

avuba PhD & Postdoc Survey 2018

Summary of Areas with Need for Action, Including Faculty Figures

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Background information

The survey aimed to record the research and working conditions of assistants at the University of Basel, allowing suitable measures to be proposed to improve these conditions. Regarded as “assistants” at the University of Basel are all matriculated doctoral students and all postdocs funded by the University.

A total of 690 assistants completed the survey in full.

Faculty	N=690	Percent
Theology	15	2%
Law	20	3%
Medicine	80	12%
Humanities	126	18%
Science	357	52%
WWZ	33	5%
Psychology	44	6%
Other	15	2%
Total	690	100%

avuba has performed and compared the following internal analyses, which will not be published.

- Reports by faculty
- Reports by gender (women N=353, men N=328)
- Reports by qualification stage (doctoral students N=535, postdocs N=155)
- Summary of the 321 responses to the open question “What measure(s) would you like the university to implement to improve working situations, research conditions, and career opportunities?”

The data has not been evaluated by a statistician, which means that, for example, no hypotheses have been developed or tested and no correlations have been sought.

There are five clear areas in which assistants see the need for action.

1. Compliance with protected time for research and reducing assistants’ workloads
2. Longer and more standardized contract terms
3. More support from the main supervisor on a day-to-day basis
4. Clear communication of expectations and assessments, support for career planning
5. Financial support for the Academic Editing Service

The following pages include figures for these areas of potential (broken down by faculty and including all participants) as well as possible ways to improve the situation.

Areas of potential according to the results of the PhD & Postdoc Survey 2018

1. Compliance with protected time for research and reducing assistants' workloads

**Is the paid employment level sufficient to complete the work assigned as well as your own research?
(figures rounded to five percent)**

Answer	Theol. N=15	Law N=20	Med. N=80	Human. N=126	Science N=357	WWZ N=33	Psy. N=44
Never or seldom	40%	35%	25%	45%	15%	25%	30%
Sometimes	20%	25%	20%	20%	10%	10%	20%

**Do you have enough time for your research e.g. can protected time for research be complied with?
(figures in percent)**

Answer	Theol. N=15	Law N=20	Med. N=80	Human. N=126	Science N=357	WWZ N=33	Psy. N=44
No. (Note: According to the University of Basel's terms of employment, you should be able to spend at least 60% of your time on your own research.)	33%	40%	26%	41%	12%	12%	48%

**Assistants who have too little time for their own research are held up by the following tasks:
(figures rounded to five percent)**

Answer (multiple answers)	Theol. N=5	Law N=8	Med. N=21	Human. N=52	Science N=43	WWZ N=4	Psy. N=21
Supervising students	T.f. N	T.f. N	75%	55%	50%	T.f. N	70%
Supervising other researchers	T.f. N	T.f. N	30%	10%	20%	T.f. N	25%
Managing research infrastructure	T.f. N	T.f. N	25%	5%	35%	T.f. N	15%
Coordination and management tasks	T.f. N	T.f. N	45%	40%	30%	T.f. N	35%
Teaching and examinations	T.f. N	T.f. N	45%	60%	45%	T.f. N	70%
Collaboration on other projects	T.f. N	T.f. N	45%	40%	40%	T.f. N	35%
Self-administration/committee work	T.f. N	T.f. N	5%	35%	10%	T.f. N	10%
Other administrative work	T.f. N	T.f. N	60%	60%	45%	T.f. N	55%

T.f. N = Too few N, i.e. fewer than 15 responses

Possible ways to improve the situation

- ➔ Protected time for research should be complied with (and made possible) for both doctoral students and postdocs. According to the new terms of employment introduced on February 1, 2017, the time available for one's own research should be at least 60% of the employment level.
- ➔ Arrange or enable more time to write during the week.
- ➔ Analyze the task "Supervision of students" in order to reduce the workload for the assistants in this area by providing support and/or relief.
- ➔ Increase number of paid teaching assignments to ease the burden on assistants created by teaching and assessments. Teaching is not necessary for assistants who are not pursuing an academic career.
- ➔ Reduce proportion of non-qualifying activities ("Other administrative work").
- ➔ Before beginning the qualification stage, doctoral students and postdocs should be informed of the approximate workload.

2. Longer and more standardized contract terms

Length of current employment contract (figures rounded to five percent)

Answer	Theol. N=15	Law N=20	Med. N=80	Human. N=126	Science N=357	WWZ N=33	Psy. N=44
1 year	5%	15%	35%	15%	35%	10%	15%
Less than a year	0%	10%	5%	5%	10%	10%	5%

According to the terms of employment for assistants applicable since February 1, 2017, assistants' contracts should have the following terms:

- Doctoral students: 2+6 semesters, extension of max. 2 semesters in justified cases (e.g. child care)
- Postdocs: 4+8 semesters, extension of max. 2 semesters in justified cases (e.g. child care)

In practice, it seems to be the case that doctoral student contracts are generally extended until they reach 4 years, even if funding was not secured at the outset. Doctoral students require the approval of their professors for their contracts to be extended, making them unnecessarily dependent on their main supervisors.

