

avuba working group (AAG)
on appointment and employment conditions of assistants

Position paper
on the planned reform of appointment and employment conditions for doctoral
and postdoctoral researchers at the University of Basel

Short version

1. Initial position and process to date

- Motivation for reform
 - Alignment of long-standing disparities in degrees of employment existing among different groups of doctoral and postdoctoral researchers which partially depend on the nature of the subject
- Catalyst for current reform efforts
 - Modification of appointment conditions for SNSF-funded doctoral and postdoctoral researchers
- Calling of an informal working group by Ch. Tschumi, Administrative Director
 - Members of Group III: four assistants (two doctoral and two postdoctoral researchers)
- First informal presentation of the reform plans in an avuba lunchtime meeting (on February 19, 2014)
- Founding of the avuba working group on appointment and employment conditions of assistants (short version: AAG) in order to represent their interests

2. Description of the reform model proposed by the Administrative Director (on February 19, 2014)

(a) Doctoral researchers

- Degree of employment and salary level: general degree of employment of 70% without adjustment of the salary.
 - Regarding assistants to professors: Increase of the regular degree of employment from 50% to 70% which results in a decrease of the hourly rate
 - Regarding project assistants: Decrease of the regular degree of employment from 100% to 70% which results in an increase of the hourly rate
- Teaching duties:
 - All doctoral researchers (assistants to professors and project assistants) are assigned a mandatory workload of 2 hours per week during the term. They will be exempt from teaching every fourth semester. De facto this results in teaching duties of 1.5 hours per week during the term on a normal contract period of 4 years

(b) Postdoctoral researchers

- Degree of employment:
 - Degree of employment between 40% and 100%. Generally, this should be at least 70%
- Salary level:
 - Remuneration of all postdoctoral researchers based on SNSF regulations
- Teaching duties:
 - Workload of 4 hours per week during the term with a degree of employment of 100%

3. Negative aspects of the reform model

- Reduction of average salary levels
- Inflexible and general employment levels / decrease in options for additional employment
- Hindered work-life balance
 - Formal increase in workload which will restrict available time without improving the financial conditions
- The analysis of the initial position is incomplete and undifferentiated
- The aims and success criteria of the reform remain unclear
 - Attempts to harmonize all subgroups results in a levelling of historically evolved differences in employment conditions
- The consequences and outcomes of the reform remain largely unclear
 - Insufficient participation opportunities for assistants and other parties. To date, only four assistants have been involved in shaping the reform as part of an informal working group of the Office of the Administrative Director.
- Insufficient transparency on the process
 - Consequently, this has created a great deal of uncertainty
- Unreasonable time frame for the implementation of the reform as of January 1, 2015

4. Specific demands of assistants

(a) Lasting improvements for early career researchers

- Adjustment of the salary level to the degree of employment by means of an increase in the staff budget for teaching and research assistants
- Consistency between formal contracts and actual working hours
- Guarantee for flexible degrees of employment
- Involvement of social partners according to the staff regulations¹

(b) A reform that is appropriate to context, purposeful and sensitive to consequences

- Differentiated status quo analysis with consideration of the following points:
 - Clarification of the reform objectives and success criteria
 - Calculation of the direct and indirect consequences of measures

(c) Broad support base, transparent structure and a deceleration of the decision making process

- Opening up and broadly supporting the reform process in the form of a Senate committee
- Documentation and access for all university members to all information
- Postponement of the date at which the reform will be implemented and place the reform in an appropriate time frame

¹ As stated in the staff regulations of the University of Basel from February 19, 2009: "(...) Staff associations are involved in the decision-making process for fundamentally important HR issues at an early stage."
(http://www.unibas.ch/doc/doc_download.cfm?uuid=B719F694C09F28B63477F80C8B900967&vobj_id=449)