

Pilot phase of the "New Career Paths at RUB" concept

GUIDELINES OF THE GERMAN RECTORS' CONFERENCE AND THE JUNGE AKADEMIE

The German Rectors' Conference (HRK) and the Junge Akademie have published a joint paper on the need for cultural change at universities with regard to academic career paths (published on June 24, 2024). In it, they recommend that individual universities develop a framework for Early Career Researchers (ECRs) after their doctorate in order to create more reliability and transparency in the career planning of ECRs. These university-specific orientation frameworks should contain personnel development concepts, offers for additional qualifications and job concepts. It should be taken into account that universities prepare young academics not only for careers within the academic system, but also for research and management activities in business and society. In addition, ECRs should have better access to information about the various career paths available. In this context, the universities are recommended to also make statements on subject-specific requirements for permanent and fixed-term employment relationships in the field of doctoral academic staff and their development. Together with the faculties, permanent academic tasks are to be identified and concepts for the necessary job portfolio drawn up.

RUB'S GOALS WITH THE "NEW CAREER PATHS" CONCEPT

With the "New Career Paths" (NKW) concept first presented in spring 2023, RUB anticipated the HRK recommendations to a certain extent and developed them into a transparent and internationally compatible qualification framework for young academics on campus.

The NKW are not intended to abolish proven career paths, but to supplement them. In recent years, RUB has successfully implemented measures that have motivated young scientists in many faculties and led to numerous careers. These successes were and are supplemented by external programs from the DFG, the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation, the state of North Rhine-Westphalia and others. Many careers run via third-party projects, which offer the corresponding scope for the development of scientific careers. The existing career paths are to be maintained and expanded as far as possible.

At the same time, quite a few young academics in the qualification phase suffer from a lack of autonomy as well as a lack of certainty of expectations and recognition: From the first day of their doctorate to the last day of their postdoc period, they are merely "research associates", a job title that is not internationally compatible and does not adequately express the increase in competence. The current shortage of skilled workers on the labor market is exacerbating the situation and is leading to recruitment problems in quite a few disciplines. Our aim as RUB is therefore to become attractive for young academics from Germany and abroad through transparent, clearly structured career paths that are accompanied by certainty of expectation and appreciation as well as more autonomy, and to support the ECRs who are already at RUB in a targeted manner through a transparent personnel development concept.

This will improve RUB's position in the competition for the best minds and make it more connectable internationally.

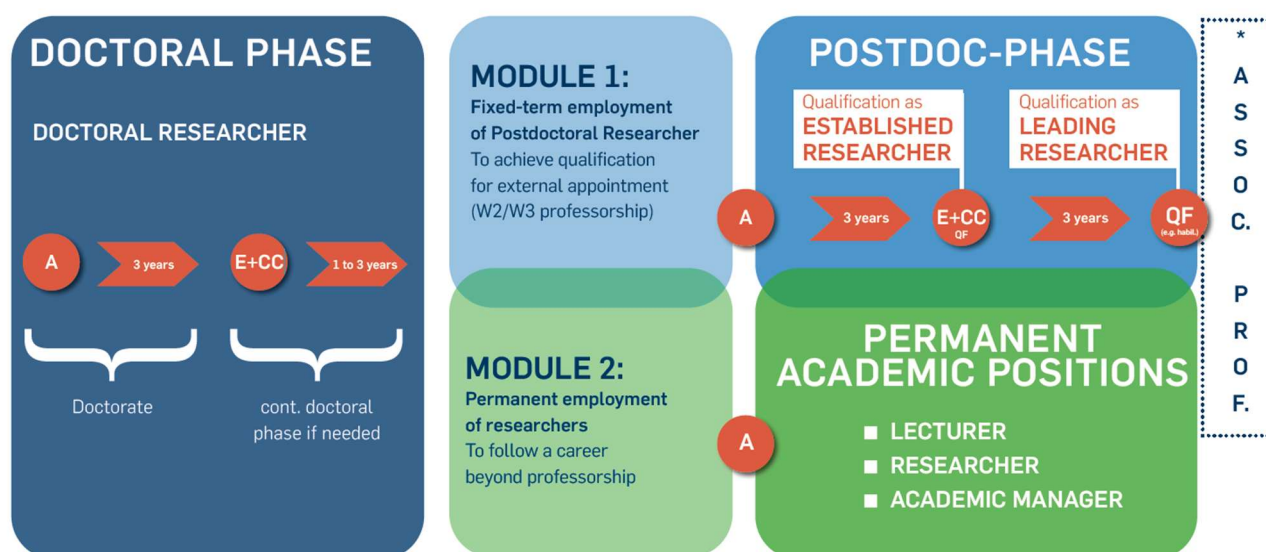
After the promotion phase, the vast majority of doctoral graduates leave the university to work in the non-academic sector. For those who want to pursue a career within the university, there are two different paths to follow: Path number 1 is postdocs (**Module 1**) who are employed for a limited period of time and who aim to further qualify themselves academically (in teaching and research) **for an external appointment to a W2/W3 professorship** after their doctorate. Path number 2 is young academics who are aiming for a career **beyond a university professorship** as a permanently employed researcher, lecturer or academic manager (**Module 2**). In doing so, RUB is going into a direction that many universities are currently going in a similar form following the recommendations of the HRK.

