

Executive Summary

○ **Project background**

The funding programme “Postdoctoral Researchers International Mobility Experience” (P.R.I.M.E.) is designed to encourage the outgoing mobility of postdoctoral researchers of all nationalities and disciplines, who plan to continue their career in Germany upon their return. The merit-based programme aims at attracting promising scientists for internationally-oriented research careers and to enhance transnational academic cooperation. The fellowships funded by the P.R.I.M.E programme combine a 12-months mobility phase abroad with a 6-months re-integration phase in Germany, to ensure further integration into the German system of science and research. Funding is not provided through a scholarship but by means of work contracts. The fellows receive 18-months temporary positions at a German university of their choice, and are thus integrated into the regular pay scale of state-run institutions, which guarantees adequate salaries and social security benefits. The German universities are receiving funding from the German Academic Exchange Service (Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst, DAAD) under bilateral endowment contracts. To enhance the career development of the fellows, regular counselling is provided by mentors at the German university, the foreign host institution and through DAAD’s information seminars for new fellows. 60% of the funds are provided by the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF). 40% of the funds are provided within the 7th Framework Programme for Research and Technological Development (FP7, 2007-2013) of the European Union (EU) under Marie Curie Action COFUND¹) – for a 5-year period (March 2014-February 2019) with up to four application/selection cycles, that were depleted after three selection rounds.

○ **Evaluation background**

To ensure the continuity of the programme and to increase the awareness of the programme brand "P.R.I.M.E.", the DAAD and BMBF agreed to continue the programme and support the 2017 selection cycle with federal funds. A new application under the Marie Skłodowska Curie Action COFUND (Horizon 2020) scheme will be submitted by September 2017, in order to receive, if successful, continued EU funding from January 2019 onwards. In November 2016, Mainlevel Consulting AG was commissioned by the DAAD to evaluate the P.R.I.M.E. programme to lay the ground for the new funding request, and to derive lessons learnt and recommendations for the potential new phase of the programme. Since the first phase has not yet been completed, this evaluation is not a final one, but an intermediate progress evaluation. The evaluation report summarises the assessment of the results and (potential) impacts of the programme, and intends to serve as a basis for optimisation and improvement for further development, through the provision of practical recommendations.

○ **Evaluation methodology**

The internationally-accepted assessment criteria: Relevance (i), Effectivity (ii), Efficiency (iii), Impact (iv), Sustainability (v) and Coherence/Complementarity (vi) are the methodological basis of the evaluation, jointly with the respective evaluation questions developed by the DAAD. To further operationalise the evaluation questions, the evaluation team developed an evaluation matrix linking evaluation questions, evaluation criteria, assessment criteria and indicators, with the support of a detailed results framework underlying the P.R.I.M.E.

1 Co-funding of Regional, National and International Programmes

programme and specifying the desired results. The information gathered through the study of relevant documents, the results of online surveys, as well as additional findings through in-depth interviews, form the empirical basis of this evaluation.

- **Results according to the evaluation criteria**

Relevance

The relevance of the P.R.I.M.E. programme can be evaluated on an individual and on a structural level. As for the individual fellows, the programme providing financial independence and social security through a temporary work contract is very attractive. In addition, the international mobility programme is perceived as an important prerequisite for a significant scientific track record and a promising scientific career. Ambivalent opinions exist when it comes to the duration of the research stay abroad (12 months) and the re-integration phase (6 months). The overall majority of fellows considered the present time format adequate for their research intentions. However, there is a minority asking for longer funding periods abroad as well as in Germany. As for the structural level, although the P.R.I.M.E. programme is a highly competitive funding scheme, given the size of the programme it only can moderately contribute to strengthen the scientific and technological base of German science and industry (“Wissenschaftsstandort Deutschland”). Nevertheless, the relevance criterion can be assessed positively.

