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**Academic Fixed-Term Contract Act: Amendment supports those affected and academia
Alliance spokesperson Alt: Expansion of research funding necessary**

The Bundestag decided today to amend the Academic Fixed-Term Contract Act (WissZeitVG) in order to prevent researchers on fixed-term employment contracts from experiencing disadvantages due to protective measures taken in response to the coronavirus pandemic. Research institutions and universities will now have the option of extending employment contracts beyond the previously applicable limit. The Alliance of Science Organisations in Germany explicitly welcomes this amendment. It seeks to ensure that academic institutions make use of this option to support early and mid-career researchers.

“In an initial step, the federal government has provided additional funding for research connected to the coronavirus pandemic to enable academics to further intensify their manifold efforts to overcome the crisis. The Bundestag has now also adjusted the framework conditions for academia and research as a whole in a pragmatic manner,” said Prof Dr Peter-André Alt, President of the German Rectors' Conference, which is currently heading the Alliance.

“The amendment of the Academic Fixed-Term Contract Act makes it possible to grant academics additional time for their academic qualification where, due to measures aimed at curbing the pandemic, research and development have to be shut down for the time being, experiments and projects have been suspended or are temporarily infeasible, and research objects can no longer be accessed. We owe our thanks to the members of the Bundestag for their rapid, effective action. We now expect that the Bundesrat will approve the legislation.”

With retroactive effect from 1 March 2020, the maximum fixed-term contract period pursuant to the WissZeitVG for academic and creative staff in the post-graduate qualification phase is to be extended by six months due to the restrictions placed on university and research activities as a result of the pandemic. The extension option is applicable to employment existing between this date and 30 September 2020. Furthermore, the qualification framework can be extended by an additional six months based on a legislative decree issued by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research, provided that this is necessary due to the continuing effects of the COVID-19 pandemic in the Federal Republic of Germany.

“Academia will continue to make its contribution to overcoming the crisis at all levels,” said Alt. “The past weeks have once again very clearly demonstrated that research and academia as a whole are indispensable components of our community – and this is true for all academic fields and all academic institutions. The close partnership between the federal government, state governments and academia in recent years has very much proved its worth in this respect.

Nevertheless, it is evident that much remains to be done such as in the digitalisation of research, studies and teaching, with particular regard to the necessary infrastructure, in the funding of university medicine and medical research and in the continued improvement of the framework conditions for international

cooperation. These are just some examples of challenges for which academia will continue to rely on special support from the federal and state governments in the years to come.”

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