On module 1: Clear structure, a supportive feedback culture, evaluation processes and career advice are intended to promote young talent in a targeted manner. With the planned career levels of Doctoral Researcher, Post-Doctoral Researcher, Established Researcher and Leading Researcher, designations are assigned to the respective career levels that make the different competencies and qualifications visible and do not subsume everyone indiscriminately under "research associates". In exceptional cases of outstanding performance in research and teaching, it should be possible for an Established or Leading Researcher to be appointed to a TV-L position, if there is a corresponding need in the respective faculty (and in agreement with the faculty).

On module 2: As part of a personnel planning concept, it should be possible to fill positions on a permanent basis . These permanent positions respond to the needs of the faculties and scientific institutions and at the same time open up reliable career prospects for people who are not seeking a professorship, but an academic career at the university. They can work as Researchers, Lecturers or Academic Managers, depending on the skills profile and the needs of the institution. The aim of the module is not necessarily to create new permanent positions, as some areas are already well positioned, but to rethink established structures in order to arrive at a more systemic and task-related approach that is tailored to the organizational needs of an area (a faculty, an institute, etc.).

Talent development is supported at all levels by services from the RUB Research School, the Research Department of Department 1, the Human Resources Department, academic personnel development in Department 6, the Research Academy Ruhr and the Center for Scientific Didactics and is linked to equality and diversity policy goals. Reliable and transparent framework conditions are particularly important for women, people with care responsibilities, First Academics, people with an international family history and people with disabilities, and thus for groups of people who are significantly underrepresented in the academic field, so that they can opt for an academic career if they are talented. They should be given special support if required. The model will be linked to target agreements on equality and diversity in the future.

CAREER PATHS FOR ECR WITHIN THE UNIVERSITY



A = Advertisement, E = Evaluation, CA = Career Counselling, QF = Qualifying Feature, * = optional, if qualified

Module 1: Qualification for an external appointment/for a professorship

The principle of the new career paths is based on transparent career development, if possible with three-year contracts (should it remain at 12 years WissZeitVG), on the basis of qualifications, evaluation and performance assessment. A distinction is made between *four career stages*, which are linked to specific steps in the qualification process and range from the start of the doctorate to the determination of eligibility for appointment:

Doctoral researcher (up to six years = R1):

Doctoral phase, divided into two contracts. Evaluation and career counselling after the first 3 years, then follow-up contract (between 1 and 3 years) until the doctorate (R1). Very many researchers leave the university after completing their doctorate, few go on to gain further qualifications. They can apply for an advertised postdoc position with a doctorate and further qualification (e.g. publication, stay abroad for research purposes, acquisition of third-party funding in combination with proof of special university didactic competence, etc. - as determined by the faculty). The international advertisement of vacant postdoc positions and the competitive filling of positions is planned on a regular basis. In cases in which the faculty asserts an interest based on the specific qualifications of candidates, a postdoc position may not be advertised. Depending on the culture within the field, it is also possible to advertise the position at the beginning of the Established Researcher career stage.

Postdoctoral Researcher (3 years = R2):

Researchers research and teach under a three-year contract with the aim of gaining further qualification (the qualifying features are determined by the faculty). If these are achieved and determined through evaluation (experts close to the subject), the researcher becomes an

Established Researcher(another 3 years = R3)

and receives another three-year contract for further research/acquisition of third-party funding etc., (to be determined on a faculty-specific basis, possibly through target agreements) combined with the acquisition of further teaching skills. If an Established Researcher achieves a habilitation or is determined to be suitable for habilitation in a formal procedure and thus eligible for appointment, they become a

Leading Researcher.

