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**Abstract**

Early career researchers are faced with the expectation of their scientific communities to conduct independent research, which is reflected in the development of independent new research lines. This change must take place under conditions that vary between national career systems. Case studies for a chair system (Germany) and two tenure systems, one with strong hierarchies (the Netherlands) and one with flat hierarchies (Australia) were conducted. The career conditions created by universities and funding agencies during this transition phase towards independence are systematically compared for two fields, molecular biology and history. Despite their different structures functional equivalents lead to similar outcomes: Only a small group of the potential elite had sufficient 'protected space' to start new research lines without delay. The majority of early career researchers encountered limitations of their 'protected space.' Differences between the systems occurred due to the increasing importance of the external funding system for the creation of 'protected space': researchers were better off in a rich funding landscape with higher grant success rates.(HRK / Abstract übernommen)