



HHU President, Professor Anja Steinbeck, together with scholarship holders – she is also a supporter.

PHOTOS: HHU/IVO MAYK

# An investment in the future

## Two donors report on their experiences with the German National Scholarship

In Germany, many people believe that university education is financed by citizens via taxes and that no-one therefore needs to start their career with debts. Nevertheless, additional financial and non-material support can enable periods of study to be shortened, make part-time jobs unnecessary and help students get ahead.

In 2009, the state of North Rhine-Westphalia (NRW) initiated a funding model for high-performing students that was then taken over by the Federal Government in 2011 and continued as the “German National Scholarship”. Professor Hannelore Riesner has been involved right from the outset. Back in 2009, she recognised the potential of the scholarship programme, found supporters at Heinrich Heine University Düsseldorf, donated funding herself and brought in further

donors. All this has made the »Seizing Opportunities« German National Scholarship programme a highly successful format at HHU: In 2021 we awarded more scholarships than any other university in NRW!

For anyone who has ever thought about supporting the next generation of academics, the advantages of the German National Scholarship are obvious: Students receive the full amount of money donated without any deductions or administrative fees. Support does not remain anonymous: You get to meet the young people you support and other donors personally at attractive academic and social events, and have the opportunity to participate in the diversity of university life. These encounters facilitate dialogue, strengthen intergenerational relationships and enable you to “give something back” to your alma mater.



HHU hosts events to enable personal contacts to be made.

**HHU ALUMNI** Professor Riesner, you established the »Seizing Opportunities« German National Scholarship programme at HHU and have played a key role in its success. What do you like about the programme?

**Riesner** I have always particularly liked the fact that the »Seizing Opportunities« programme is also attractive to those who can only donate small amounts – you only need to donate €150 per month to provide a scholarship; this amount is then doubled to €300 by the Federal Government and is fully tax-deductible. »Seizing Opportunities« is a face-to-face format and I really value the personal aspect and the events. I am also proud and delighted that here at HHU we currently award more German National Scholarships than any other university in NRW – which is incidentally an important factor in making a university attractive to good students internationally!

**HHU ALUMNI** Ms Walther, as a young woman, you aren't the kind of person many would consider a "traditional supporter". What made you decide to donate a scholarship at HHU?

**Walther** HHU provided me with the foundation for my career and I will always look back with gratitude for that. The "Anglo-Saxon" tradition of giving something back to your "alma mater" in the form of donations after successfully completing your studies and starting your career is something I know from my husband, who studied at the WWU University of Münster. That inspired me.

**HHU ALUMNI** You initially provided financial support for a project at Düsseldorf University Hospital?

**Walther** Yes, during my pregnancy I found out about the teddy bear clinic project at the hospital. I was already familiar with the fears of young patients from the time I spent working in hospitals, so I thought this playful approach tailored to children was a great idea.

**Riesner** How did you become aware of the »Seizing Opportunities« German National Scholarship programme at HHU, Ms Walther?

**Walther** An acquaintance, who is a member of the "Düsseldorfer Jonges" organisation and also involved in other civic engagement activities in Düsseldorf, told me about it. When considering a suitable project to fund, I decided that getting involved in the German National Scholarship would be appropriate.

**Riesner** As a professor and as a business-oriented person, I know how important well-educated young people are. The »Seizing Opportunities« German National Scholarship programme at HHU supports high-performing students, giving cause for hope that they will develop into dedicated and responsible individuals in the practice of their professions in the future. Donating companies or individuals have the opportunity to enjoy direct contact with our talented young academics – for example at our scholarship ceremony for donors and scholarship holders. Here, every scholarship has a face – you can meet people in person and benefit from each other.

“It would be great to see a noteworthy number of alumni supporting HHU through donations.”

Daria Walther – doctor



PHOTO CHRISTOPH KAWAN/HHU

### Daria Walther

Daria Walther is a doctor. She is married and has a daughter. She grew up in Düsseldorf and chose to study at HHU because the Faculty of Medicine enjoys a good reputation. She travelled further afield to complete her

specialist training but then returned to Düsseldorf as a registered specialist doctor.

“The interdisciplinary, intergenerational exchange between scholarship holders and donors is a special feature.”

Hannelore Riesner – HHU professor

**HHU ALUMNI** Is this personal aspect also important to you as a donor, Ms Walther?

**Walther** I agree with Professor Riesner. Personally, I don't think the quality of the exchange is dependent on knowing exactly which donor has supported which student, but on the other hand, it is also very good to know exactly who you are supporting.

**Riesner** Any preferences the donor states with regard to the specialist field of the student are taken into account as far as possible. I always find the contact with “my” students very enriching! In addition to the scholarship award ceremony, HHU has also hosted other events for scholarship holders and supporters in the past such as symposia at which projects from all specialist fields were presented and discussed, events at the companies of donors and even cultural events such as visits to the opera. We are now intending to continue this tradition and I find this non-material support very important. It represents an excellent opportunity for students to establish networks and make contacts before starting their careers.

**Walther** I experienced a really enjoyable and interesting exchange with “my” scholarship holder – a medical student – and several of her fellow students at the highly successful scholarship ceremony at the theatre in Düsseldorf. In addition to specialist topics and discussions about the future and goals, it was also interesting for me to hear about what student life is like now.

**HHU ALUMNI** The German National Scholarship supports high-performing students from all subjects and faculties. In addition, there are also special quotas.

**Riesner** The majority of our almost 500 scholarships go to young people with outstanding school and university grades. However, I believe we should also encourage young people and not just make demands on them: As we want to create optimum study conditions for everyone at HHU, in the last few years we have also taken personal circum-

## Prof Hannelore Riesner



PHOTO IVO MAYR/HHU

Hannelore Riesner is Professor of Public Health at the HHU Faculty of Medicine, focusing on the areas of sports medicine and training science. After completing her biology degree with a major in biochemistry, she went on to study theoretical medicine before completing her doctorate (*Dr. rer. nat.*) at the University of Halle and gaining her habilitation in sports biology and training science at the University of Bonn. Amongst other things, she has held a guest professorship at the University of Graz and was Director of the Trainer Academy in Cologne. Professor Riesner is a scholarship ambassador and Chair of the Advisory Board for University Funding at HHU. She is married and has two grown-up children.

stances that result in additional burdens into account in the selection process: That's why scholarship holders also include student mothers and fathers, and talents from non-academic families.

**Walther** The concept of the German National Scholarship has won me over. I am happy to continue my support and in so doing, make a personal contribution to a good cause.

**Riesner** Super – that's a great decision!

**Walther** I hope that you and HHU can win over many more supporters, including alumni.

**Riesner** Perhaps you have just inspired one or two alumni, Ms Walther! I call upon all university alumni: Donate a scholarship and become one of our supporters!



PHOTO CHRISTOPH KAWAN/HHU

**ARE YOU INTERESTED IN DONATING?**

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