

## Ensuring that integration succeeds: The DAAD's measures for refugees



*During a press conference at the Technische Universität Berlin, the Federal Education Minister Johanna Wanka, the President of the TU Berlin, Christian Thomsen, and the President of the DAAD, Margret Wintermantel, presented the DAAD's measures for refugees.*

In view of the growing number of refugees entering Germany, the DAAD organised a conference with university representatives in Berlin at the end of September to determine current needs and necessary measures. The DAAD has already implemented several measures which support refugees, for example, the scholarship programme "Leadership for Syria", funded by the Federal Foreign Office, which called for applications just one year ago. The scholarship recipients commenced their degree programmes in the current winter semester. They, along with the universities, receive ongoing support and consultation from the DAAD.

The latest set of measures for refugees builds on feedback provided by the universities and the experience of the DAAD – and is compatible with the funding instruments already in place at the DAAD. For instance, the DAAD Info Centre, which fields questions and offers advice to interested parties, will be entrusted with further responsibilities. "I'm pleased that the DAAD is regarded as an expert organisation," said DAAD President Professor Margret Wintermantel at the press conference, declaring that "if any organisation has experience with integrating foreign students, then it's the DAAD."

Federal Minister of Education Professor Johanna Wanka underscored the value of the work of the DAAD. "If integration is to truly succeed, then it shall happen largely through education," said Wanka and emphasised that the "best possibility to implement the measures is to rely on the longstanding cooperation with the DAAD." This is evident in the three-part approach of the new set of measures

which calls for recognising the refugees' skills and qualifications, ensuring that refugees possess the necessary academic qualifications, and supporting their long-term integration at the universities.

### **Recognising potentials**

The first measure will have the TestAS, a BMBF-funded assessment test for foreign students, translated into other languages and flexible testing procedures implemented at central German university locations. Furthermore, uni-assist e.V., a service provider established by the DAAD and the German Rectors' Conference to support international student applicants, will be expanded to review applications from refugees.

### **Ensuring academic qualification**

This measure aims to prepare young refugees for the rigours of university study by providing language instruction and subject-based preparation through foundation courses and similar programmes at German universities. The German federal government has agreed to finance an additional 10,000 places in the coming four years, accompanied by a corresponding DAAD scholarship programme. "This preparation for university study is a very important point," stated DAAD President Margret Wintermantel in Berlin.

### **Supporting student organisations**

Wintermantel expressly praised student-run organisations for their enormous commitment to supporting refugees. These organisations can now apply for financial assistance through a new DAAD programme titled "Welcome - Students Helping Refugees". The programme can grant funding to self-managed projects by student groups, as well as students, employed in their university's advising and integration programmes for academically qualified refugees, e.g. with tutorials, translations and language courses. Student assistants and required materials are also fundable. "We have to find out which projects work especially well and ensure that these can be adopted by other universities," said Margret Wintermantel. In order to provide refugees with better information about studying and living in Germany, the DAAD has also created a new BMBF-funded multilingual website with "information for refugees", available in Arabic, Dari, Pashtu and Urdu.

### **Giving talented students a chance**

Professor Christian Thomsen, President of TU Berlin, thanked the BMBF and DAAD at the press conference for their commitment to supporting refugees. His university has developed a successful programme for refugees called "In(2)TU Berlin" which not only allows them to participate in courses, but also prepares them for entry into a degree programme. According to Thomsen, integrating refugees as new students is definitely feasible; "So far we've been able to cope well with the numbers." The TU President emphasised that student refugees were extremely motivated and possessed important skills, for example, in the area of the natural sciences, which are in high demand in Germany.

For the DAAD, the question of where the students put their talents to use is not the primary concern. Margret Wintermantel stressed that the young refugees not only have the potential to work in Germany as qualified professionals, but may at some point direct the reconstruction efforts in their home countries. "We should let the students decide that for themselves." The important thing is to ensure that the joint measures of the federal government, the universities and the DAAD provide effective assistance. "It's no use to us if they simply go through the motions and are not integrated."