Effectiveness

After a lifespan of about 3 years, it can be stated that the P.R.I.M.E. programme has achieved its short- and medium-term results on the outcome-level. In every sense, the programme contributed to improved career opportunities for the fellows that completed the programme so far, either by a full-time position after the fellowship or by the establishment of promising research contacts during their mobility phase. In addition, an important indicator for the results on the outcome-level are the positive perceptions of the fellows about their own self-confidence and increased capabilities thanks to the P.R.I.M.E. programme. On the desired long-term results, it is still too early to assess if, for instance, international research co-operations between universities have been established or if there is a significant contribution to strengthen Germany’s position as an important location for science and research (“Wissenschaftsstandort Deutschland”). However, positive trends are already visible, thus the effectiveness criterion can overall be assessed positively.

Efficiency

Compared to traditional scholarship programmes, the unit-cost per fellow is much higher in the P.R.I.M.E. programme given the programme’s principle “work contract instead of a stipend”. However, considering the financial and social advantages of the P.R.I.M.E. programme and the overall positive perceptions of the fellows, this programme cannot be compared to scholarships only on the financial level. Overall the cost-benefit-ratio can be assessed positively. This assessment refers to the application and the selection process as well as to the overall mobility activities which are considered very beneficial by fellows and stakeholders alike. Nevertheless, it should also be mentioned that in view of the high unit costs, only a limited number of fellows can be supported by the P.R.I.M.E programme., thus, any structural changes are to be strictly checked against the available finances.

Impact

The P.R.I.M.E. programme is unique in its structure and objectives, and allows young postdoctoral scholars to gather relevant international experience. With its re-integration phase, it seems to offer an ideal combination of acquiring international experience with career aspirations in Germany. The mobility phase at a renowned institute abroad becomes a solid basis for long lasting cooperation between German and international research institutions. However, at this stage, the P.R.I.M.E. programme cannot claim to make a significant contribution to the internationalisation of the participating universities, even though the highly-qualified P.R.I.M.E. programme fellows are potential significant “door openers” towards creating and strengthening international networks and international cooperation between German and foreign universities. Furthermore, the analysis of the primary data reveals that basically all surveyed fellows intend to return to Germany in the long-run rather than continuing their career abroad. This is a clear sign that the re-integration phase as structural component of the programme contributes to strengthen Germany’s position as an important location for science and research (“Wissenschaftsstandort Deutschland”). However, there are some indications that not all fellows will immediately be able to find an adequate employment in science after completing the P.R.I.M.E. fellowship. Nonetheless, a significant majority of the fellows believes to have gained much academic self-confidence and a substantial number of former fellows already holds attractive positions such as (junior-)professorships and research group leaderships. They perceive the P.R.I.M.E. programme as an excellent preparation for competitive professional selection processes inside and outside the university system. The P.R.I.M.E. programme appears to be a valuable investment for any professional promotion.

Sustainability

Given the limited number of fellows supported so far and the short existence of the programme, its sustainability is still limited. However, with its institutionalised structures the P.R.I.M.E. programme is a remarkable innovation which is likely to persist for a long time, especially when the programme would be additionally supported by international funds to increase the number of fellowships and possibly their duration. The P.R.I.M.E. programme has the potential to set new standards for outgoing mobility of postdocs and in the future, will most likely have a great impact as a role model for exchange structures in German universities. In addition, many fellows and universities consider the P.R.I.M.E. programme a potential career booster. The majority of the returning fellows found a full-time position as junior professor or researcher at a university. It is the opinion of the evaluators that the others will very likely find interesting positions due to the newly-acquired skills abroad and the academic contacts, networks and friendships they have established during their mobility phase. Personal acquaintances and well-established institutional relationships can lead to an atmosphere which, in turn, can be positively used for mutual exchange and positive learning effects between stakeholders. Thus, the sustainability criterion can also be assessed positively.

