

6 June 2023**HRK President on the draft bill for a reform of the Academic Fixed-Term Contract Act (WissZeitVG)**

The President of the German Rectors' Conference (HRK), Prof Dr Walter Rosenthal, has commented on the draft bill for a reform of the Academic Fixed-Term Contract Act (WissZeitVG) presented today by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF):

"The draft bill for the amendment of the Academic Fixed-Term Contract Act (WissZeitVG) is finally available. The text, which has been long awaited after an intensive and transparent consultation process, will help to further objectivise the discussion on the appropriate design of the necessary special fixed-term contract law in academia and on accompanying sensible measures, which, however, are not the subject of the Act. The BMBF's reform proposals, which are largely uncontroversial, should be able to unite all stakeholders who constructively weigh up the different interests in academia against each other.

The universities welcome the proposal for a postdoctoral phase with a fixed-term option of no less than four years – only in this way can postdoctoral researchers in many subjects succeed in developing a new focus in research and teaching and an independent academic profile after their doctoral degree. The question of whether a long-term career in academia – or outside it – is possible and promising is decided during this qualification phase. Minimum terms for initial contracts in the doctoral and postdoctoral phases, as envisaged in the draft bill, lead to a higher degree of reliability appropriate to the academic qualification process.

On the other hand, opening up pay scales, as is currently being considered for an amended Academic Fixed-Term Contract Act, carries the risk of a lack of reliability and transparency for employees. This is likely to hamper mobility between the higher education institutions of the federal states and non-university research institutions and encourage further pillarisation of the research system, since the research institutions are bound by different collective agreements.

The HRK will comment on the details of the announced legislative reform within the framework of the parliamentary hearing of associations, its committee meetings and the Alliance of Science Organisations in Germany, and will continue to contribute in a goal-oriented manner to the discussion on attractive working conditions and an efficient research system. Changes to the system, such as the establishment of additional permanent positions alongside the tenured professorship and the systematic establishment of tenure-track models, do not take place through a fixed-term contract law such as the Academic Fixed-Term Contract Act, but rather from within universities and, above all, with the support of the federal states – and in a way that is appropriate to research."