There are two types of contracts for assistants at the University: Public law contracts (*öffentlich-rechtlich*) and private law contracts (*privatrechtlich*). According to information from the free skuba legal advice service, the University's terms of employment (e.g. terms of employment for assistants, HR regulations, regulations for academic staff) also form part of public law contracts. This is not the case for private law contracts.

Research time is lost due to parental leave and military/civilian service. There is currently no entitlement for fixed-term contracts at the University of Basel to be extended by at least the corresponding amount of time, neither for structural posts nor for project-based posts.

Possible ways to improve the situation

- ➔ Contracts for assistants at the University of Basel should be standardized as public law contracts.
- ➔ As a rule, 1+3 and 2+4 year contracts should be respected, i.e. there should be no more "1+1+1+1" chain contracts. If this is not possible, the reason for this should be explained and recorded in writing.
- ➔ The timeframe for which funding is secured and what the assistant must achieve for the contract to be extended should be noted in the doctoral agreement and in a future postdoctoral agreement.
- ➔ On request it should be possible and easy for fixed-term assistants' contracts (doctoral students and postdocs, regardless of the funding type) to be extended – with pay – by the amount of time lost due to parental leave or military/civilian service.
- ➔ If a contract is not to be extended, the assistant should be informed three months before the contract expires.

3. More support from the main supervisor on a day-to-day basis

**Does the day-to-day supervisor have enough time to supervise you?
(figures rounded to five percent)**

Answer	Theol. N=15	Law N=20	Med. N=80	Human. N=126	Science N=357	WWZ N=33	Psy. N=44
Never or seldom	35%	30%	20%	25%	20%	10%	30%
Sometimes	35%	10%	25%	20%	15%	10%	10%

Possible ways to improve the situation

- ➔ Improve supervision for all assistants, not just for those who have the “courage” to speak to their professor.
- ➔ Make sure assistants know that they are allowed to request regular meetings.
- ➔ Involve second supervisor (more)
- ➔ Reduce administrative workload for supervisors

4. Clear communication of expectations and assessments, support for career planning

In the tables in this section, the proportion of assistants who answered the question with either "Very not true " or " Quite not true" is shown in percent using the traffic light colours:

Red = >20%, orange = 10.0-19.9%, green = <10%.

Evaluation of the primary supervisor/professor

<i>(Proportion of assistants (in percent) who answered with “Very not true” or “Quite not true”)</i>	Theol. N=15	Law N=20	Med. N=80	Human. N=126	Science N=357	WWZ N=33	Psy. N=44
You have the feeling that your work is valued.	0%	15%	6%	9%	14%	3%	18%
You have the feeling that you have sufficient freedom to conduct your research and/or shape your work.	0%	5%	4%	10%	11%	3%	14%
When you request a meeting, he/she sets aside the time required.	0%	15%	7%	8%	5%	0%	11%
Talking with him or her helps you along with the content and/or methodology of your research.	7%	15%	19%	14%	14%	3%	21%
The expectations for reaching the next level of qualification are clearly communicated to you.	27%	35%	25%	33%	27%	15%	34%
You feel comfortable speaking to him/her or making requests.	7%	15%	8%	14%	15%	9%	14%
You feel comfortable with the level of potential dependency on your professor.	13%	15%	14%	18%	16%	3%	16%
You have the impression that whenever you have collaborated on something, you have been listed as a (co-)author.	7%	10%	14%	13%	11%	0%	7%

Possible ways to improve the situation

- Discuss and document mutual expectations of future collaboration before entering into a contract.
- Increase transparency and commitment in regards to what PhDs and postdocs must achieve for their contract to be extended and/or to reach the next qualification stage.
- Increase transparency and communication regarding the assignment of roles and tasks as well as the rights and duties of supervisors.
- Reduce dependency on professors. This is particularly important in highly specialized fields in which only very few assistant positions may be available, even throughout Europe as a whole. The University should make people even more aware that misuse of power will not be tolerated.
- Regular evaluations for supervisors.
- Dissociate dependency in employment and qualification supervision. The supervisor and superior role could be shared between several people to avoid conflicts of interest.

