



Implementation *Bulletin*



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RA 11035: AN ACT INSTITUTIONALIZING THE BALIK SCIENTIST PROGRAM

This law mandates the Department of Science and Technology (DOST) to award short-term, medium-term, and long-term engagements to Balik Scientists. These are science, technology or innovation experts or professionals accorded with benefits and incentives to undertake science and technology activities with a host institution in the Philippines. Both Filipino citizens and foreigners of Filipino descent are eligible to be Balik Scientists.

Benefits accorded to Balik Scientists include the following: (1) exemption from licensing or permitting requirements of the Professional Regulation Commission (PRC); (2) accident and medical insurance; (3) tax and duty exemption in the importation of professional equipment, instruments, and materials; (4) for non-Filipino citizens, exemption from renouncing their oath of allegiance to the country where they took the oath; and (5) grants and allowances, depending on the length of their participation in the program.

The implementing rules and regulations (IRR) of this law were issued on October 4, 2018 by DOST Secretary Fortunato T. Dela Peña.

DOST Undersecretary for Research and Development Rowena Cristina L. Guevara describes the Balik Scientist Program as the agency's "flagship program for reversing brain drain in the country." It is complemented by the agency's programs on science and technology (S&T) infrastructure and S&T human resource development, which DOST has been implementing in the past decade.

Balik Scientists are classified under four categories: Academe, DOST Agencies, Other Government Agencies, and Industries. The program is implemented by the DOST Office of the Undersecretary for Research and Development (OUSeRD) alongside the agency's sectoral planning Councils, namely: Philippine Council for Agriculture, Aquatic and Natural Resources Research and Development

Balik Scientist Dr. Wilfred Santiañez, who specializes in the biodiversity of seaweeds, during a field visit (DOST photo)



(PCAARRD), Philippine Council for Health Research and Development (PCHRD), and Philippine Council for Industry, Energy and Emerging Technology Research and Development (PCIEERD).

Usec. Guevara noted that prior to the passage of this law, the program was implemented and funded through the agency's Grant-in-Aid (GIA) Program beginning in 1975. To date, there has been a total of 555 Balik Scientists, of which 49 (8.9 percent) were accredited in 2019. She directly attributes this achievement to the passage of RA 11035.

Duration of engagement

Balik Scientists were first given the option to choose the duration of their engagement in 2007. This practice was retained with the approval of the law. The types of engagements are as follows:

- **Short-term engagement** covers a minimum duration of 15 days to a maximum duration of six months per award to be served within one year from the date of award.
- **Medium-term engagement** covers a minimum duration of more than six months but not to exceed one year per award to be served within two years from the date of the award.
- **Long-term engagement** covers a duration of more than one year to three years, subject to renewal to be determined by DOST and to be served within five years from the date of the award.

From 2007 to date, 263 Balik Scientists covering 394 engagements have been involved in this arrangement. Of this group, 47 Balik Scientists permanently returned to the Philippines and were absorbed by their respective host institutions. An additional 11 Balik Scientists that did not have the

option to choose the duration of their engagement (i.e. pre-2007 policy) permanently relocated to the country.

Role of Balik Scientists in research and development (R&D) leadership

Usec. Guevara shared that Balik Scientists exercise R&D leadership by sharing their expertise, developing technologies, conducting capacity building activities, assisting in the implementation of on-going projects, and publishing articles in reputable international scientific journals.

