

Recommendation by the
27th General Assembly of
the German Rectors'
Conference (HRK)
on 19 November 2019
in Hamburg

**Evaluation of Academic
Fixed-Term Contract Act
and advancement of early
career researchers**

HRK German Rectors' Conference

The Voice of the Universities

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Advancement of early career researchers

The conclusion of the 'Future Contract' and thus the Federal Government's commitment to providing ongoing funding for higher education teaching marks a significant step towards ensuring the reliability of higher education funding. The long-term funding that will start in 2021 is to be used to hire additional permanent university staff for studying and teaching in accordance with the wishes of the Federal and State Governments. The Federal and State Governments consider this a key factor in improving the quality of studying and teaching.

The evaluation of the amendment of the Academic Fixed-Term Contract Act is prescribed by law for 2020. This amendment is intended to counter undesirable developments in the system of temporary contracts without adversely affecting the necessary flexibility and dynamic nature of academia. The amendment accompanied the efforts of universities and research institutions to improve the employment conditions and career prospects of academic staff.

The extensive status review carried out in the course of the evaluation combined with the more reliable financing prospects of the 'Future Contract' offers universities the chance to review and continuously develop their measures to advance early career researchers and their system of temporary contracts.

Background

The HRK recommendation 'Guidelines for the advancement of early career researchers in the post-doctoral phase and for the development of academic career paths in addition to that of professorships' (2014) and the core theses for this recommendation represent an appropriate system for this.¹ These recommendations constitute standards that the HRK has set for the advancement of early career researchers and the issue of personnel development, which a large number of universities have implemented within university-specific frameworks.

The advancement of personnel development strategies was also driven by the specifications of various funding programmes. Universities are required to establish personnel development as a strategic goal in order to be eligible to apply for the Federal/State Government programme to advance early career researchers (tenure track programme). The quality of personnel development strategies both at the level of the cluster of excellence and in the funding line of Universities of Excellence is also a criterion of the Excellence Strategy.

¹ Core theses for the 'Guidelines for the Advancement of Early Career Researchers and for the Development of Academic Career Paths in Addition to that of a Professorship', recommendation by the 18th HRK General Assembly on 12/05/2015

Fields of action

The aim of the university-specific guidelines is to formulate concepts for the advancement of early career researchers and options for academic career paths with due regard to rules governing fixed-term employment and opportunities for further training. The staff development concepts should take account of equal opportunities for women and men and also of diversity. Every university should involve its faculties and departments in formulating a concept for future staffing arrangements and personnel development, with due regard for the specific requirements of permanent and fixed-term employment for post-doctoral research personnel.

In addition to identifying permanent posts and appointing incumbents, the creation of consulting and qualification programmes and the further development of collaboration on university fields of action in the advancement of early career researchers were also defined.

In recent years, universities have significantly expanded the options they offer for the qualification of doctoral candidates in the context of graduate schools and academies as well as doctoral training programmes. Increasingly, they also offer a number of grants for researchers in the post-doctoral phase. On the one hand, training options extend to programmes specifically targeted at careers in academia, for example in the areas of higher education teaching or securing third-party funding. On the other hand, universities have developed funding measures that are important or even crucial for non-university career paths, e.g. training in the area of entrepreneurship or project management.

However, universities often find themselves confronted with the difficulty of preserving successful training options in the long term, as there is a high level of dependency on third-party funding and short-term Federal and State Government funding as well as specifications in agreed targets. New cooperations with other universities or non-university partners could potentially open up opportunities to assimilate measures and develop new options that further multiply the career prospects of researchers with doctorates.

Recommendation

In light of these developments in academic policy and higher education, the General Assembly of the HRK declares the following:

1. The member universities of the HRK support the evaluation of the Academic Fixed-Term Contract Act.
2. In addition, the General Assembly will establish a working group that compiles reports and draft recommendations on the basis of recommendations of the guidelines regarding
 - principles for working in academia in due consideration of academic generational equity,
 - the ratio of permanent positions to fixed-term positions in academia and the difference between qualification tasks and long-term tasks,
 - outstanding legal issues relating to temporary employment in academia, including in terms of the law on third-party funding,
 - cooperation models in the post-doctoral phase with non-university research institutions in particular as well as between universities and universities of applied sciences with respect to the career path for obtaining a professorship at a university of applied sciences. The internationalisation of career paths should also be taken into consideration.