A Leading Researcher may be awarded the title of Assoc. Prof. earlier than after five years of independent teaching if an external opinion was consulted for the habilitation or the committee (e.g. tenure track committee) that determines eligibility for appointment.

Researchers, Established and Leading Researchers are to be given more rights and duties as their qualifications increase. This means that they should be given responsibility for auditing and, if necessary, personnel, supervise degree theses, be involved in committees and, if possible, be able to manage their own budget. The details must be set on a subject-specific basis. Close cooperation between the ECR and experienced scientists can be an important factor for the long-term success of the career concept and scientific development.

Module 2: Permanent positions beyond the professorship

With regard to permanent academic positions, three job profiles have become established in the discussion. They were summarized in the HRK's "Guidelines for permanent positions at universities in addition to professorships", i.e. positions that represent career options beyond the professorial career. These are Researcher, Lecturer and Academic Manager, all three profiles are required for permanent academic tasks. A doctorate is usually required. Exceptions are possible for Academic Managers.

Researcher: They are mainly active in research, conduct research, manage projects and participate in joint projects, publish and give lectures. They can also look after laboratories or large appliances.

They should also have time for independent research and teaching. Their teaching load should not exceed 8 semester hours per week.

Lecturer: They are mainly involved in teaching, plan courses, conduct them independently and with a high level of research relevance and advise students. They follow new developments in higher education. They contribute to strategic developments in teaching. Their teaching load should not exceed 12 semester hours per week.

Academic Manager: They mainly take on tasks in science or infrastructure management or in knowledge exchange. They work at the interface between university administration on the one hand and research and teaching (approx. 4 semester hours per week) on the other. They participate conceptually and strategically in the further development of the organization in research, teaching and knowledge exchange.

These job profiles will be specified for RUB in the pilot phase. In particular, the term "Lecturer" may need to be adapted because the term "Lecturer" as used in the guidelines of the HRK and the Junge Akademie is different from "Lecturer" in the North Rhine-Westphalian Higher Education Act.

General conditions: In principle, it must be taken into account that permanent contracts must be concluded for permanent tasks in terms of service and labor law (see Guidelines on Good Employment of RUB and the agreement "Good Employment" of NRW). To this end, the faculties determine their requirements for academic permanent positions beyond professorships and set them out in a binding personnel planning concept. After the pilot phase, it should be considered whether and in what form the personnel planning concept and its further development should be included in perspective agreements with the Rectorate.

The WissZeitVG, which allows for fixed-term contracts due to qualification and third-party efficiency, must be observed for the temporary employment of academic staff. The various sources of funding used to finance personnel also play an important role. The respective usage guidelines must be observed for all funding except in the state grant budget (including state program funds such as QVM and ZSL).

Changing Lanes

An Established Researcher or Leading Researcher may be appointed in individual cases if the faculty, the professor who has supervised them to date and the Rectorate agree. The position is then located at the faculty or institute. In the course of this, the professorship providing the funding can be relieved of 2 semester hours per week in teaching, which the Established or Leading Researcher takes over. An individual contract must be concluded with the Established or Leading Researcher with regard to the teaching contract, which corresponds to the capacity of the unit (the institute/subject). It is also possible to change tracks from Module 2 to Module 1 if, for example, a researcher (Module 2) receives an appointment to a W2/W3 professorship.

FRAMEWORK CONDITIONS FOR THE PILOT UNITS

The NKW have been tested in a pilot phase since the winter semester 2024/25. In the pilot phase, faculties or central scientific institutions voluntarily decide to participate in the sense of an *opt-in* approach and concretize the general framework conditions with regard to discipline and faculty-specific requirements (with regard to qualifying features, concretization of the evaluation procedures, rights and obligations, etc.).

To participate as a pilot unit, it is sufficient to declare that at least one position in the post doc area is advertised and filled according to the new career paths or that the institution gives its existing staff the opportunity to qualify according to the career concept. Pilot units receive central funding for international advertisements during the period in question via [Academics.com](https://www.academics.com).