Evaluation of the future career

<i>(Proportion of assistants (in percent) who answered with "Very not true" or "Quite not true")</i>	Theol. N=15	Law N=20	Med. N=80	Human. N=126	Science N=357	WWZ N=33	Psy. N=44
You can speak openly about your career plans.	13%	15%	15%	11%	12%	3%	21%
You are pursuing an academic career.	13%	45%	29%	20%	39%	36%	43%
Your professor speaks openly with you about his or her assessment of your scientific career.	33%	25%	25%	32%	27%	18%	30%
Your supervisors provide you with sufficient support to plan your career and to expand your network.	33%	25%	27%	33%	32%	24%	39%

Possible ways to improve the situation

- Raise awareness among professors.
- Make it obligatory to hold annual employee meetings. The University should provide a list of discussion topics.
- All assistants should be informed openly and in good time of how their professor sees their scientific career prospects.
- Assistants should also acquire as many skills as possible during their doctorate/postdoc and be able to certify these skills. This will help them to successfully leave the University at the right moment. The budget for transferable skills courses should be increased and/or most of these courses should be opened up to larger groups.
- Internships/industrial experience/periods abroad should be supported to boost assistants' career prospects.

Evaluation of the support received by supervisors

<i>(Proportion of assistants (in percent) who answered with "Very not true" or "Quite not true")</i>	Theol. N=15	Law N=20	Med. N=80	Human. N=126	Science N=357	WWZ N=33	Psy. N=44
Writing publications and papers	27%	20%	16%	29%	15%	3%	32%
Applying for funding	33%	20%	23%	21%	17%	0%	23%
Career planning and advice	40%	20%	38%	36%	31%	15%	39%
Attending workshops, conferences, and congresses	27%	30%	16%	21%	19%	9%	16%
Further education	20%	30%	25%	33%	23%	12%	23%
Compatibility of profession and private life	7%	15%	17%	22%	26%	9%	23%
You are able to use all of your vacation time by the end of the year.	7%	0%	18%	14%	18%	3%	9%

Possible ways to improve the situation

- ➔ Increase career planning/advice support from supervisors for all assistants through mentoring, coaching, and networking.
- ➔ Support from superiors/supervisors for assistants wishing to attend workshops, conferences, congresses, and/or continuing education courses.
- ➔ It must be generally possible to take all vacation entitlements by the end of the year.

Evaluation of the workplace/laboratory

<i>(Proportion of assistants (in percent) who answered with "Very not true" or "Quite not true")</i>	Theol. N=15	Law N=20	Med. N=80	Human. N=126	Science N=357	WWZ N=33	Psy. N=44
Technology	7%	10%	5%	5%	6%	3%	7%
Desk	7%	15%	13%	8%	11%	3%	5%
Size of workspace	0%	10%	15%	7%	12%	3%	11%
Lighting	0%	5%	7%	14%	8%	3%	11%
Room temperature	13%	20%	29%	29%	31%	27%	21%
Air quality	7%	40%	21%	21%	25%	9%	14%
Noise level	13%	35%	35%	30%	31%	12%	43%
Building infrastructure	7%	20%	23%	10%	17%	0%	25%

Possible ways to improve the situation

- ➔ Review the workplace situation – especially with regard to room temperature and noise level – and optimize if necessary. Excessive noise levels in particular can harm productivity.

5. Financial support for academic editing service

Support for language editing for high-impact publications or presentations in English needed? (figures rounded to five percent)

Answer	Theol. N=15	Law N=20	Med. N=80	Human. N=126	Science N=357	WWZ N=33	Psy. N=44
Help is needed	55%	50%	40%	60%	35%	45%	55%
... and is provided in the work environment	T.f. N	T.f. N	70%	20%	75%	25%	40%
... and is provided in the private environment	T.f. N	T.f. N	15%	35%	10%	20%	10%
... and an external editor is paid privately	T.f. N	T.f. N	10%	25%	5%	40%	45%

T.f. N = Too few N, fewer than 15 responses

Possible ways to improve the situation

- ➔ Empower all assistants to write better English-language publications, for example by expanding transferable skills courses in this area.
 - ➔ Contribute to the cost of external editing services. This would also reduce the burden on those people currently performing editing work in their working environment.
- avuba submitted its “Academic Editing Incentive” proposal to the President’s Office in 2018. Among other things, the President’s Office requested specific figures from avuba to estimate the costs. avuba has also been asked to develop a proposal explaining what will happen if demand is too high and requests have to be rejected. The published survey results provide specific figures indicating the level of demand. avuba provided the President’s Office with a revised “Academic Editing Incentive” proposal in May 2019 and is waiting for feedback.

Assistants’ wishes for improvement

Assistants answered the question “What would improve the research and/or working conditions?” as follows:

Answer (multiple answers) / (figures rounded to five percent)	Theol. N=15	Law N=20	Med. N=80	Human. N=126	Science N=357	WWZ N=33	Psy. N=44
More supervision	25%	20%	35%	25%	25%	30%	30%
More time to write during the week	55%	40%	35%	55%	20%	10%	50%
More time for your own research	25%	40%	40%	40%	25%	15%	45%
A higher employment level	20%	30%	15%	40%	15%	40%	10%
A longer employment contract	60%	15%	25%	65%	35%	30%	45%