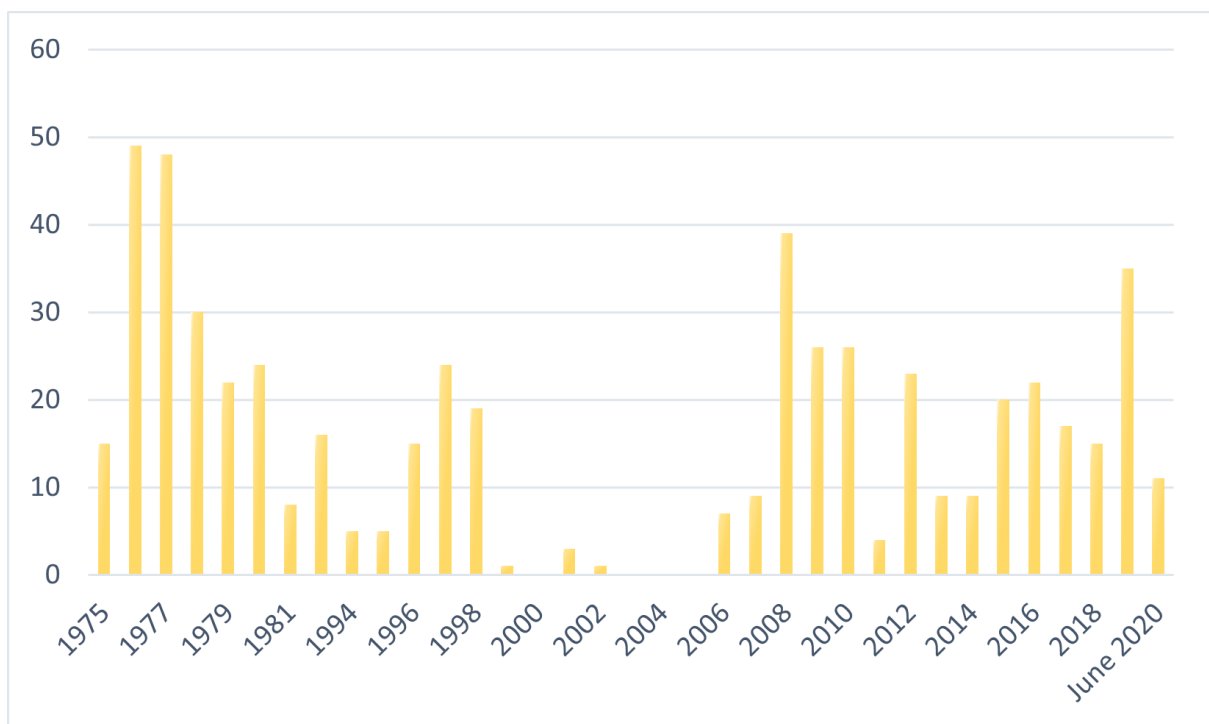


Dr. Deborah A. Tanganan delivers a presentation on seas and oceans to over 100 mid-to-high schoolers. She also led workshops on microscopy of different sands and creation of 3D microfossils (DOST photo)

