financial programs, and the co-design of European higher education policy, and also determines BAföG policy. For a strong student voice, a powerful nationwide student association is needed: the fzs. In addition, the student body would gain access to extended educational offers, discounts on educational offers, access to the infrastructure of the fzs and to framework agreements for fzs members (which in turn means discounts, for example on GEMA fees).

The fzs has a very lean structure, is supported by voluntary commitment and does not waste vast sums in administration. The benefits and advantages of the fzs far outweigh the membership fee of 0,80€ per year and student. Compared to the costs of studying (rent and living expenses, over 300,00 € per year in administrative fees alone) this amount seems negligible and will hardly be felt. Political decisions against the interests of students, such as the above-mentioned 1,000.00 € general tuition fees per year, if you do not get BAföG because of unfair political regulations or much too little, too short or too late to be able to study meaningfully with it, students get, however, very quickly and strongly negatively felt! The membership fee of the KIT student body to the fzs corresponds in its amount to about four percent of the total budget of the "Verfasste Studierendenschaft". The general meeting decides on the use of membership fees and other income. The largest expenditures of the fzs are in the areas of representation of interests and campaigns as well as educational work and networking.

The student body of KIT - or before that of the University of Karlsruhe (TH) - was already represented in the fzs earlier. It had joined in the fzs founding year 1993 and before that was part of the predecessor organization Vereinigte Deutsche Studentenschaften (VDS). When the Verfasste Studierendenschaft was reintroduced in Baden-Württemberg in 2013, the previous representation (the UStA, the Unabhängige Studierendenausschuss - see [https:// www.asta-kit.de/de/studierendenschaft/u-modell](https://www.asta-kit.de/de/studierendenschaft/u-modell) ) automatically left the fzs. However, the new structures were not directly capable of acting, so there was no immediate re-entry. Due to the rapid generational changes among the volunteers, the fzs membership was then forgotten for the time being. Since then, the KIT external department has participated in the general meetings of the fzs as a guest without voting rights.

Currently (as of June 10, 2021), 93 student bodies with 946,885 students are represented in the fzs. The fzs is currently growing strongly - in 2018 there were 81 student bodies with 760,237 students. Several more student bodies are currently being admitted.

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The federal legislature could also provide for an umbrella organization for students, in which 100% - all students and all student bodies - would come together to represent student interests. The fzs itself is in favor of this. As long as the legislator does not comply with this request, we students have to organize our umbrella organization and our representation of interests ourselves, and that is what we do in the fzs.

You can find more information about the fzs at [www.fzs.de](http://www.fzs.de).

## **CONS**

The "**freie zusammenschluss von student\*innenschaften**" (**fzs**) is a nationwide umbrella organisation of student bodies and is supposed to represent their interests vis-à-vis universities, politics and the public. In practice, the association is often characterised by a lack of transparency, frequent internal disputes and questionable democratic legitimacy. Currently, the fzs represents just 30% of the students in Germany. Of these hundreds of thousands of students, however, very few are even aware of their indirect membership or the mere existence of the association. This can call into question the representation of all these students.

As an association, the fzs is not politically neutral but left-wing. This is also expressed in its positioning on numerous issues. It is questionable whether it can do justice to its claim to represent all students. For example, the fzs has shown solidarity with squatters several times in the past, considers the banning of the KPD as "delegitimising anti-fascist commitment" and supports anti-fascist associations outside the university.

Thematically, the fzs mainly deals with higher education policy issues such as BAföG, tuition fees or the Bologna reform. However, the fzs also deals with general political issues such as the financial crisis in Greece, the general minimum wage and the situation in Kurdish areas. In the case of issues that do not affect students in a particular way, however, it is questionable whether it is one of the tasks of a student interest group to comment on them. Therefore, this endeavour should not be supported through membership.

Another reason against membership is the fzs' positioning against the Excellence Initiative. KIT places very high value on high-quality research and teaching. As a university of excellence, we not only benefit from a good reputation, KIT can also compete internationally with top universities thanks to funds from the initiative, among other things. The "needs-oriented basic funding" demanded by the fzs instead would be anything but beneficial to the reputation and possibilities of the universities, especially in international comparison. Abolishing the Excellence Initiative would have extreme consequences for KIT. If we want to remain elite students, we must not join the fzs!

80 cents per student per year may look like little money at first glance, but with the amount of students at KIT, it is still more than 18 thousand euros per year that are spent uselessly. The fzs may have some supportable demands in their catalogue, such as the demand for better BAföG, but

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why we as students in Karlsruhe should have to pay such a lot of money for it is incomprehensible. At the same time, the students of the KIT are already represented at the most important political level for higher education policy, the state, by the state student representation, and that without any expensive membership fees. In addition, it is not clear where these funds go, but a large part of the money goes to delegates who regularly travel to meetings all over the country as conference fees or travel costs (about 6% of the budget).

In addition, almost every political university group also has an association at the federal level. This means that students' interests can also be represented at the national level and even at the European level, and there is no need for another association that in no way represents all students. Through the federal associations of the university groups, the interests and demands of the students end up in the decisions of the parties and also in the Bundestag. This means that there is already a democratic process for the representation of interests and this has no additional costs for the individual student.