

**German Federal Parliament – Expert exchange in a public commission meeting (October 19th 2022, 9.30am).
Topic: Diversity in the structure of personnel, in career paths and in scientific excellence.**



N² Statement in front of the parliament's commission:

*“Thank you so much for the invitation to today’s exchange. I am representing N², Network of Doctoral Researcher Networks of non-university research organizations. Our network focuses on the **basic working conditions which should be created to ensure scientific excellence and diversity in a sustainable manner.**”*

For this, we identify four pillars that should be considered by public policy:

Prevention of power abuse, abolition of stipends, 100% payment for full-time work, and minimum contract durations of 4 years.

In the following, I will elaborate on each of these points:

- (1) We need to stay active against **power abuse**. Surveys indicate that one eighth of Doctoral Researchers (henceforth: DRs) has already experienced conflicts with their leaders, whereas half of DRs say that they do not report such conflicts out of fear of consequences. At the same time, we observe that many DRs are subject to discrimination and micro-aggressions due to their gender identity, nationality, or ethnic background (as examples). Of course, both issues are unacceptable. Therefore, we request more mandatory, regular trainings in the fields of leadership and diversity as well as conflict management. In addition, dependency structures should be reduced. Supervision, evaluation, and payment need to be disentangled, and they should not all depend on one and the same person. Good supervision and the existence of as well as adherence to a supervision agreement should be ensured. And of course, reporting lines should be improved continuously.*
- (2) We advocate **employment contracts instead of stipends**. Why? Stipends, in most cases, imply a lack of social security, lack of public health insurance, lack of contribution to the retirement system, and difficulties regarding residence permit. Often stipends also yield (approximately 500€) less net income compared to employment with contracts. This implies that stipends disadvantage all those who are not financially safe, parents, people with special health constraints, or people without German citizenship. Therefore, we request that funds acquired through stipends are handed to the employed researchers in the form of contracts that are subject to social insurance contributions.*
- (3) We request **full payment for full-time work** for all research fields. As DRs, we are highly qualified and significantly contribute to scientific insights. Of course, our scientific contribution provides the basis for our doctorate, but it is also ‘owned’ by the research institution and serves the public. Moreover, we know that DRs already work more than even a full-time position would demand. In any case, contracts should list, transparently, all the necessary tasks of DRs and specify appropriate, realistic, weekly working hours. For contracts falling under the law ‘WissZeitVG’, the term ‘Qualification’ should be defined more narrowly. Contracts offering part-time payment for teaching and thereby*

pushing research work into DRs' 'leisure time', are completely unacceptable. Such contract conditions systematically disadvantage certain groups of people.¹

- (4) *We know from surveys that the completion of a PhD takes, on average, between 4.7 and 5.7 years, depending on the research field. Thus, we request a **minimum contract duration of 4 years** for all DRs to provide an approximation to this scientific reality. This would also increase diversity in science, as too short contract durations create time pressure and financial insecurity. This is especially fatal for financially vulnerable DRs, for those providing care to others or those depending on care themselves.*

Of course, still the goal may remain that a dissertation is completed within 3 years, but this also needs to be supported by the scientific institutions – we are happy to talk more about the necessary structural change in our subsequent discussion.²

Here, we'd also like to point out that legislators would indeed have the ability to stipulate realistic minimum contract durations for the time of the PhD – for example, in the context of the amendment of the 'WissZeitVG'.

*Last, but not least: our surveys show that many DRs consider science as a rather unattractive place to work over the long term. It is clear that not all DRs can become professors. However, an **increase in Tenure-Track positions** would be desirable as well as a **change of trend towards more types of permanent employment**, such as the establishment of professional categories with permanent tasks in teaching and research **aside from professorship**. This could, for example, help to counteract the '**Leaky Pipeline**' effect, meaning keeping more highly qualified women with a doctoral degree in science. In addition, it would increase the international attractiveness of the German scientific system.*

We want to highlight that the non-university research organizations already have taken important steps in many of the points we have raised. However, for both, universities and non-university research organizations, we still see room for improvement and are very much looking forward to continuing working together on these topics.

As bottom line: We all want to enthuse the most brilliant and innovative brains with regards to the 'scientific base' Germany and we want to remain competitive internationally. It would be a pity if we missed this goal, simply because our local contract conditions are not up to date anymore and disadvantage all those who cannot afford a career in science under these current conditions.³

¹ Explanation of the abbreviation 'WissZeitVG': this refers to the so-called Wissenschaftszeitvertragsgesetz, a law regulating fixed-term contracts in science in Germany.

² In the discussion, we mentioned important support structures like comprehensive on-boarding and the implementation of TACs (thesis advisory committees; consisting of more experienced researchers who should give advice on (not evaluate) the DR's research project(s) and their feasibility, skills and career development, as well as check for supervision quality).

³ This statement was given by Alina Fahrenwaldt (Deputy Spokesperson of Max Planck PhNet), who was representing N² – Network of Doctoral Researcher Networks. N² unites more than 16.000 doctoral researchers of Germany's non-university research organizations to discuss the future of science – its working conditions, career perspectives and impact on society. The mentioned survey results were provided by the regular survey reports of N² as well as the BuWiN 2021 (Bundesbericht Wissenschaftlicher Nachwuchs).