

RDF-RWG - PFAU-Program for the financial support of start-ups from Universities in North Rhine-Westphalia (NRW)

In the modernisation of any economy small and medium-sized technology-based and know-how-based enterprises have particular importance. The promotion of start-up activities from universities and R&D institutes is an instrument that speeds up technology transfer from the scientific to the business community. The main promotion goal is to develop innovative products, processes and service ideas into a marketable product or service by using existing state-of-the-art facilities at the universities and R&D centers (laboratories, equipment, and ICT infrastructure). The PFAU-Program for the financial support of start-ups from Universities in North Rhine-Westphalia targets graduates from universities and researchers whose last university degree (diploma or PhD) was completed at the latest three years prior to application. With a population of 18.1 million inhabitants and a labor market of 8.3 million employees, the North-Rhine Westphalia enjoys an excellent R&D infrastructure consisting of 63 technology parks and centers, 59 universities and technical colleges, 55 research institutes and 31 technology transfer agencies. However, the problem there is that a very small number of innovative firms are launched every year and less than 0.5% of all university graduates set-up a business on their own.

Subsequently, the promotional measures are expected to motivate graduates (up to three years after graduation or PhD) to consider starting a business on their own as a serious option (besides academic career or working in a firm). These measures, together with the great achievements of new technology and university research, triggered the state interest to invest in coupling scientific knowledge from university research with marketable products. This will help to develop innovative ideas into full valued products and processes by using state-of-the-art infrastructure and facilities at the universities and R&D centers. Other goals are related to the promotion of R&D by turning innovative ideas into marketable products, processes or services.

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SWOT ANALYSIS

Strengths:

- Innovative financial mechanism;
- Promote transformation from idea/research to product/business;
- Induce new healthy start-ups companies into North Rhine-Westphalia economy;
- Amazing social result. For a period of ten years the program created 1500 new work places and among them 750 for people with university degree;
- Ready for use state of the art equipment (universities technical base);
- Long term established Level of trust among enterprises;
- Established synergy between Academics and Business.

Weaknesses:

- Lack of day to day control mechanism;
- Despite all the efforts the program was not promoted enough and did not have as wide spread as initially planned;
- Less or no information on the project in the leading institution website;
- Missing public available dissemination and results exploitation.

Opportunities:

- Program transferability is just amazing it could be transferred to the whole SEE region;
- Smooth transition of aggregated knowledge into successful business (start-ups and newly established SMEs);
- Increase the number of competitive sustainable jobs and the overall competitiveness of the industry;
- Launching suitable development programs in accordance with market needs.

Threats:

- Some Professors consider their academic activities as a primary goal and they do not promote their students to make startup companies;
- There is possible to human capital deficit;
- There is hard to predict model of timely availability of human and technical resources.