

DW Akademie's Masters Program in International Media Studies (M.A.)

External Evaluation Report | Executive Summary

12/2017



Background

The IMS M.A. program was founded in response to a **need for internationally trained journalists and media professionals who are equipped to adapt to a rapidly changing media landscape** where new challenges are emerging which affect media freedoms and access to information.

The program is a two year M.A. which has an **annual intake of approximately 30 students representing over 24 countries** with a focus on developing and emerging economies and is a tripartite agreement between DW Akademie, Hochschule Bonn-Rhein-Sieg (HBRS) and University of Bonn. The intake is generally divided in three with a third of the students being full-scholarship holders (exempted from paying the study fees and recipients of living costs); a third of the students are partially funded by remission of the study fees; and the remaining third are self-paying students. All students have professional work experience, within the media field, prior to joining the course. At the end of the first year all students successfully completing the first two semesters are awarded the title 'International Journalist'. The students that pass their exams and progress

into the second year go on to attain the M.A. In **2017 a new refugee component** has been added to the program where **five partial scholarships** have been awarded to five people with official refugee status in Germany.

The goal of DW Akademie **"to train students to be 'International Journalists' that are empowered to strengthen the role of independent media in democratic processes and to initiate reform processes"** is the subject of this evaluation. The BMZ funded 'International Journalist' project proposal (2015–2017) is the basis for evaluating the program and has been expanded to include all students regardless of funding.

The objective of this external evaluation is to provide a constructive assessment of the project results after the completion of the funding phase. The recommendations made at the end were put together by an external consultant. They do not necessarily align with the perspective and planning of the project team. Nevertheless, all suggestions were discussed in order to allow lessons learned to be incorporated into the development of future strategies.

Evaluation methodology

This external evaluation adopted a **participatory approach** using a mixture of qualitative and quantitative research approaches enabling cross verification of the results. These included face-to-face interviews, surveys, telephone interviews, a workshop and document analysis. 'Key Questions' were identified based on the OECD's DAC Criteria for Evaluating Development Assistance: Relevance, Effectiveness, Impact, and Sustainability. Quality of Management was also added to appraise the cooperation and learning and innovation components of the project. In total, 23 students and three recent graduates, ten alumni, five employers, two mentors and two mentees, two external professors and three faculty staff were interviewed. 42 current students fully completed the online survey questionnaire and the results from 53 alumni of a survey ran by the faculty in December 2016 have also been utilized.

Conclusions

The IMS M.A. addresses DW Akademie's key strategic action areas of 'Qualification' and 'Participation in society' in its endeavor to produce highly qualified, ethical and competent graduates and its recent earmarking of place for refugees, respectively. The **human rights based approach** is fully integrated into the project not only through the curriculum but also in interactions with the students. The IMS program strives to introduce cutting edge technologies to the students through media practice ensuring students have the flexibility to work within the realms of a rapidly changing technological landscape in a digital world and thus meeting the cross-cutting theme of 'Digital Transformation'. Both the students and graduates interviewed highlighted that the program offers an unparalleled and unique opportunity to study an academic course within a broadcasting house and to gain a strong grounding in media ethics, media development and media management in an international sphere. This therefore confirms the **relevance** of the program for the students, graduates and strategically for DW Akademie.

The program has a high success rate with an **overall graduation rate** from 2009 to 2013 (137 students) of **80 percent** with the majority of students saying the course meets their expectations. The course provides exposure to the German

media environment through visits to a variety of media outlets, input from guest lectures and excursions to conferences. The students find that the course provides a varied learning environment where they have the chance to take part in academic research, occasionally summer schools, and a comprehensive and holistic account of the international media discipline is provided. However, students would like to have both more practical elements and for them to be more integrated and aligned to the theoretical modules. Administration and specifically communication were highlighted by both students and alumni as areas that could be streamlined to provide some more clarity and easier access to information. **In this case the DAC criterion Effectiveness is considered generally fulfilled.**

95 percent of alumni agreed that the course provided them with broader knowledge on the importance of freedom of opinion and information. Meanwhile, 65 percent of full-scholarship holder alumni surveyed are back in their home countries and 93 percent of alumni stated that they had worked for or in their home countries since graduating from the program. 48 percent of alumni and 15 percent of students are involved in extracurricular/professional activities in this arena. From discussions with alumni it became clear that even though some students are committed to the tenets of media development that working on these issues overtly in their home contexts is not easy or in some cases safe. Those interviewed also said that they feel that these principles are part of their journalistic approach, that they project these sentiments in their daily lives and are trying to do what they can to promote good practice. **Based on these findings the DAC criterion Impact is judged as generally fulfilled.**

The faculty has an established practice of seeking feedback from students and alumni and is committed to responding to the needs and interests of the students. Both students and alumni emphasized that staff members were open, friendly, and supportive. A mentoring program was piloted in 2016, but participation was low and the three recent graduates who participated did not find the support they wanted. Meanwhile, the lack of a formal IMS alumni network means that graduates are not connected and although they are proud of the program and keen to still be involved or promote it, they have no official channels to do so. **Therefore, the DAC criterion Sustainability is judged as partially fulfilled.**

DW Akademie

DW Akademie is Germany's leading organization for media development and Deutsche Welle's center of excellence for education and knowledge transfer. As a strategic partner of Germany's Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development we strengthen the universal human rights of free expression, education, and access to information.

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