The focus is on voluntariness and the willingness to try out new things together. Therefore, it is not necessary that an entire faculty participate in the project; institutes or several professorships in one department can also take part. Pilot units do not necessarily have to implement both modules.

Pilots can also work with the administration to develop or specify a faculty-specific permanent position concept for Researchers, Lecturers and Academic Managers: How many permanent positions are needed for what purpose and can they be financed from the existing resources of the department (perspectively)? Here, too, the discipline-specific cultures and perspectives are taken into account there will be no "one size fits all", but rather a system that does justice to the different departmental logics in a comprehensive university.

How do faculties benefit from participating in the pilot phase?

As part of joining the model, the pilot units are offered a personnel development concept that responds to the need for stronger strategic personnel planning in the academic sector, specifically promoting talent in a targeted manner and contributing to the profile of the subject.

The pilot units have the opportunity to help shape the career model and the associated personnel development concept for the scientific community, to concretize it and to set their own priorities. For example, the aim is to develop a verifiable supervision agreement (sample template), to consider how the qualification (e.g. for the "Established Researcher" career level) should be determined or what fundamental changes should be made to the model.

The pilot units are financially supported when publishing international advertisements. The possible reduction of the teaching load for professorships that make a TVL position available for continuation serves as a further incentive (not only in the pilot phase, but also beyond).

One advantage of the NKW is not only the attractive job profiles and greater transparency, but also the fact that, if the model is applied consistently, a decision for or against an academic career is made earlier than at present and jobs are not filled for an unnecessarily long time by people who have no prospect of remaining in the academic system for the long term. In this way, the university is also fulfilling its social responsibility, as the non-academic labor market is in urgent need of highly qualified specialists. These, in turn, profit from deciding the direction of their own development as early as possible.

For the faculties, the model results in the need for stronger strategic personnel planning. The added value lies in offering people at early career stages a clearly structured path, which helps ensure that talented academics remain in the academic system.

What are the general conditions for the NKW in the pilot phase?

The model is implemented **within the available resources**. For the funding of all positions, but in particular the permanent positions, the purposes of the various sources of funding must be taken into account. Funding a permanent position from the state subsidy budget can be facilitated relatively easily. In the case of länder-specific programs such as QVM and ZSL, it must be taken into account that these are dynamic.

The financing of permanent positions from other third-party funds is only possible in exceptional cases and requires special risk management.

The career designations should be used for all appropriately qualified (existing) employees in "middle positions" and are independent of the service law designations. The use of the designation follows the logic of the NKW: If an evaluation is required at the transition from one phase to the next, then this also applies to the existing employees.

The **evaluation procedures** should be lean and effective at the same time. The evaluation of the appointment of a Leading Researcher is based on the (faculty-specific) criteria of the tenure track procedures and is to be specified in the pilot phase. The quality of teaching and the university's didactic training is an integral part of the evaluation. If a fixed-term Leading Researcher successfully applies for an external W2/W3 professorship or leaves the university for other reasons, the TVL position reverts to the original "hiring" professorship.

Evaluation and international advertisement are assumed in Module 1 as a means of quality assurance and as a consequence of increasing autonomy with the later career phases. This ensures that there is a quality-focused selection process that utilizes an international applicant pool. Of course, a job advertisement is also open to internal employees. A job advertisement also requires regular and structured discussions with internal personnel about their career prospects in academia. An international job advertisement does not mean that internal applicants are disadvantaged; if successful, it increases their acceptance and prospects of success in the system. It goes without saying that there is no mandatory job advertisements for current job holders during the transition phase. Only when a contract comes to an end, the position must be advertised internationally. Permanent positions in Module 2 must always be advertised.

Shared facilities (laboratories, workshops, etc.) are a prerequisite for success of the model in experimental subjects to enable more independent research for researchers in the new career model.

Third-party funding: Third-party funds acquired in cooperation with the university professor who provides for a position to be made permanent, are attributed to the Established or Leading Researcher who (co-)acquired them. With regard to the POM, the third-party funds are still allocated to the professorship/unit.

As before, the **scope of the job** is based on the [RUB Guidelines](#) and the contract on good employment conditions.

Family and sick leave are taken into account with corresponding contract extensions. Researchers with disabilities receive compensation for disadvantages.

The **status framework** (including the rights and obligations assigned to it) of the career levels (esp. Established and Leading Researcher) has yet to be defined and designed in the pilot phase.