

## Executive Summary

In April 2012, the DAAD (Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst - German Academic Exchange Service) commissioned the BEB (Institut für Bildung, Entwicklung und Beratung - Institute for Education, Development and Consulting) to evaluate the RISE professional program.

This executive summary provides a brief overview of the goals, methodology and the most important results of the evaluation.

### Background and goal of the evaluation

The RISE professional program was developed based on the experiences of the RISE program, which offers a stipend to North American undergraduate students. Within this framework, students can obtain an eight- to twelve-week research internship at a German university or a non-university research institution. In 2007, RISE pro was first introduced and since then, it is viewed as being a beneficial follow-up program to the RISE research internships. The goal of this program is to offer a meaningful follow-up program for RISE alumni and to expand the DAAD's range of programs by forming a business-oriented funding instrument. In this way, German companies can have privileged access to potential job candidates and this furthers support for the internationalization of research studies at an economic level.<sup>1</sup> Companies have the opportunity to gain intercultural experiences internally and, in the long run, to attract young North American professionals with strong qualifications.

In total, the DAAD supported 302 interns who participated in the RISE pro program between 2004 and 2011. In addition to the DAAD's funding support, another important element is the funding and placement support of the companies offering internships, without which the program would not be possible.

Forming a network between qualified young professionals as well as with companies and research groups is an important goal, not only for the BMBF, but also in terms of fostering foreign cultural relations and developing educational policy.<sup>2</sup> BMBF's financing of the program will expire at the end of 2013. From 2014 onward, the DAAD will ensure financing with funding from its regular program funds. Against this background, it seemed appropriate to evaluate the program in order to identify criteria that demonstrate not only the successful areas, but to also identify critical points.

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<sup>1</sup> cf. DAAD tender description regarding the RISE pro evaluation in March 2012

<sup>2</sup> cf. „Auswärtige Kulturpolitik – Konzeption 2000“. Department of State – Cultural Department. Berlin 2000

Therefore, the evaluation should analyze to what extent the interns have profited from their stay in Germany with regard to competency and language acquisition. Evidence should be provided concerning the sustainability of this program in terms of alumni retention to German companies as well as to Germany itself. In turn, this will help with predicting future program monitoring. Furthermore, the expansion of the program to other fields and subjects was analyzed. Lastly, this involves the added value of the program to the companies.

### **Methods and instruments used for the evaluation**

In order to determine to what extent RISE pro actually achieved their goals, data had to be collected. By interpreting this data, conclusions could be drawn concerning the effect of the program at the individual, organizational and institutional level.

Therefore, the complexity surrounding the subject of investigation required that a broad range of investigative methods be utilized. These methods included:

- using the DAAD's available documents and databases, e.g. statistics about companies, projects, vacancies, application procedures, alumni reports and surveys as well as surveys answered by the companies, application portal data and corresponding information on placement procedures
- conducting a survey of employees of the DAAD (Division 316)
- conducting numerous interviews with representatives of companies that offered internships
- conducting standardized alumni surveys on the conditions, activities and benefits of the program

RISE pro alumni were questioned via an online survey. Of the 260 alumni that were contacted via e-mail, 132 answered the survey (41.7% of the respondents were female; 58.3% were male). Of those who responded, 55.3% held a Master's degree, 29.5% held a Bachelor of Arts degree (BA) and 13.6% received their PhD. The average age was 27.1 years. The alumni's nationalities are reflective of the multicultural mix of North American society. Besides the North American and Canadian alumni, the number of Indian and Chinese graduates is particularly striking.

The assessments of the companies offering internships were obtained by interviews. Out of the 20 companies that were approached, 18 were willing to be interviewed. Analogous to the placement of the alumni in companies of varying sizes, mainly companies with more than 500 employees were questioned. Seven companies had less than 500 employees; a few had less than 50 employees.

The interviews conducted with the employees from the DAAD were structured according to guidelines.

The analysis of the documents is based on a systematic scheme of information within a previously defined range of statements.

The evaluation took place from April to August 2012.

### **Funding data**

Of the RISE pro alumni who completed the survey, 18.9% were also RISE alumni; this means that they had participated in the RISE program prior to participating in the RISE pro program. When taking into account that RISE pro was designed as an addition to the RISE program, this figure is relatively low. However, this also means that the RISE pro program is so attractive, that it is also of interest to those who have not previously studied in Germany. This shows that RISE pro could exist as a stand-alone program, independent of RISE, should there be any changes in the program or funding.

The average stay of the alumni is 17 weeks; the trend continues to increase. Only two alumni participated twice in the RISE pro program.

The program is becoming increasingly popular. The number of applicants is rising steadily. The number of newly acquired companies that are providing internships can barely cope with the demand. Thus, the gap between applicants and internship offers is becoming increasingly wider.

In addition to the administrative costs of the program, the DAAD also bears the costs of lump-sum payments for insurance benefits, language courses and additional internship-payment. Taking this into account, this is one of the lower-cost programs offered by the DAAD.

### **Initiation of the internship and level of motivation of the participants**

The first point of contact for obtaining information about RISE pro is via the internet portal which can be found on the DAAD's website. This site can be reached when performing a Google search. With the keyword search "internship in Germany", RISE pro is listed in sixth place.

The interviewed RISE pro participants were satisfied with the process and transparency of the application procedure. The company information found on the portal was rated as both very good and good. The DAAD received top marks from alumni for the overall consulting services with regard to competency and accessibility. The annual intern meeting which is held by the DAAD was rated very positively.

