

Executive Summary

Subject of evaluation and method

The Georg Forster Research Fellowship Programme (GF Programme) was established in 1997 to improve the competitive chances of researchers from developing and transition countries with above-average qualifications. It was deemed necessary because the Humboldt Research Fellowships offered on a competitive basis worldwide were not always able to take sufficient account of the particular needs and difficulties facing researchers from developing and transition countries. The programme is financed by the Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) which had previously funded extended stays for researchers from developing and transition countries in the context of Humboldt Research Fellowships. The GF Programme is essentially based on the established Humboldt Research Fellowship Programme which promotes excellent researchers across the globe, irrespective of discipline, in individually tailored sponsorship programmes. The financial provisions are in line with the high level of the Humboldt Research Fellowship Programme. Just like all other Humboldtians, Forster Fellows are also eligible for other additional items of funding (travel expenses, allowance for research costs, etc.). As is the case with traditional Humboldt Research Fellowships, applicants for Forster Fellowships submit their own research proposals to be conducted independently at a German host institution. This is designed to generate knowledge circulation and the development of long-term research collaborations. Furthermore, alumni have unrestricted access to the international Humboldt Network and local alumni associations. Thus taken together, this constitutes a package of measures in accordance with the specifications of the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation which go well beyond the standard fellowships granted in Germany, facilitate integration into the 'Humboldt Family' and guarantee the researchers sponsored a continuous research and learning environment.

The GF Programme is largely based on the guidelines for sponsoring excellence pertaining to the Humboldt Research Fellowship Programme, but it does include an additional component specifically designed to promote development in higher education. The linkage between promoting excellence and promoting development is expressed in five programme objectives and two overarching objectives:

Overarching objectives

Overarching objective 1: *To provide support for the establishment and development of competitive science systems in developing and transition countries in order for them to find their own solutions and develop their own structures for regional and national development issues (such as achieving the Millennium Development Goals).*

Overarching objective 2: *To contribute to generating knowledge of relevance to development as well as to the mutual transfer of globally-available knowledge and methods for the purpose of developing sustainable solutions to global challenges.*

Programme objectives

Programme objective 1: *To select and sponsor highly-qualified researchers from developing and transition countries who wish to undertake research projects of relevance to development in Germany.*

Programme objective 2: *To promote highly-qualified academics to remain in developing and transition countries on a long-term basis.*

Programme objective 3: *To support qualified researchers in developing and transition countries in their role as important actors in the reform of academia, business, politics and society.*

Programme objective 4: *To integrate researchers from developing and transition countries in academic networks with the aim of promoting research collaborations.*

Programme objective 5: *To develop personal bonds, share knowledge on the respective knowledge systems and dismantle prejudice in the interests of scientific dialogue.*

Thus in the context of research promotion in the field of development policy, the GF Programme enjoys a special status because it is explicitly directed towards strengthening the tertiary sector. Against the backdrop of the transition to knowledge societies, higher education – in addition to the promotion of primary and secondary education – plays a crucial role in reducing disparities in development.

The current evaluation examines the extent to which the objectives have been achieved in relation to the five DAC criteria (relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability) in the framework of an impact analysis. It covers the entire duration of the programme with the exception only of those fellows whose initial sponsorship had not been completed at the time of the evaluation. For this purpose, a triangulation of quantitative methods (evaluation of the GF database, electronic survey of Forster Fellows) and qualitative methods (intensive interviews with fellows, hosts, colleagues, students and programme managers) was used.

Results

The **most important results** pertaining to the achievement of objectives based on DAC criteria can be summarised as follows:

1. Relevance

The GF Programme, which seeks to promote individual excellence, makes a significant contribution to the promotion of education in the context of development policy by providing fellowships for excellent academics from developing and transition countries, facilitating the target group's access to further academic training and international networking, and supporting the sponsored academics in their role as change agents in academia, business, politics and society. 'Agents of change', in this understanding, refers to highly-qualified academics from developing and transition countries whose research and teaching generate knowledge of relevance to development and whose international connections contribute to increased knowledge circulation. Forster Fellows are outstandingly qualified, which is not only demonstrated by their professional success but also by their exemplary engagement with research and teaching as well as their willingness to take on leadership positions in the university sector. Forster Fellows thus become academic change agents who (indirectly) help to promote the science systems in developing and transition countries and, by extension, their innovative capacity and competitiveness. The Foundation's selection procedure is based on a broad definition of development that is not narrowly focussed on certain academic disciplines. Nevertheless, natural scientists prevail over humanities scholars, social scientists and engineering scientists. Given that in knowledge societies innovative ability and problem solving capacity can be promoted in very different ways, this openness is, however, a positive feature. With regard to the fellows' countries of origin, the GF community

comprises a wide variety of countries with very diverse levels of development and science systems. So far, there has been no apparent concentration on any particular group of countries. In order to make the programme even more relevant, it would be possible to increase the volume of funding and the number of fellowships, on the one hand, and consider whether GF Programme activities should target particular countries or groups of countries on the other (cf. also Recommendations).

