

The Jugend forscht Contest

“We are looking for the scientists of tomorrow!” Henri Nannen, the editor-in-chief of stern magazine, coined this slogan when launching the first Jugend forscht contest in 1965. This is as true today as it was then. In science, technology and engineering there is an unbroken demand for highly qualified people. As a result of declining student numbers in these subjects and due to an increasing global competition, the current lack of specialists is going to get even worse. Jugend forscht believes that the education of young people and the development of their careers in science, technology, engineering and mathematics is a crucial task for our society. This is how we will be able to meet the challenges of the future. Jugend forscht makes an important contribution to identifying and supporting the highly gifted people we need in business and academia.

Guidance for Schools and Teachers

Today, as well as over 50 years ago, Germany’s most famous junior talent contest can rightly say that it is setting a good example with the very effective way in which it promotes careers of highly gifted young people. Some of the principal proposals being discussed in the current education reform debate have been part of what Jugend forscht does for many years. For example, project work constitutes an ideal framework for offering pupils the kind of individual attention that will encourage them to make most of their special abilities. Furthermore, inquiry-based learning enables young people to familiarize themselves with the tools of scientific enquiry. They thus acquire methodological skills that are core qualifications of today’s knowledge society. More than anything else, Jugend forscht emphasizes the importance of self-directed and interdisciplinary work in order to provide guidance for schools and teachers.

Providing Support After the Contest

Jugend forscht does not confine its support and encouragement to the contest itself. Successful participants are given the opportunity to take part in internships at research institutions or universities and to attend scientific conferences in order to enhance and widen their knowledge. This way Jugend forscht supports talented young people in focusing on a goal at an early stage, and motivates them to study a science or engineering-related subject. These support schemes following the contest offer young people an opportunity to establish contacts that may later be useful in their careers.

An Effective Way of Promoting Junior Talent

Surveys have shown that Jugend forscht is an extremely effective way of promoting careers of gifted young people. Nine out of ten successful participants later study a scientific, technological, engineering, mathematical or medical subject. After having completed their university education about half of the winners of the federal contest work in the area of research and development at universities, research institutes, or for large companies.

A Broadly-based Social Network

Jugend forscht has developed a viable organizational structure in order to successfully support talented young people. For many years the contest has been setting a good example in this respect. The contest depends on a broadly-based public-private partnership in which various stakeholders work together in pursuit of a common goal. Jugend forscht’s main patrons are the German government, stern magazine and the business sector. Moreover, the support provided by the state and federal ministries of education and by schools is crucial to Jugend forscht. The contest is organized by a non-profit association, Stiftung Jugend forscht e. V. The German Minister of Education and Research is the chairwoman of its Board of Trustees, and its patron is the President of Germany.

Partners from Business and Science

Jugend forscht is largely financed by the German business. For five decades this concept has been central to making the contest such a lasting success. Currently about 250 partners provide the financial support needed for the contest, and this amounts to an annual total of approximately € 9 million. The money comes from medium-sized enterprises and global corporations, universities, research institutions, foundations and associations. Our partners run the contests, donate awards, and organize other activities such as alumni meetings. Without their collaboration and support the contest could not take place. Henri Nannen devised this financial model. In fact, this innovative approach was quite unique in Germany when the Jugend forscht was founded. Sponsorship and joint partnership is increasingly becoming the norm in the educational sector. And, last but not least, the concept forms the basis for the ongoing expansion of Jugend forscht, which now has 120 contests on the regional, state and national levels.

Voluntary Work is an Essential Element

An exemplary aspect of Jugend forscht is the willingness of many teachers to support the contest on a voluntary basis. More than 5,000 science and engineering teachers participate each year as project supervisors, jury members and contest organizers. Their voluntary work is an essential element of the contest, and without it more than 12,000 young people each year would not be able to participate. Above all the exemplary activities of teachers and business instructors acting as supervisors offer young people the chance to develop their talents by taking part in Jugend forscht projects.

Tremendous Media Resonance

Jugend forscht pursues a pro-active press and publicity policy designed to raise public awareness of why it promotes the careers of gifted young people. Throughout the year the contest generates a tremendous press resonance. The print and online media carry more than 20,000 articles about Jugend forscht every year. And when the German finals are being held there are regularly more than 200 reports on both radio and television. But what is really important is not only the high level of public awareness of the contest. It is also the fact that Jugend forscht has a unique and unmistakable image.

www.jugend-forscht.de