The only weakness – and this is the view of just a few companies – is the application portal. According to the companies, the portal does not have enough space for the presentation of research projects and there is little time flexibility. Since some research projects come up on short notice, they could not be taken into consideration. Furthermore, some companies are not aware of the fact that by specifying a timeframe for an internship, potential applicants could be excluded from the very beginning since some students still have to attend university. That is why attractive internship offers remain unused time and time again.

It is also time-consuming to provide support to the interns for house-hunting and visa issues. Many companies are overburdened with these matters; alumni complain about the lack of support. In some large companies, the level of cooperation between the Human Resources Department and the internship supervisor was not transparent.

Apparently, RISE pro participants arrive in Germany with high expectations; 87.1% want to gain international experience while 78% would like to obtain professional experience. In third place is the desire for German experience. The desire for continuing education lags somewhat behind (56.1%). For 92% of the interviewed alumni, the topic of the project was the determining factor in selecting a company and this corresponds to the previously mentioned statement.

The companies stated that they want to sharpen their international profile by participating in the RISE pro program. In addition to that, they wanted to obtain experience with North American work and research practices. Lastly, in the long-term, they wanted to acquire young professionals with strong skills. According to what some smaller companies have stated, they in particular have not had much of a chance competing in the international labor market. RISE pro is a deciding factor for opening doors.

### **Course of the internship**

Companies assessed the intern's theoretical and scientific level as well as the mastery of research methods as being consistently high. Additionally, the scientific/technical background is said to be very current and state of the art. Generally, integrating the interns in their companies worked out slightly better for smaller companies. For the companies, the primary benefits were work support as well as cultural exchange.

Interns rated their stay at German companies in a similarly positive way. Their integration in the companies and their level of acceptance by other colleagues received top marks. 109 interviewees assessed their newly gained competencies as either very high or high, although 21 were not that satisfied. Reasons for these issues – as best can be determined – were the lack of support on the part

of their internship supervisor, the insignificance of the work assigned or the difference between the descriptions of the project listed in the portal and the actual work assignment.

Every intern observed an increase in their knowledge of German which was existent even after returning home.

The alumni's cultural experience was very positive. The internship in Germany had encouraged them to be more secure within an international environment, to open-up their minds to other cultures and to intensify their closeness to German culture. The interns were less successful in establishing contacts to Germans.

### The interns' whereabouts and their bond to Germany

More than half of the currently employed RISE pro alumni work in a research institute, while 43% work in private industry. 70.5% stated that they can apply the skills they acquired during their RISE pro internship in their current job. About 80% stated that the internship made their start in professional life easier and helped advance their career opportunities. Only a few (21.7%) can apply their German knowledge to their current working environment.

Even though only a small number of interns remains in regular contact with Germans, it is nevertheless remarkable that 7.8% currently live and work in Germany. That also coincides with the statements of some companies who have offered their interns employment or the possibility of doing their PhD at the end of the internship. Currently, 37.2% are considering graduate or post-graduate study in Germany. However, in the open answer section of the evaluation, the alumni stated that they do not have enough information on how to realize these plans.

### Results and effects

The very positive effect of RISE pro on the alumni's individual development is summarized quite clearly in the following figure:

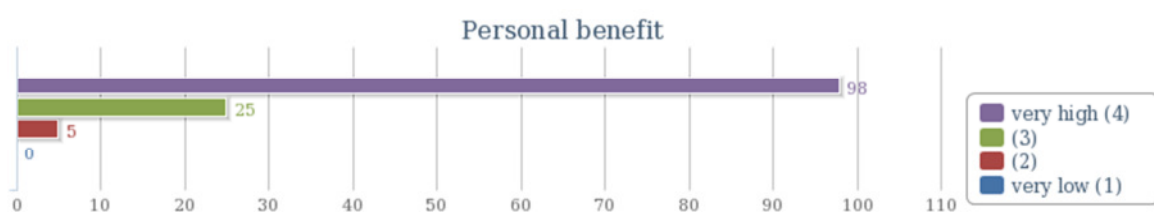


Figure 48: Personal benefit of the RISE pro internship – alumni evaluation

The diagram shows that 123 out of 134 alumni rated the benefit of the internship as either very high or high.

Therefore, an internship in Germany is of great personal benefit to the RISE pro alumni. For the majority of RISE pro alumni, both the professional and cultural levels were ranked pleasingly high. The main reasons for participating in the RISE pro program – namely, strengthening the academic profile, getting to know Germany and gaining international experience - were rated as thoroughly satisfactory in the final assessment.

At the same time, if general satisfaction means that at least a certain openness exists for a continued relationship to Germany, then the RISE pro program will have attained one important goal.

Another criterion for success is matching the research project to the applicant's profile. Both sides – the company and the applicant – stated that they are generally satisfied. If the portal was designed with more flexibility, then an even higher placement rating would be likely. In addition to that, more fields of study and new region locations could lead to more participation on both sides.

Likewise, the companies draw a similar, positive conclusion. The expectations for RISE pro participation which included the internationalization of the company, the long-term acquisition of young professionals and obtaining insight into North American work and research practices were largely achieved. It is not expected that every intern will be a promising future employee. However, in some cases, interns acquired a PhD or continued working as a regular employee after their internship.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the RISE pro program can be viewed as being highly efficient with regard to funding, benefits and, respectively, impact. With relatively little expense, the program contributes substantially towards improving the attractiveness of Germany as a research and study location amongst North American students and doctoral candidates. It creates an effective interface between the DAAD and its manifold programs and German research companies. Both sides gain experience and expand their networks. Both sides are interested in developing a long-term cooperation. As measured by their reasons for participating, alumni find the program very satisfying. This applies equally to the companies.