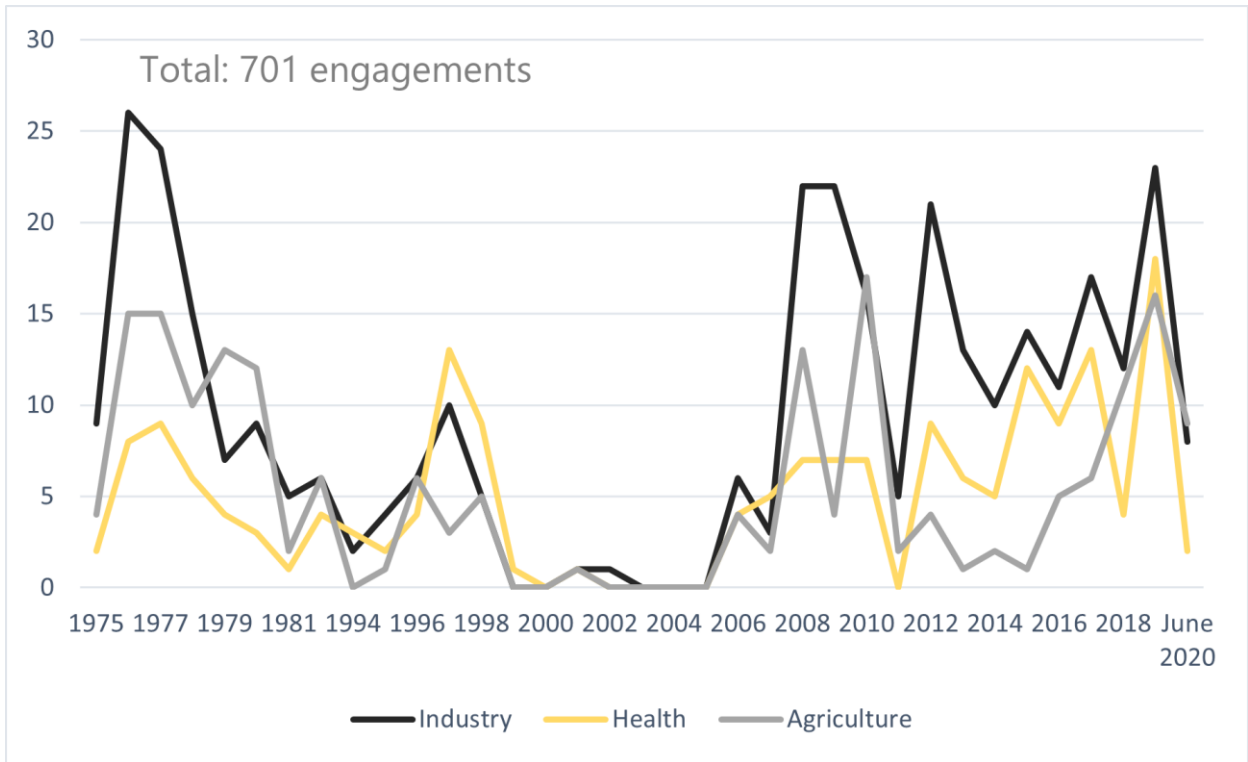
Other activities

DOST held the following activities to further strengthen the implementation of this law:

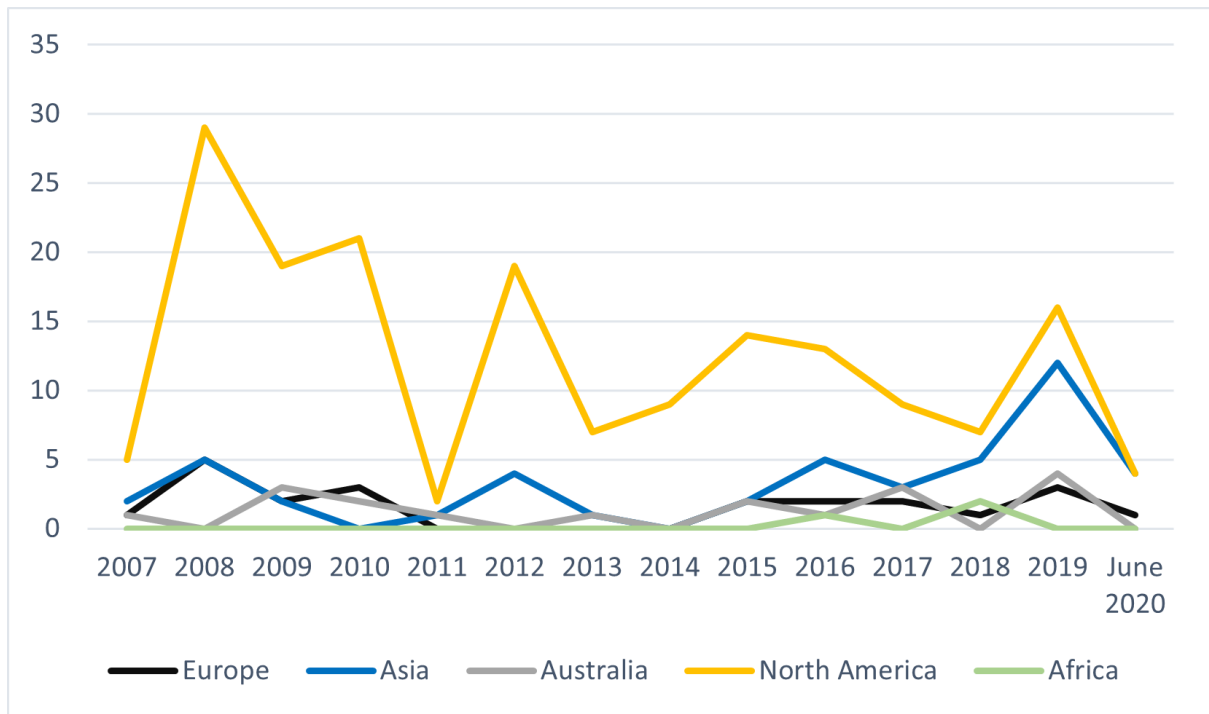
- Online Kumustahan with previous and ongoing Balik Scientists as a venue to discuss the proposed supplemental guidelines on program implementation amid the pandemic.
- Online discussion with host Institutions to solicit inputs/suggestions on the proposed supplemental guidelines



