

**20 May 2022****Evaluation of the Academic Fixed-Term Contract Act: HRK welcomes results and points to limits of legal regulations**

The President of the German Rectors' Conference (HRK), Professor Dr Peter-André Alt, has just commented in Berlin on the results published today of the evaluation of the effects of the 2015/2016 amendment to the Academic Fixed-Term Contract Act (Wissenschaftszeitvertragsgesetz, WissZeitVG):

"The results of the evaluation of the Academic Fixed-Term Contract Act required by the legislative and commissioned by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBWF) are on the table – a thorough assessment must now be carried out by the ministry in close consultation with the stakeholders concerned. On this basis, the German Bundestag (federal parliament) can decide on further possible adjustments. The evaluation shows that the practice of fixed-term contracts at universities, research institutions and university hospitals has changed as a result of the last amendment to the law; in many cases in the sense of greater transparency of career paths for employees and academic institutions. At the same time, the limits of what can be regulated by law become clear."

As the evaluation shows, in the area of fixed-term contracts for qualifications, the average contract duration has noticeably lengthened in recent years. While fixed-term employment contracts at universities still had a mean duration of 15–17 months in 2015, these mean values had already risen to 21–22 months by 2017. One decisive factor in this was an increase in three-year contracts, with which the universities implement the guidelines for determining appropriate contract terms. In the area of contracts financed with what is known as third-party funding, the universities have also complied with the amendment and usually adjusted the individual contract duration to the project duration.

Alt further explained: "The Academic Fixed-Term Contract Act regulates essential fixed-term principles in the field of academia, and the universities implement them. However, the commitment and responsibility for academics, especially in early career phases, goes beyond this labour law framework. Academia and politics are called upon to ensure attractive employment conditions in a comprehensive sense. To achieve the necessary planning security, reliable and adequate funding for academic institutions is essential. The universities themselves are called upon to clearly structure the career paths they offer and to qualify students not only for careers in research and teaching, but also for various activities in business, administration and society. In particular, the perspectives of academically or artistically employed postdocs included in the evaluation provide valuable information on where opportunities

for improvement are currently seen."

The fact that 74 percent of doctoral graduates aspire to work in academia in the medium term speaks for the unbroken attractiveness of academic work and the special creative freedom and development opportunities associated with it. This also explains why those hoping for a permanent position in academia are often rather critical of the qualification process. A sober analysis, however, must recognise that employment opportunities in academia are limited and that selection procedures are necessarily highly competitive.

Professor Dr Anja Steinbeck, Spokesperson of the HRK Universities Member Group and HRK Vice-President, emphasised today with regard to the upcoming debate: "The evaluation provides very important and interesting results. However, it is hardly possible to derive any compelling conclusions for a reform of the Academic Fixed-Term Contract Act. For this reason, the universities will continue their consultations on appropriate personnel structures and pathways to professorships, but also on preparation for non-university occupational fields, and will contribute sound proposals to the stakeholder process planned by the BMBF. The higher education system clearly sees itself as responsible for its employees as well as for its graduates. University-specific personnel development concepts can help to ensure attractive job opportunities in the long term. And additional qualifications for non-university occupational fields can further increase the permeability of career paths, even for academics with a doctorate."