



Dear Federal Minister of Education Karliczek,

Dear Members of the German Bundestag,

The outrage of the last days on social networks with #IchbinHanna clearly exemplifies the point of view shared by many researchers - not only is the Wissenschaftszeitvertragsgesetz ('WissZeitVG') outdated, moreover there is a dire need to reorient the academic system. We acknowledge the importance of a dynamic system and recognize the structure brought on by the 'WissZeitVG', but call for a better balance between flexibility and stable employment possibilities. The idea of a flexible system that is efficient only through its high turnover has led to a lack of diversity and increased disadvantages for already vulnerable groups by fostering dependencies and the associated abuse of power. In addition, recurring turnover at almost all levels results in a consistent loss of knowledge that can only be compensated through more permanent personnel.

As the N<sup>2</sup> Network, we speak for the interests of 16,000 doctoral researchers in non-university research institutions (AuF) and call on you, to further adapt the contract situation during the doctoral phase to match the actual conditions, as described in the Federal Report on Young Academics (Bundesbericht Wissenschaftlicher Nachwuchs) (BuWiN) 2021. We also call for full recognition of research achievements during the doctoral phase as a valuable contribution to society that goes beyond a private qualification. In addition, it is not enough to just limit the maximum fixed-term periods for employment contracts in science; clear career paths to permanent employment are also required. It must be possible to plan a scientific career. The lack of structure and permanent positions has led to additional discrimination against already disadvantaged groups; for example, the Joint Science Conference (Gemeinsame Wissenschaftskonferenz) (GWK) writes on the topic of equal opportunities: 'The necessary structural conditions, such as longer-term employment prospects, greater scientific independence among mid-level faculty, and family-friendly working conditions, must also be ensured.' (Joint Science Conference Report 2018<sup>1</sup>, translated here). The high level of diversity during the

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<sup>1</sup>[https://www.gwk-bonn.de/fileadmin/Redaktion/Dokumente/Papers/22.\\_FS\\_Frauenbericht\\_2018\\_Heft\\_60.pdf](https://www.gwk-bonn.de/fileadmin/Redaktion/Dokumente/Papers/22._FS_Frauenbericht_2018_Heft_60.pdf)

doctoral phase steadily decreases in subsequent career stages, limiting productivity and excellence.

Additionally, our surveys<sup>2,3,4</sup> have shown that 70% of doctoral researchers currently rate the availability of permanent positions in the scientific career path as unattractive. Just under half of the doctoral researchers surveyed consider the compatibility of their own career plans with a partnership or starting a family to be unattractive. These assessments are also confirmed by results reported in BuWiN 2021: 92% of academic staff under the age of 45 are employed on a fixed-term basis with an average contract duration of 22 months. At the same time, they have had an average of 6.3 fixed-term contracts since their first academic employment, and it takes an average of 10 years to reach a permanent position (BuWiN 2021). Excellent workers seek out particularly good working conditions. Therefore, we require a fundamental rethinking, in order to attract more excellence into Germany and to the non-university research institutions, to retain doctoral researchers in Germany and to prevent further exodus of academic talent.

We consider the following points to be essential in order to maintain and strengthen Germany's competitiveness as a location for innovation and science in the future:

Recognition of doctoral performance as a scientific contribution to society and invalidation of the image of the doctorate as a private qualification devoid of social value.

1. Introduce a full salary for doctoral researchers in all research fields, rather than the often-used part-time contracts, to reflect the full-time nature of doctoral work.

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<sup>2</sup> Helmholtz Junior Survey Report 2019:  
[https://www.helmholtz.de/fileadmin/user\\_upload/06\\_jobs\\_talente/Helmholtz-Juniors/Survey\\_Report2019\\_update.pdf](https://www.helmholtz.de/fileadmin/user_upload/06_jobs_talente/Helmholtz-Juniors/Survey_Report2019_update.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> 2019 Leibniz PhD Network Survey Report: <https://www.ssoar.info/ssoar/handle/document/69403>

<sup>4</sup> Max Planck PhDnet Survey Report 2019:  
[https://www.phdnet.mpg.de/145345/PhDnet\\_Survey\\_Report\\_2019.pdf](https://www.phdnet.mpg.de/145345/PhDnet_Survey_Report_2019.pdf)

2. Adjusting the minimum contract duration of doctoral researchers to four years to reflect the average doctoral duration of 4.7 years (BuWiN 2021).

