

Discussion proposal by the Universities Member Group of the German Rectors' Conference on the Further Development of the Academic Fixed-Term Contract Act (Berlin, 06/07/2022)

I. Initial situation

The universities see it as their task to enable individuals to qualify at the highest level, including by way of doctoral education. It is in the nature of post-graduate qualification positions that they may only be filled for a limited period of time, if only for the sake of intergenerational equity. By far the largest proportion of doctoral graduates pursue careers in industry, public administration or society. Only a small number of doctoral graduates remain permanently at universities because the demand for professors and researchers on career paths adjacent to professorships is limited. It is in the interests of academia to enable the best-qualified individuals to remain in professorships or permanent positions alongside professorships.

II. Proposed reforms

1. Academic Fixed-Term Contract Act (WissZeitVG):

In future, the decision as to whether a permanent career in academia is realistic should be made earlier in one's professional career. We therefore propose a uniform, maximum post-graduate qualification period within the framework of the above Act, § 2 para. 1, of 10 years (plus family policy component). This period should be followed by plannable career paths either in a junior professorship (with tenure), a permanent position alongside a professorship or – which is by far the most common case – outside academia. Within this period, up to 6 years may be allowed until completion of the doctoral degree. The initial contract with the qualification objective of a doctoral degree should be concluded with a minimum term (preferably at least 3 years). However, in all cases a period of at least 4 years remains for the post-doctoral phase.

The flexibility gained through a uniform qualification period with regard to the duration of the doctoral degree and the postdoctoral phase takes into account the different subject cultures and individual needs. In addition, bringing the career decision forward ensures compatibility with the legal arrangements of the federal states.¹

The Universities Member Group of the HRK is opposed to the idea that all fixed-term contracts in the early postdoctoral phase must be accompanied by a promise of continued employment if the objectives are achieved. The obligation to commit to offering continued employment would significantly reduce the number of postdoctoral positions and thus deprive many early-career researchers of the opportunity to pursue a career in academia.

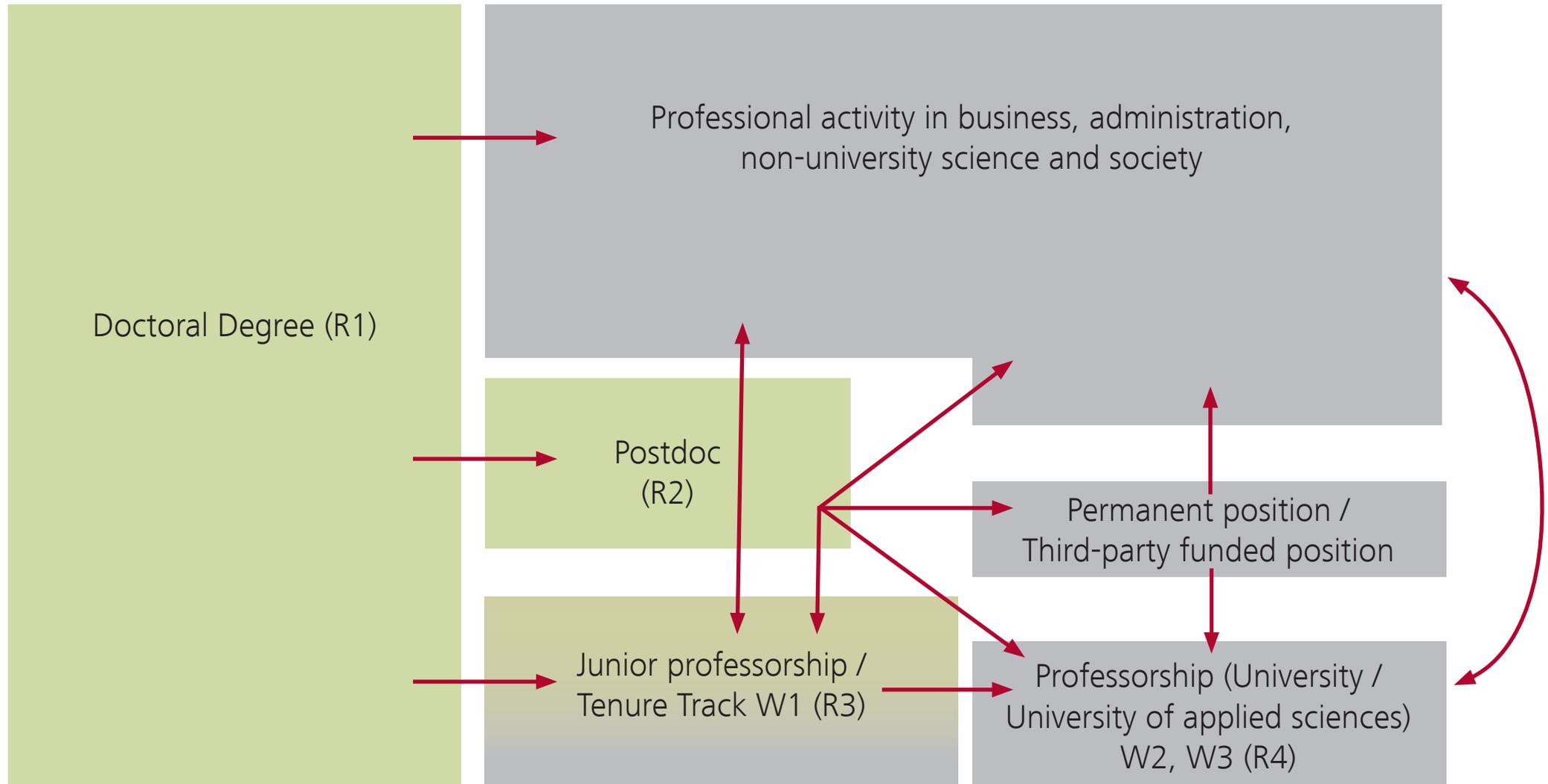
2. Other necessary measures besides the WissZeitVG:

- Public third-party funding bodies should adapt their third-party funding practices with regard to the use of funds and funding terms, for example to enable pooling solutions for permanent employees and a realistic funding term for post-graduate qualification positions. Family-related absences should also be compensated by third-party funding bodies.

- The HRK has initiated a process to structure the different career paths to a professorship more clearly and transparently and to establish careers in permanent academic positions alongside professorships more firmly. Among other things, a public event relating to this topic will be held in the first half of 2023.

¹ In Hesse, for example, the Higher Education Act § 70 para. 3 p. 3 stipulates: "As a rule, the duration of academic employment during and after the doctoral degree should not exceed nine years and employment after the doctoral degree four years".

Chart on the Discussion Proposal of the Member Group Universities of the German Rectors' Conference (HRK)
on the Further Development of the Academic Fixed-Term Contract Act 6.7.2022



The main career paths are presented. Of course, individual career paths may be different.

R1: First Stage Researcher. Up to the point of PhD

R2: Recognised Researcher. PhD holders or equivalent who are not yet fully independent

R3: Established Researcher. Researchers who have developed a level of independence

R4: Leading Researcher. Researchers leading their research area or field

R1 and R2 together are limited to 10 years. Green are the qualification periods