

**English Translation:**

Berlin, 27 May 2024

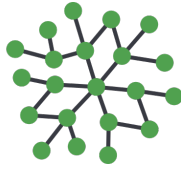
**Statement on the Federal Cabinet's decision on the WissZeitVG amendment of March 27, 2024**

On March 27, 2024, the amendment to the Academic Fixed-Term Contract Act (WissZeitVG) was approved by the Federal Cabinet. It will next be discussed in the German Bundestag. According to media reports, the draft amendment has not changed significantly compared to the previous draft published in June 2023.

Max Planck PostdocNet was asked to comment on the earlier draft back in June 2023 and, in response, published a joint statement with other German postdoc networks on July 4, 2023. As postdoctoral researchers who are directly affected by the changes to this law, we would like to reiterate the position expressed at that time, as the problems identified therein are not adequately addressed either in July 2023 or in the amendment.

In our opinion, the problems that we and other status groups at German academic institutions have pointed out are fundamentally incompatible with the stated objectives of the proposed changes in the amendment. These objectives include "good and competitive employment and career conditions", a "cultural change in science", attractive "working conditions at universities and research institutions" as "an essential key to maintaining and expanding Germany's international competitiveness and innovative capacity", "reliability, predictability and transparency for scientists in early career phases" and "a better work-life balance" (Gesetzesentwurf der Bundesregierung, Entwurf eines Gesetzes zur Änderung des Befristungsrechts für die Wissenschaft, p. 1). Due to the incompatibility of the problems identified and the objectives set out in the amendment, we strongly oppose the amendment, both as postdoctoral researchers and as citizens and international researchers of Germany.

Justification: Once a decision has been made to pursue an academic career, the career paths to a permanent position should be transparent, unambiguous and objectively clear for the

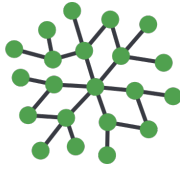


researchers concerned. For the German scientific system, career paths should also be globally permeable so that Germany can continue to compete internationally for the best minds. The 4+2 model within the framework of the WissZeitVG draft, to which we would like to limit our discussion here, threatens both: the individual perspectives of individual academics and the competitiveness of the German academic system.

Shortening the postdoc phase from the current 6 years to the 4+2 model puts far more pressure on the crucial development of academic independence than would be feasible in most cases (Laudel and Bielick, “The Emergence of Individual Research Programs in the Early Career Phase of Academics,” *Science, Technology, and Human Values* 43.6 (2018): 972–1010). This shortening, in turn, will have considerable negative repercussions for the German academic system as a whole. For example, it is to be feared that the envisaged early permanence of early career researchers who are still largely dependent after the doctoral phase will have fatal consequences both individually for career paths (keywords: nepotism and CV streamlining) and globally and systemically for Germany (keywords: decoupling from international qualification standards). This is particularly detrimental for the recruitment and retention of international researchers. This is because talent from the world's leading research institutions is attracted by the promotion of innovative ideas and career development opportunities and not by restrictions and limitations on professional and career development. In addition, the 4+2 model does not address the complexity of an academic career, which is depicted far more realistically in the EU Council recommendations using the R2 and R3 phases. Where, for example, is the R3 phase to be found in the draft amendment?

Our demands against the proposed 4+2 model and against the negative individual and systemic consequences that clearly emerge from it are as follows:

1. We demand an academic system in Germany that offers every excellent early career researcher the opportunity to develop their academic independence after completing their doctorate. This does not require a prescriptive and restrictive law on a period of development, which would also level the playing field for all institutions and disciplines. Rather a framework law is needed within which career and development paths can be developed transparently and



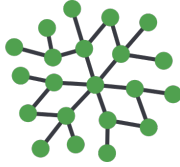
tailored to disciplinary requirements by the various German stakeholders (AUFs and universities) in accordance with globally applicable standards.

2. We call for clear, transparent and objective assessment standards for both the R2 phase and the R3 phase of a research career, as set out in the EU Council recommendations of December 2023. We would like to emphasize that an academic career does not necessarily only have to be a research career but can also be a teaching career. The latter is mainly realized at universities.

3. We call for a career system for universities, funded by the federal and state governments, which creates permanent positions for the central task area of teaching in addition to and independently of top-level research. In view of the latest PISA study, Germany must ensure more than ever before that the next generation of students receive the best possible education through teaching. It is therefore urgent to create career paths in teaching for academics that offer early stability by means of permanent positions for these long-term tasks. This stability could, for example, already be provided after two years of temporary employment, parallel to the traineeship at schools.

4. In return, we are calling for professors to be released from their high teaching load for research so that German universities can conduct more top-level research on a broad front and remain competitive, especially in the current age of transformation, a goal set by the amendment. Here, for example, a competitive system financed by the federal government could be established that makes more research time available for periods that can be planned in the medium term.

We understand that a reform of the WissZeitVG alone cannot achieve this without amending other laws and implementing personnel structure reforms at German research institutions. Trying to eradicate the current weaknesses of the WissZeitVG using the 4+2 model does not provide improvements, but rather makes the situation worse on all levels, which will ultimately be to the loss of all German citizens. Simply shortening the R2 and R3 phases is not a solution for science in Germany, but quite the opposite. We therefore strongly oppose the amendment, both as postdoctoral researchers and as citizens and international researchers in Germany.



The aim of our statement, which was limited to the problems of the 4+2 model, was to show that the second step should be taken before the first step, if the above-mentioned objectives of the amendment are to be implemented on the basis of "a further development of the fixed-term regulations in the WissZeitVG" (Gesetzesentwurf der Bundesregierung, Entwurf eines Gesetzes zur Änderung des Befristungsrechts für die Wissenschaft, p. 1). We therefore expect our statement to prompt a rethink among those responsible and hope that the structural problems of the German higher education system will at least be constructively addressed and ideally resolved before the WissZeitVG is amended. We also urge you to actively involve us as networks in the process of solving the structural problems as the target group most affected at all stages of decision-making. We look forward to your feedback and contact regarding the next steps.

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This statement was critically discussed with postdoc networks on 13 May 2024 and adjusted accordingly.

The following networks sign this concept together with Max Planck PostdocNet:

Göttingen Campus Postdoc Network Committee

Helmholtz Association Postdoc Network (HAPN) - Endorsed by AWI PostDoc Team, GEOMAR Postdoc+ Team, Helmholtz Munich Postdoc Association, Postdoc Representatives DZNE, PostDoc Network (PDN) DKFZ, MDC Postdoc Association and DESY Postdoc Representatives (Zeuthen)

Munich Postdoc Network

Postdoc Council of the Postdoc Center of Technische Universität Dresden and Helmholtz-Zentrum Dresden-Rossendorf

PostDoc-Vertretung Oldenburg

Rede Apoena (Apoena Netzwerk)

