

WissZeitVG – The main changes of the draft legislation (*Referentenentwurf*, June 2023) compared to the currently valid WissZeitVG¹

Introduction of minimum contract terms:

Minimum contract terms for all phases of an academic career are to be prescribed in the WissZeitVG: Three years minimum contract duration for the initial contract in the phase before the doctorate and two years after the doctorate, as well as one year minimum contract duration for employment during studies. These can only be undercut in justified exceptional cases. The still too high proportion of short fixed-term contracts was a major result of the evaluation of the WissZeitVG.

Relationship between qualification and third-party fixed-term contracts:

A temporal priority of the qualification time limit is to be introduced. This means that a fixed-term contract for third-party funding should only be possible after the maximum fixed-term period in the qualification fixed-term contract has been exhausted. In particular, this is intended to make the minimum contract periods and the regulation on the automatic extension of the employment contract, for example, when maternity and parental leave are taken during this period, binding for all.

Fixed-term regulations in the postdoc phase:

In this regard, a new 4+2 model will be introduced: The maximum fixed-term period in the qualification phase after the doctorate is to be reduced from six to four years. As before, this period will be extended by any unused fixed-term periods from the phase before the doctorate, as well as extensions of two years each for caring for minor children and for disability or serious chronic illness. As early as possible, but generally no later than after four years of a fixed-term qualification, a decision should be made as to whether scientists have a prospect of permanent employment in science, for example a professorship or another permanent position in addition to the professorship. At the same time, the possibility of a fixed term of up to four years ensures sufficient flexibility for differences in the various subjects or subject cultures and the diversity of career paths in science.

A further fixed-term of up to two years is then only possible with a follow-up commitment, i.e. under the condition that an unlimited employment relationship is concluded upon achievement of previously agreed scientific and artistic performance. This is intended to integrate the tenure-track concept into the WissZeitVG.

Minimum duration of the contract for positions with a qualification time limit:

The scope of positions with a qualification time limit must be at least one quarter of the regular working time. This establishes a minimum working time for qualification contracts, which at the same time opens up the necessary flexibility to enable positions with a relatively small

¹ Text based on: <https://www.bmbf.de/bmbf/shareddocs/faq/wisszeitvg-reform.html>, 9/11/2023, translated into English with deepl.com.

scope in principle if required. In particular, as in the previous legal situation, scholarship holders (e.g. in a doctoral scholarship) can take on a quarter-time position at a university or research institution at the same time. Irrespective of this, the standard employment relationship according to general principles of employment law is the full-time position. This also applies to work in science.

What does the 4+2 model mean in practice?

A fixed-term contract without a follow-up commitment is to be permissible only for a maximum of four years after the doctorate. The four-year maximum fixed-term period may be extended in individual cases due to unused fixed-term periods from the phase prior to the doctorate as well as due to the family and inclusion policy component. At the latest after the four years (plus the above-mentioned extension options) have been exhausted, a further fixed-term of up to two years should only be possible with a follow-up commitment. The four years (plus extension options) of the first phase are to be understood as the maximum and the two years of the second phase as the minimum. In practice, a contract with a follow-up commitment could also last longer than two years if the previous fixed-term periods were not exhausted. For example, after a three-year initial contract without follow-up commitment, a further three-year contract could be concluded, then with follow-up commitment. It would also be possible for a six-year contract with a follow-up commitment to be concluded immediately after the doctorate.

What is the goal of the 4+2 model for postdocs?

The primary goal of the introduction of the new establishment phase in the 4+2 model is to increase the predictability and commitment for employees through the secure prospect of permanent employment. The model is open to various career paths and follow-up perspectives. An example of this could be structured programs for particularly talented scientists in the career phases R2 and R3 (junior research group leaders, etc.), which are regularly designed for five to six years. The 4+2 model offers an additional fixed-term option that is in line with the interests of the individual and guarantees both the necessary time for scientific work and the prospect of an adequate permanent position in the event that the scientist proves his or her worth. The model also offers the possibility, for example, of attracting scientists to a clearly defined career path for specialized activities in addition to the professorship at an early stage after the doctorate.

Full text of draft legislation
Referentenentwurf (German)²



Full text of current WissZeitVG³
(2007, German)



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² https://www.bmbf.de/SharedDocs/Downloads/de/2023/2023-06-wisszeitvg-referentenentwurf.pdf?__blob=publicationFile&v=1,9/11/2023.

³ <https://www.gesetze-im-internet.de/wisszeitvg/WissZeitVG.pdf> 9/11/2023.