Coordination, complementarity and coherence

P.R.I.M.E. is unique in its composition and structure, e.g.: employment contracts; re-integration phase in Germany. After DAAD has abolished its own standard long-term postdoc scholarship scheme in 2016 as well as its specific re-integration funding programme (return scholarships),

in parallel with P.R.I.M.E. there is currently only a limited number of mostly short-term DAAD scholarship programmes for specific groups of postdocs. There are no redundancies or “unnecessary overlapping” between P.R.I.M.E. and other DAAD programmes but many complimentary factors.

o **Recommendations**

Based on the evaluation results and the lessons learned, the evaluation team has developed 13 recommendations for the further implementation of the P.R.I.M.E. programme, and proposal to be submitted to MSCA in September 2017:

1	<p>Continue the programme but increase the number of available fellowships</p> <p>The P.R.I.M.E. programme is an innovative funding programme for postdoctoral fellows created and developed by the DAAD, and it is currently unique in Germany. Being evaluated by the fellows and other stakeholders as outstanding and successful, the programme should be continued and, in view of future EU funding, the number of fellowships should be significantly expanded to manifest the employment model in the German research landscape as a means to support the outgoing mobility of postdoctoral researchers.</p>
2	<p>Maintaining the “work contract” principle</p> <p>The most attractive aspect of P.R.I.M.E. is the principle “work contract instead of scholarship”, offering a full salary plus social contributions to pension funds, health insurance, parental leave etc. This salary package, in addition to the expatriate and travel allowances, has mostly been considered very generous and should not be supplemented by further allowances as some fellows and stakeholders have asked for. Compared with ordinary scholarships, work contracts which include social benefits to fellows are very attractive, even if they are paid on a temporary basis. This format should be maintained.</p>
3	<p>Offering the possibility of a flexible duration of the research mobility phase</p> <p>The 12-months research stay abroad has generally proved to be of adequate length. Many fellows are presently satisfied with the existing 12-months duration of the mobility phase. Nevertheless, a certain number of fellows suggested to introduce more flexibility and allow for a longer overall fellowship duration, especially because different research projects often require different research durations. Hence, the evaluators recommend considering a flexible solution, e.g. a research stay abroad between 12 months minimum and 18 months maximum.</p>
4	<p>Maintaining the programme’s openness to non-German fellows with a focus on EU nationals and residents</p> <p>Allowing non-German postdocs to apply for the programme has been a requirement to receive EU funding under FP7/COFUND and the evaluators generally agree with the COFUND provision that restrictions on nationality of eligible researchers and limitations regarding the researchers' origins and destinations should be avoided. Nevertheless, P.R.I.M.E. is an outgoing scheme and by its very nature, it is primarily designed for those who leave Germany for the research abroad and return for the re-integration phase (brain circulation).</p> <p>The programme’s enforced openness has caused a disproportionate distribution among the applicants and the significant number of foreign nationals residing abroad is running counter to the basic idea of an outgoing mobility scheme. Therefore, the evaluators recommend restricting access to nationals and residents of EU member states and associated countries under Horizon 2020.</p>