2. Effectiveness

In terms of achieving its objectives the GF Programme is, therefore, very effective, but the impact on development could be optimised. The programme promotes top researchers from developing and transition countries who utilise the fellowship profitably both to drive their academic careers and to contribute to the global circulation of knowledge as well as to academic networking. In addition to methodological expertise, intercultural competence is also promoted with a view to creating the basis for long-term bonds with Germany as a research location. This is reflected in the fellows' differentiated picture of Germany: apart from occasional discrimination, they report on very positive experiences. By far the majority of Forster alumni have very few problems in reintegrating in the university system or employment market in their own countries after their research stay and are able to continue their academic or professional careers successfully. The positive impact of the fellowship is particularly apparent in joint publications and research projects as well as lively exchange at academic and student level. The impact of the programme goes beyond the **individual level** to include **the institutional level**, too: the boost in internationalisation associated with the sponsorship helps strengthen university systems because, in the global knowledge society, networks play a central role in knowledge circulation and in the acquisition of research funding. First-class, internationally-visible research and dedicated teaching also enhance the innovative capacity and competitiveness of science systems in the fellows' own countries. Forster Fellows' enormous engagement is also expressed in their willingness to take on leadership positions at their universities. Thanks to their outstanding performance in research and teaching, Forster alumni are thus important change agents in the university sector. Given that fellows are spread around many different locations, however, there is often not enough critical mass to continue reform processes. Whilst the programme's commitment to excellence is being implemented in an exemplary fashion, the development impact could be strengthened if the selection procedure were not solely based on the developmental relevance of the research project, but also took greater account of additional aspects of the applicants' commitment to development (cf. Recommendations). Engagement by Forster alumni outside the university context and involvement in development consultancy activities tend to be the exception, and there is little contact to local development cooperation institutions. On this point, there is potential to improve the programme.

The data collected also indicates that the migration rate amongst alumni is higher than it was in the survey conducted amongst alumni on the 10th anniversary of the programme in 2007. 17 percent of those surveyed were no longer employed in their countries of origin at the time of the survey. Given the growing mobility of academics worldwide, the figures are not alarming, but it would be advisable to examine the tools currently used as incentives to remain in their own countries on a permanent basis (cf. Recommendations).

3. Efficiency

The amount of resources used for the programme is appropriate for achieving its objectives. If one compares the average costs of a Forster Fellowship with the personnel costs of an academic position in

Germany (W2 professorship), they are relatively moderate. The programme's long-term, positive impact in the form of jointly acquired third-party funding and internationally visible publications also witnesses the high efficiency of the programme that continues to be effective well beyond the designated sponsorship period.

4. Impact on development policy

In the international competition between knowledge societies, in which developing and transition countries are also involved, academics are important drivers. Thus, in the long run, innovations in the tertiary education sector, in particular, are an important precondition for achieving general development policy objectives. The impact of the GF Programme can be observed on three levels: that of the individual, the institutional and of society as a whole, whereby an attribution gap exists between the institutional and the superordinate level. On the level of the individual, the programme contributes to knowledge circulation and international networking by providing training and continuing education for outstanding academics from developing and transition countries. Over and above strengthening academic and intercultural expertise, the programme promotes development by helping to improve research and teaching with the aim of strengthening the university systems in the fellows' own countries. In the modern knowledge society, research and teaching are a vital prerequisite for economic and social innovation and development. In order to achieve a more far-reaching impact, research needs to be related to applications, i.e. geared towards addressing essential economic, political and social issues. A focus on the application potential of research presupposes that academics engage with society. In this context, a more precise definition of the concept 'change agent' could help to optimise the programme's direction with regard to development policy.

5. Sustainability

The positive impact of the GF Programme is sustainable: Forster alumni develop long-term bonds with Germany as a research location, research collaborations are fostered on a longer-term basis and contacts become ever more international. The Humboldt Network is but one of many options in this meshwork of connections, which is used more or less intensively depending on the fellows' interests. In most cases, however, even if they are less actively involved in the network, fellows feel a long-term attachment to the Humboldt Family.

