

6 July 2022**Universities in the HRK present a discussion proposal for the further development of the Academic Fixed-Term Contract Act – Further measures called for**

At its closed meeting in Berlin, the Universities Member Group of the German Rectors' Conference (HRK) adopted **proposals for the further development of the Academic Fixed-Term Contract Act (WissZeitVG)** and called for supplementary measures. The aim of the discussion paper is to make academic career paths more plannable and predictable, in such a way that employees receive certainty earlier than under current law as to whether they have good prospects of permanent employment in academia within the framework of their qualification process, which includes the doctoral degree and an initial postdoctoral phase. Allowance must be made for the special requirements of a necessarily highly competitive personnel development and selection process in academia. In this way, the universities are actively participating in the consultation process initiated by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research among all affected stakeholders on an amendment to the Act.

Professor Dr Anja Steinbeck, Spokesperson of the HRK Universities Member Group and HRK Vice-President, said in Berlin today: "The professional situation of academics in early career phases at German universities has room for improvement. In particular, the uncertainty associated with a late career decision and the traditionally strong focus on a professorship as the seemingly sole career goal both create problems. With this paper, the HRK aims to contribute to the discussion on the planned amendment of the WissZeitVG. At the same time, rectors and presidents are aware that an amendment to the law alone will not be enough to ensure attractive employment conditions in a comprehensive sense. Numerous further measures are needed on the part of the universities themselves, politicians and third-party funding bodies."

The discussion proposal advocates a uniform qualification period for a doctoral degree and the first postdoctoral phase of ten years, which can be individually structured in line with personal needs and different subject cultures. Bringing forward the decision as to whether long-term employment in academia is realistic – whether in a professorship or another permanent position in research, teaching, or higher education and research management – is intended to provide planning certainty for those going through the post-graduate qualification process and for universities earlier than before, and at the same time ensure sustainable intergenerational equity. It also makes it easier to switch to other attractive career paths outside academia and strengthens the innovative power of industry and society.

The President of the German Rectors' Conference (HRK), Professor Dr Peter-André Alt, explains: "The proposals are the result of a lengthy discussion process and underline the fact that German universities are living up to their responsibility as good employers. The paper takes into account different, sometimes conflicting expectations and requirements for career paths and sustainable staff structures at universities and aims overall to achieve greater reliability and transparency."