DAAD

“I want to use this opportunity”: the “Leadership for Syria” scholarship programme



A new start: Khaled Shaheen at Mannheim University of Applied Sciences

For Alaa Kanaieh and Khaled Shaheen, the current winter semester is something very special. The two Syrian students have been granted scholarships within the DAAD’s “Leadership for Syria” programme. In the light of the war and terror, Kanaieh and Shaheen now wish to use their studies in Germany to enable them one day to contribute to creating a better future.

Khaled Shaheen has just come from the laboratory. He now has time to talk about the Bachelor’s degree in biotechnology he is completing at Mannheim University of Applied Sciences. He has a physics lecture to attend after the lunch break. “It’s a lot of work,” says Shaheen with a smile. “I am very lucky to be able to study in Germany. This was no longer possible in my home country Syria because of the war.” When Khaled Shaheen left school in his home town of Daraa with top marks in his higher education entrance qualification, university studies were out of the question in a country devastated by terror and war. Shaheen was able to flee to Jordan where his parents still live today. He was selected for the “Leadership for Syria” scholarship programme set up by the DAAD and funded by the Federal Foreign Office (AA). “I want to use this opportunity,” says Khaled Shaheen, who recently celebrated his twentieth birthday. He wants to take responsibility. And he wants to make use of the perspectives that the DAAD’s scholarship programme opens up to him in his home country.

“Syria runs the risk of losing an entire generation of academics, professionals and leaders,” says DAAD President Prof. Margret Wintermantel. “Precisely these individuals will however be urgently needed by the country for reconstruction when the war ends. The “Leadership for Syria” programme specifically targets these persons. Out of the large number of applicants, we selected those who we believe will be in a position to address future challenges by studying in Germany.”

Intensive language course in Marburg

This concept also convinced the Federal State of North Rhine-Westphalia: it is providing a further 21 scholarships in addition to the 200 funded by the Federal Foreign Office. The 221 scholarship holders were selected from over 5,000 applications in an extremely complex process focussing on academic achievements and personality. In March, selection interviews in Beirut, Erbil, Istanbul, Cairo, Amman and Bonn were held by an expert commission comprising professors from German universities. All scholarship holders then had to take a language course in Marburg. Divided into 15 learning groups, they completed a four-month intensive German language course: from elementary language use to independent communication. The DAAD helped scholarship holders to choose a suitable university and continues to provide support. Khaled Shaheen turned to his contacts at the DAAD for advice on a number of issues for example. “They were able to explain several things to me and I feel even better prepared for my studies now,” he said, answering the question about the ongoing exchange with the DAAD – as he did all the other questions – in German.

Vera Usoltseva was also extremely impressed with the scholarship holders in the “Leadership for Syria” programme. “I found my students to be very sincere, intelligent and grateful,” Usoltseva says. She is a member of the teaching team at the language school in Marburg where the four-month language course for the DAAD took place. The scholarship holders also expressed their gratitude and happiness to learn at the end of the course with a creative performance by a quickly assembled band and choir. Vera Usoltseva said of her students that she could “very well imagine them one day contributing to the reconstruction of Syria”.

More than a good degree

Beside the already completed language course, the DAAD also offers the scholarship holders an additional obligatory programme in the fields of good governance, civil society and sustainable project management. “During the selection interviews, we focused on the question of what personal contribution the individual scholarship holders can make to the reconstruction of Syria,” says Inka Löck, who is the Team Leader coordinating the scholarship programme at the DAAD. “It became clear just how much the scholarship holders identified with this objective: they did not choose their degree subjects according to the subsequent career opportunities in Germany, but according to what they hope one day to be able to use particularly well in Syria.”



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Alaa Kanaieh in Marburg: “We want to work on our country’s future.”

This is also important to Alaa Kanaieh. The 27-year-old previously worked for a telecommunications company in Syria after completing her Bachelor’s degree in computer science at the Arab International University. She now has the opportunity to complete a Master’s degree in software systems engineering at the RWTH Aachen. “I hope to be able to work as an IT project manager in Syria one day,” the young woman says. “The RWTH Aachen has an excellent reputation – I want to prove myself here.” Alaa Kanaieh’s ambition is not only limited to obtaining a good degree and gaining a better understanding of technical processes and programming. The scholarship holder also wants to encourage more young women to study IT, and was initially surprised that this is something still relevant in Germany as well. A few days ago, she linked up with a volunteer project that supports refugees: she wants to help other people. “Obtaining a Master’s degree or getting a good job at a company later on is also important to be able to help other people,” says Alaa Kanaieh. “It is about making the best of our situation and the opportunities offered by our scholarship programme. We strive to be leaders for Syria and to work on our country’s future – from inside or outside Syria.”

Conference at the Federal Foreign Office

Today, over 200 scholarship holders in the “Leadership for Syria” programme as well as the Syrian scholarship holders funded by the state of Baden-Württemberg will meet for a conference at the Federal Foreign Office in Berlin. The scholarship holders will be welcomed by Federal Foreign Minister Dr. Frank-Walter Steinmeier. DAAD President Prof. Margret Wintermantel will participate in the panel discussion entitled “No lost generation in Syria – integration, prospects, zero hour” together with Svenja Schulze (Minister of Innovation, Science and Research, North Rhine-Westphalia) and Dr. Simone Schwanitz (Director of the Ministry of Science, Research and the Arts, Baden-Württemberg).

Johannes Göbel (24 November 2015)

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Press release: Creating perspectives through education [https://www.daad.de/presse/pressemitteilungen/de/39937-mit-bildung-perspektiven-schaffen/]

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