Recommendations

1. Overall, in terms of a research fellowship programme targeting developing and transition countries, the Humboldt Foundation's GF Programme can be described as very successful. The Foundation has managed to sponsor researchers who draw major academic benefits from the stay in Germany, go on to pursue impressive academic careers and largely conduct research of relevance to development. This success is reflected to different degrees on all levels – individual, institutional and in relation to the target countries. Hence it is recommended to continue and extend the programme.
2. Despite the fundamentally positive result, a conflict of objectives can be identified in the GF Programme between the promotion of particularly gifted individuals and objectives of a rather more development policy-related nature, which seek to encourage institutional

changes in the university sector and structural changes in the respective countries. The promotion of excellent academics in developing and transition countries is the basis for strengthening research and teaching as well as – indirectly – for improving these countries' competitiveness and innovative capacity. However, the promotion of particularly gifted individuals in the GF Programme should, wherever possible, have an impact on development, even if this only occurs at a later stage.

3. On the Foundation's list of objectives, there is talk of 'change agents' who are supposed to contribute to a structural change in their home countries, not only in the university sector (in research and teaching), but also in business, politics and society. As the alumni surveyed thought it was important to engage in their countries' development, the Humboldt Foundation should offer special sponsorship opportunities to encourage this basic willingness.
4. The work of the selection committee could be facilitated by giving more consideration to objectives and implementation. It is recommended to measure relevance to development by using the existing tools more effectively and by extending them. In particular, question 16 on the application questionnaire, which examines the applicant's commitment to development, should be made more relevant.
5. The spectrum of developing and transition countries is very broad whilst resources are restricted. Because there is not enough critical mass of fellowships in each individual country to have a significant structural impact, it should be discussed whether the number of research fellowships should be augmented by increasing the volume of funding or, alternatively, whether there should be a greater bundling and concentration on specific target countries. In the latter case, agreement should be reached on a list of target countries – poor developing countries, which are seriously lagging behind, partner countries in development cooperation or, rather, countries that are pursuing an active higher education and research policy.

In the selection process, more attention should be paid to relevance to development as a criterion for inclusion with regard to the following aspects:

- a) Is there a recognisable, active interest on the part of applicants to get involved in issues of relevance to development in their own countries?
 - b.) Do applicants display a willingness to engage with social policy issues (consultancy activities, participation in civil society organisations and initiatives, media presence)?
6. By improving the coordination of funding policy, for example with the DAAD and GIZ in Germany, or by cooperating with other donor countries, it would be possible to drive synergies, enhance coherence and strengthen the structural components of GF sponsorship.
 7. Alumni associations could be used to a greater extent to address and implement development policy objectives. In concrete terms, this could mean alumni associations receiving financial and other incentives from the Humboldt Foundation to implement one or more research

projects involving several Humboldtians, which are of relevance to development and are related to development policy. This is already happening to some extent at Humboldt Kollegs, but efforts should be made to ensure that the character of an exclusive club that still tends to cling to some of the associations is converted into one that embraces society more readily. In general, the associations' existing potential should be utilised in this context, rather than introducing a too visible steering element on the part of the Foundation, in order not to undermine the well-established notion of ownership.

- 8.** One of the ways in which the multiplier impact is generated is teaching. Current requirement and selection profiles are strongly focussed on fellows' research and publication performance and ignore the crucial importance of teaching. Providing opportunities for young academics to continue their education in their own countries should be understood to a greater degree than it has so far as important engagement with development policy.
- 9.** At 22 percent, the proportion of women in the Georg Forster Programme is below that in the Humboldt Research Fellowship Programme. In order to increase the percentage of women, an active recruitment policy is required, tailored to the specific needs of women in academia, such as measures designed to harmonise gainful employment and homemaking. If Germany wants to remain competitive as a research location in the long run and recruit excellent female researchers, it would be expedient not only to provide more flexible child care options but also to develop adequate dual career policies. However, this cannot be the sole responsibility of the Humboldt Foundation; it requires support from the relevant ministries.
- 10.** The fact that 17 percent of those surveyed were not working in their own countries when the survey was conducted is not particularly alarming, given the growing mobility of academics worldwide. In this context, however, the question does arise as to whether the tools used to avoid this brain drain could be optimised and, in particular, the number of Return Fellowships for young academics at the beginning of their careers could be increased.
- 11.** In order to enhance the appeal of the research fellowship yet further and guarantee the continuity of joint research projects, it should also be considered whether the intervals between re-invitations should be made more flexible.
- 12.** The data base of former fellows should urgently be extended to record data on engagement with development more systematically than has been the case so far. Apart from information on university leadership positions, membership in civil society organisations, political offices and consultancy activities for governmental agencies, NGOs and international organisations should be included. These changes could be used to facilitate Foundation-wide monitoring of fellows' careers.