

Petition
Academia: End the perpetual cycle of fixed-term employment!

Launched by: Alliance against the Perpetual Cycle of Fixed-Term Employment in Academia

To: Federal Minister Dorothee Bär, Prof. Dr Karl Lauterbach (Chair of the relevant committee in the Bundestag), Nicole Gohlke (Deputy Chair of the committee) and other members of the German Bundestag

Moving to a new city every one or two years, repeatedly postponing plans to have children, and living with the constant fear of soon losing one's job. This is the reality for many academics in Germany.

For example, almost nine out of ten academic staff at universities are employed on fixed-term contracts. 42 per cent of employment contracts have a duration of less than one year.[1,2]

These precarious working conditions are underpinned by the 'Fixed-Term Academic Contracts Act' (WissZeitVG). The Act allows academic staff to remain in fixed-term employment for much longer than workers in other professions. **The WissZeitVG has made fixed-term contracts the norm and undermines equal opportunities.**

These uncertain career paths particularly disadvantage researchers with children, care responsibilities, disabilities, chronic illnesses or a lack of financial security for their families. The perpetual cycle of fixed-term employment creates anxiety about the future, makes long-term planning impossible and puts pressure on staff to conform.

Sign the Petition now!

Excellent research and high-quality teaching require long-term prospects, stable terms, and Continuous research programmes, democratic participation – and staff who do not burn out.

Ms Bär, initiate a paradigm shift!
Abolish the Fixed-Term Academic Contracts Act!

Why is this important?

We depend on a strong research sector. For example, to tackle the social and technological challenges posed by the climate crisis or digitalisation. To inspire people to pursue a career in research, we need good working conditions.

The Federal Government's new draft bill on modernising the law on fixed-term contracts in academia does not solve these problems. And as if that were not enough**: the Federal Government is now also planning to double the period for which fixed-term contracts can be granted without objective grounds under general labour law, from the current two years to up to four years**. By the end of 2030, up to six contract extensions are to be permitted – even with the same employer. We firmly reject this.

There has already been an intense debate on reform in recent years. Unfortunately, this has so far been without success. Our demands for fundamental reform of the postdoctoral phase and for the removal of statutory restrictions on collective bargaining have been completely ignored **A fundamental improvement in working conditions cannot be expected as long as the WissZeitVG remains in place.**

What should replace the Fixed-Term Academic Contracts Act?

The academic sector needs a good balance between general employment law, collective agreements and adequate employment regulations for the doctoral phase, for example in the form of a doctoral support act. Following a structured transitional phase, these regulations must be supplemented at the level of the federal states and academic institutions with further measures to improve working conditions in academia, particularly for researchers who have completed their doctorates. This is what we are advocating for.

Why are fixed-term regulations only needed until the completion of a PhD?

After completing a PhD, further career progression is possible on the basis of publications, increasing professional experience and relevant further training –right up to a professorship. However, these career steps no longer justify the routine use of fixed-term contracts. Anyone who holds a doctoral degree is academically qualified. The notion of a postdoctoral training phase lasting several years serves merely to justify further fixed-term contracts.

What employment arrangements should be in place for student assistants?

In principle, student employees should be offered permanent employment. For student employees carrying out academic or artistic support work, only de-registration from the higher education institution should constitute a condition for the termination of the permanent employment contract.

Further information can be found in our position paper: https://kurz.gew.app/popa-wisszeitvg

Supporters of the petition:

- Bundeskonferenz der Frauen- und Gleichstellungsbeauftragten an Hochschulen e.V. (bukof e. V.)
- Bundesverband Promovierende e. V.
- Bundesweites Netzwerk Studentischer Tarifvertragsinitiativen (TVStud)
- Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund (DGB)
- Deutsche Gesellschaft Juniorprofessur e.V. (DGJ)
- Fraunhofer Gesamtbetriebsrat
- freier zusammenschluss von student*innenschaften (fzs)
- Gesamtbetriebsrat der Max-Planck-Gesellschaft
- Gewerkschaft Erziehung und Wissenschaft (GEW)
- Network of Doctoral Researcher Networks (N^2)
- Netzwerk für Gute Arbeit in der Wissenschaft (NGAWiss)
- Netzwerk nachhaltige Wissenschaft
- Personal- und Betriebsräte der Leibniz-Gemeinschaft – Koordinierungsgruppe (PBL)
- Thesis - Interdisziplinäres Netzwerk für Promovierende und Promovierte e. V.
- Vereinte Dienstleistungsgewerkschaft (ver.di)

1 Own calculations based on: Statistisches Bundesamt: Statistischer Bericht – Statistik des Hochschulpersonal 2024. https://www.destatis.de/DE/Themen/Gesellschaft-Umwelt/Bildung-Forschung-Kultur/Hochschulen/Publikationen/Downloads-Hochschulen/statistischer-berichthochschulpersonal-2110440247005.html?templateQueryString=hochschulpersonal.

2 Jörn Sommer u. a.: Evaluation des novellierten Wissenschaftszeitvertragsgesetzes. Bericht. Berlin/Hannover 2022. https://www.bmftr.bund.de/SharedDocs/Downloads/DE/2022/abschlussbericht-evaluation-wisszeitvg.pdf?blob=publication-File&v=4.

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