Creation of permanent career prospects in both non-university and university research:

1. Permanent scientist as career option for academic research without staff responsibility
2. Permanent lecturer as a career option for academic teaching without research tasks at the universities
3. Group leader as a career option for academic research with lower personnel responsibility and a perspective of possible promotion to professorship
4. The professorship continues to be the highest academic career level with a focus on science management

Create clear career paths toward the previously mentioned career prospects to provide a clear framework for fixed term contracts following the doctorate:

1. Usage of a 'tenure-track' system with a clearly defined duration
2. Time limitation of the postdoc phase without a previously defined 'tenure-track' option
3. Enabling an orientation phase as a postdoc, for example in the form of an experience abroad, with guaranteed time recognition in the event of a subsequent tenure-track career
4. Introduction of clear and transparent guidelines for tenure after the 'tenure-track' phase
5. Limitation of time exceptions in connection with third-party funding and creation of permanent positions funded by the federal government through third-party funding.

We are aware that the 'WissZeitVG' intended to support new dynamics in academia when it was passed in 2007, and at the same time regulate it in the interest of academic personnel. We recognize the basic idea and intentions behind the amendment in 2016 and welcome the current evaluation of the law. However, as already mentioned, we see the need for a structural change in academia that goes

far beyond the 'WissZeitVG'. In this regard, we also see positive trends in recent years and welcome the efforts that policy makers have made to address the issue. However, we assess the efforts to create incentives and impulses as insufficient. For example, the 'tenure track program' is expected to create 1,000 new positions and has already resulted in 519 new positions in 2018 (BuWiN 2021). While we are clearly in favor of more 'tenure track' positions, we would also like to emphasize that 1,000 new positions represent only 2% of the current total of 48,111 professors and this will not lead to the necessary system change. The 'Excellence Strategy' serves as additional funding for top-level research at German universities (BMBF) and should also enable better doctoral conditions, as well as more permanent positions and better career prospects (BuWiN 2021). However, we see the limitation of the funding period as a hurdle. In the past, it has been shown that third-party funding remains as an obstacle for the creation of additional permanent positions in the assembly of scientific staff since 2000 (Wissenschaftsrat 2014<sup>5</sup>). The inherent volatility of third-party funding in its current form removes incentives for creating more permanent positions, as permanent funding is not guaranteed. Therefore, in our view, there is a need for a better balance between third-party and general funding. In the 'Zukunftsvertrag Studium und Lehre stärken' (The Contract for the future, giving more strength to studying and teaching), focus is laid on the expansion of permanent positions for staff involved in studying and teaching with the aim of further improving the quality. We encourage to take up this idea for all academic staff and to initiate a change to a balanced ratio of permanent positions and temporary employment conditions with clear and unambiguous structures and guidelines for states, universities and AuFs instead of the current usual incentives and expectations.

We are of the opinion that the continuation of the above-mentioned approaches in conjunction with the further-reaching reforms, that we have proposed, will make it possible to strengthen Germany's position as a center of science in an equal and

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<sup>5</sup> [https://www.wissenschaftsrat.de/download/archiv/4009-14.pdf?\\_\\_blob=publicationFile&v=1](https://www.wissenschaftsrat.de/download/archiv/4009-14.pdf?__blob=publicationFile&v=1)



sustainable manner and to succeed in securing excellence. This will certainly require more in-depth discussions, in which N<sup>2</sup> is happy to participate in with the perspective of young scientists.

Respectfully,

The N<sup>2</sup> Board

This text is a translation of the original german letter 'N2\_Stellungnahme\_IchbinHanna'