New Balik Scientists by year, 1975-June 2020 (DOST data)



Total engagements by industry, 1975 to June 2020 (DOST data)



Balik Scientists by origin continent, 2007 to June 2020 (DOST data)

Issues and concerns

Usec. Guevara identified the following issues and concerns, as well as the agency's proposed actions to address them.

Issue/concern	Proposed action
Health and medical	
<p>(1) Meeting the target number of Balik Scientists and implementation of the program affected by the COVID19 pandemic</p> <p>(2) Since the provision of medical insurance is still in its first stage, the budget allocation for its procurement was projected lower than the actual amount needed. Procurement of health insurance was difficult due to failure in the bidding process with insurance providers.</p>	<p>(1) Drafting of guidelines on the implementation of the program amid the COVID-19 pandemic and in the new normal</p> <p>(2) Additional budget was requested to successfully procure the comprehensive health and medical insurance for Balik Scientists. Efforts have been made through series of secretariat meetings with other Councils and potential providers (Medicare, AXA, etc.) to come up with a plan considering the demographics of the on-going Balik Scientists and the specifications (Php 250,000/illness) in the DOST Memo Circular No. 006 Series of 2018. The option of applying for group insurance as another strategy for successful health insurance acquisition is also being explored.</p>
Technical	
Concerns of Balik Scientists relative to the submission of DOST-GIA proposals	Create a separate procedure for the evaluation of proposals submitted/assisted by the Balik Scientist, which comply with the DOST Monitoring and Evaluation Protocol.
Logistics	
Question on the number of times that an expert will be allowed to serve as Balik Scientist	Specify the limit or the number of times that a Balik Scientist will be allowed to apply under short term and medium-term engagements
Budget and funding	
<p>(1) Setbacks in the release of funds was due to the approved budget of the Program being lower than the submitted/projected 2019 budget; hence, an additional budget was requested during the 3rd quarter. Further, the budget of the Program was included in the DOST's Tier II which was released during the 2nd semester of the year.</p> <p>(2) Institutions, most especially academic institutions, do not have the capability to provide positions and compensate rates of long-term Balik Scientists.</p>	<p>(1) The matter was raised to the office of Usec. Guevara. The submitted/projected 2020 budget was approved during [the] EXECOM [meeting] and was included in DOST's first releases for CY 2020</p> <p>(2) DOST to coordinate with Commission on Higher Education (CHED) for inclusion in plans or flexible arrangements for Balik Scientists</p> <p>(3) The sectoral Councils through the DOST Secretary and Undersecretary requested the Department of Budget and Management (DBM) for the</p>

Issue/concern	Proposed action
<p>(3) Since the implementation of the program by the sectoral councils, the program is being handled by project staff who managed to support the implementation of Balik Scientists' engagement. With the enactment of RA 11035, the purpose is to institutionalize the program under DOST and it needs to be handled by permanent staff to ensure the efficient administration of the program</p>	<p>deployment of plantilla positions to the implementing councils. In 2019, said request has been granted by providing two plantilla positions per sectoral Council; however, the request for a plantilla position at OUSecRD was not granted by DBM.</p>

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