<p>5</p>	<p>Maintaining the selection process</p> <p>The evaluators recommend that the current selection system is kept in place since it is based on a merit-based selection of fellows (as a prerequisite for the quality of any similar research funding programme) and on a very competitive procedure to filter the “best of the best”.</p>
<p>6</p>	<p>No special quota for women</p> <p>The evaluators would not opt for a special quota for women because it would undermine the merit-based principle, which is essential for the excellency of the programme. In parallel, the programme caters for family-related needs, taking parental times into account, and providing access to social benefits such as free health insurance for family members etc. This should be continued, and is clearly seen as a good practice, allowing equality between applicants with different family background and obligations.</p>
<p>7</p>	<p>No special quota for specific disciplines – open for all</p> <p>All scientific and academic disciplines are being supported by the programme: The overall balanced representation of disciplines clearly reflects the fact that P.R.I.M.E. is attractive to many disciplines; admittedly with the exception in the field of IT and engineering sciences, which simply might have to do with various job opportunities outside academia.</p>
<p>8</p>	<p>Involvement of additional public and/or private research centres as home bases</p> <p>The core partners of the programme are German universities; they play a crucial part as employing host institutes for the fellows. They also highly benefit from the programme, as soon as they are fully integrated into it. However, a recommendation of the evaluators is to extend the core-group of universities. It would be the evaluators’ assumption that an increased number of available fellowships will automatically cause an increase in the number of participating German universities. This will be essential to manifest the employment model for postdoctoral outgoing mobility in the German research funding landscape. In addition; renowned non-university institutes such as Max Planck, Helmholtz or Leibniz institutes and applied research centres such as the Fraunhofer institutes (non-profit organisations of private law in the form of registered associations) could be included as home bases for research, if they agree to the P.R.I.M.E. standards (salary, social benefits etc.). It nevertheless needs to be carefully examined, particularly with regard to the effect this could have on the number of participating German universities (which constitute DAAD’s membership base).</p>
<p>9</p>	<p>Offering more guidance for the contact persons at the universities</p> <p>The evaluators see some room for improvement when it comes to the relationship between the DAAD and the contact persons at the universities. The evaluators recommend the DAAD to increase its support to host universities by i) guiding and supporting the daily work of the contact persons at the universities and ii) promoting and institutionalising the P.R.I.M.E. programme, e.g. through information seminars for contact persons at universities and useful information.</p>
<p>10</p>	<p>Involve former fellows in programme activities and encourage fellows to join existing networks</p> <p>The contacts established between fellows and their host institutes, mentors abroad and other researchers are perceived as a very rewarding part of the programme, and a reason for its success. The experiences made do not only refer to academic but also to personal relationships. The network between foreign institutes, fellows and German faculties can be perceived as a win-win situation for all and should be strengthened and</p>

	supported. Various alumni network opportunities are already in place (e.g. DAAD alumni network, Marie Curie Alumni Association), and former fellows should be encouraged to engage in networking beyond the group of P.R.I.M.E. fellows.
11	<p>Intersectoral mobility: support multiple career paths of equal value</p> <p>In order to bring an added-value in their proposal to MSCA, DAAD might consider including measures to enhance the aspect of intersectoral mobility. The absorptive capacities of academia are not unlimited. Thus, today's researchers have to be more innovative in transferring their highly-specialised knowledge from one discipline and from one sector to another. This implies that participating researchers should not limit their aspirations to the academic sphere. Career options for fellows should not be limited to becoming a university professor, but they should also consider career paths in the industry and society in a broader sense. The P.R.I.M.E programme could include this aspect, by providing specific support to the fellows in developing their practical skills, either through DAAD or through host universities. The new funding application should include detailed proposals to this effect.</p>
12	<p>Outreach: communicating the programme results to academia and society</p> <p>DAAD should design a system by which the results obtained by the P.R.I.M.E. programme can be communicated to the – specifically German – universities and to broader society. Apart from the obvious step of participating in activities like European Researchers' Night events, this should involve activities of the fellows in their re-integration phase, e.g. lectures to students of different levels at their employing universities. It would also be beneficial, if they presented the achievements and strengths of the German and European science and research system during their mobility phase abroad. In addition to individual fellows' activities in this area, DAAD should use its PR resources for press and other media dissemination. DAAD's extended international network would also allow to disseminate the programme results to other European countries and their higher education system. The new funding application should include detailed proposals to this effect.</p>
13	<p>Continuing to improve the programme administration</p> <p>The administration of public funds always involves a certain set of regulations and control mechanisms. This is generally accepted by all stakeholders, nevertheless, further improvement of the programme administration has been a request by various survey participants and interview partners. Room for improvement seems to exist in the programme management, both in the selection process (e.g. shortlist of documents for the committee members to review) and in the fellowship implementation (improving the guidance to mentors and stakeholders in host universities).</p>