

Response

from avuba to the draft revision of appointment conditions for doctoral and postdoctoral students issued by the Office of the Administrative Director (June 16, 2015)

Initial situation

The Office of the Administrative Director first discussed its plans to reform appointment conditions back in 2013 in an informal working group it convened, which included a total of four avuba assistants (two doctoral and two postdoctoral students). It also presented the current status of the reform to a wider audience of assistants during an avuba lunchtime meeting on February 19, 2014, to which avuba had invited its members. The model presented met with a very critical response from most of the assistants present. As a result, several avuba members initiated a discussion process that culminated in the founding of an official avuba working group. Since then, the working group has monitored the process and the Office of the Administrative Director has involved the group in an advisory role several times during the development of the current draft. We thank the Office of the Administrative Director for allowing us to voice our opinions in the form of this response.

When an earlier version of the reform was presented to the faculty heads in early 2014, the working group compiled a [position paper](#), which was supported by avuba as a whole and forms the basis for the following assessment of the proposed reform. It contains procedural, conceptual and material requirements.

In *procedural terms*, the group of assistants calls for the various subgroups affected by the reform (doctoral and postdoctoral students from different faculties and positions) to be extensively and substantially involved in the process and for the policy-forming, decision-making and communication processes associated with the reform to be made transparent and given a timeframe appropriate to the scope and complexity of the reform.

avuba is pleased that the Office of the Administrative Director has adopted large portions of these *process-related* requirements.

The planned introduction of new salary structures was initially moved back one year to January 2016, meeting the demand for a slower pace of reform. The process was also made more transparent and given a broader support base. During this process, the working group was involved in developing the new reform proposal now available. In November 2014, the Office of the Administrative Director presented the working group with a new concept that has been discussed and further developed since January 2015 in three meetings between the Office of the Administrative Director and a group of delegates selected by the working group. The results of the meetings have been discussed within the avuba working group and any comments have been passed on to the Office of the Administrative Director by the representatives. The proposal has been amended again since the last meeting between avuba and the Office of the Administrative Director (March 31, 2015); however, these last changes were not agreed with the working group delegates.

avuba's position on the current draft

General stance

Overall, avuba concludes that the reform proposal submitted for consultation has been drawn up under consideration of avuba's positions and knowledge. However, some aspects deviate from the conceptual and material positions formulated in the position paper.

From a *conceptual perspective*, the working group has advocated a comprehensive and differentiated analysis of the problems to be addressed by the reform, the identification and justification of the reform objectives, and the success criteria against which the reform will be measured, as well as the appraisal of the direct and indirect consequences of individual measures and the reform as a whole. Initially, the Office of the Administrative Director fulfilled this requirement by examining the situation more closely last summer together with the faculties.

However, avuba does not feel able to assess the financial and organizational consequences because central material decisions have been devolved to the faculties.

The current framework cannot guarantee any improvement in the status quo for the majority of people affected, primarily because central decisions about the application of the new salary structures will not be made until the fall within the faculties and departments. Ultimately, the implementation of the new salary guidelines at the lower levels will determine whether assistants' situations improve or deteriorate. The effects of the reform on assistants will therefore differ greatly between the faculties and cannot be assessed by avuba. avuba is also unable to judge the impact of the reform on the organization and finances or rather financial settlements within the faculties and departments.

The intended system is flexible enough to cater sufficiently for the different subject cultures. However, two points are required for avuba to grant its approval:

1. Critical analysis is currently taking place within the faculties, where specific decisions will be made on how the employment classification, etc. will be actually defined. avuba's right to participate in the faculties/departments must therefore be ensured.
2. avuba cannot assess the consequences of implementing this draft for budgets and other provisions.

From a *material perspective*, the assistants call for a reform oriented toward the university's overall aim of promoting early career researchers. Therefore, a predicted deterioration in appointment and employment conditions for individual subgroups of assistants is particularly unacceptable. The assistants see the reform as an opportunity to take an important step toward future-proof appointment and employment conditions and thus to fulfill the strategic aim of the University of Basel of promoting early career researchers.

avuba regrets that the reform of appointment conditions has not been taken as an opportunity to discuss long-term perspectives (alternative job models beyond professorships, etc.) or to launch such a discussion process.

Overview (section 5.1 in draft)

The draft states that if a person is employed at less than 100%, the free percentage must be made available for the person to pursue further qualifications. avuba proposes that this sentence be removed completely because it could lead to misunderstandings. Instead, it should be emphasized that, as an employer, the university may not occupy more working time than is specified for the employment level.

Doctoral students (sections 5.1 and 5.2 in draft)

avuba welcomes the fact that minimum employment levels (60% Doc2, 100% Doc1) may be circumvented in exceptional cases only. This will prevent doctoral students from being appointed at extremely low employment levels to use up any remaining project budget.

avuba is pleased that teaching duties will now be measured in percent rather than in hours per week in semester because this is a more meaningful (standardized) method of measuring the permissible teaching workload. However, avuba would like to point out that teaching duties were increased again in the last draft; in the previous draft (March 2015), the Doc1 salary was defined with teaching duties of (converted) 0-1.75 hours per week in semester, which would have potentially permitted one free semester (7 semesters of teaching, 1 semester free) when supervising one class of 2 hours per week in semester. From avuba's perspective, the removal of this genuine improvement in appointment conditions is indefensible. If SNSF assistants are to be given teaching duties, this must reduce the load on other groups of assistants.

Postdocs (sections 5.1 and 5.3 in draft)

avuba welcomes the substantial salary increase that the current proposal presents for postdocs previously in the lowest salary bracket (for standard appointments, i.e. SNSF rate during doctorate and then lowest postdoc salary).

As temporary teaching contracts are currently awarded with an employment level of 12.75%, moving to a 10-stage employment level would equate to a reduction in salary.

Moving between salary rates (sections 5.2 and 5.3 in draft)

Here, all aspects depend on the implementation in the faculties.

Criteria for salary selection (section 5.4 in draft)

These criteria have been agreed with avuba. They enable those salary structures to be implemented that satisfy a faculty's specific requirements.

Transfer procedure (section 5.5 in draft)

Protecting vested interests is an elementary and important factor. At the same time, the transfer proposals set out in the draft will actually lead to a deterioration in situation for all assistants previously receiving the minimum amount. Protecting vested interests alone will prevent this from happening. Therefore, if the foundations are not to be laid for the regulation of future budgeting and other provisions, then such a transfer rule makes no sense and should be removed.¹

New job description (section 6 in draft)

avuba is satisfied with the new job description because it offers opportunities for regulated working conditions; the individual categories and subpoints have been revised within the avuba working group and (for the most part) adopted by the Office of the Administrative Director. At the same time, the faculties remain free to customize the existing guidelines (while maintaining the minimum requirements).

However, specific implementation of and compliance with the rights and duties defined in the job descriptions appears critical: What steps can be taken to ensure that the contractual points reflect the real working environment? Structures should be established here as a matter of urgency that extend beyond a new job description and provide (new) assistants with sufficient information about their rights and duties and who to contact in the event of problems (see supporting measures).

Supporting measures (section 7 in draft)

avuba welcomes the set-up of advisory services, but points out that this offering and the general rights and duties of assistants must be better highlighted (and earlier, i.e. when signing the contract). The extension of parenthood support is also positive, although a program with a sufficiently broad base will have to be established and financed.

¹ Organic and inorganic chemistry is one exception here: Footnote 1 in the transfer provisions for postdocs (page 10) is to be retained; not as a transfer provision, but to clarify that this salary rate (PostDoc1, 80%) may only be applied here.