

29 May 2026**HRK President on the current draft bill to amend the Academic Fixed-Term Contract Act (WissZeitVG)**

The President of the German Rectors' Conference (HRK), Prof Dr Walter Rosenthal, has issued the following initial response to the draft bill on the amendment of the Academic Fixed-Term Contract Act (Wissenschaftszeitvertragsgesetz; WissZeitVG), which was made public on Thursday evening:

"German universities expressly welcome the fact that the long-awaited draft bill on the WissZeitVG is now available. This represents a significant step forward for the amendment process initiated during the previous parliamentary term and which will hopefully be successfully concluded soon.

It is encouraging to note that the regulations that have now been announced have, on the whole, been streamlined. They are written in a way that makes them easier to read and understand. This can only be beneficial to the debate on the purpose and scope of this law. The draft legislation also includes long-overdue updates that have already become law because of current case law and EU legislation.

It is also positive that the proposal to reduce the maximum duration of fixed-term contracts during the postdoctoral phase – which was discussed at times during the previous parliamentary term – has been shelved. This would have unnecessarily hampered innovative research projects and had foreseeable negative consequences for the individual career and qualification prospects of early-career researchers across all disciplines – for example, regarding a habilitation.

One key change in the draft legislation is the introduction of minimum contract terms for initial contracts of three years for doctoral candidates and of two years for postdoctoral researchers. The HRK had itself proposed this as appropriate for the doctoral phase during the last attempt to amend the legislation under the 'traffic-light' coalition government. We are therefore pleased that the legislator intends to follow this approach and has included it in the draft.

However, a second change—intended to give priority to the time limit on the qualification period over the time limit on third-party funding—is problematic. This jeopardises the transfer of research findings to industry and society, something that politicians otherwise strongly advocate. Not every third-party funded project, particularly those involving partners from industry and the business sector, will be able to cover the desired minimum duration of the fixed-term qualification period. In many

cases, such projects do not, in any event, serve the purpose of academic qualification in the strict sense. The proposed new regulations fail to recognise the social function and statutory role of third-party funded research.

The HRK will once again participate in the upcoming parliamentary consultation process in a critical yet constructive manner. Regardless of the narrow scope of the Academic Fixed-Term Contract Act, universities are committed to providing attractive working conditions and to a needs-based differentiation of academic career paths with additional permanent positions alongside tenured professorships.”