

Statement for the attention of avuba

Email inquiry dated 4 November, 2019

avuba survey 2018

26.11.2019 | ASW | CMR

1. Compliance with “protected time for research” and reducing assistants’ workloads

The University of Basel places great value on creating a family-friendly environment. The Human Resources department and the Diversity Office are currently conducting a project to ensure compliance with “protected time for research” throughout the university. To achieve this, barriers will be identified and removed and clear information will be provided.

The University of Basel also offers “get on track” funding to reduce the workload of doctoral students with children, and “stay on track” funding for highly qualified postdocs and Habilitation candidates in the first phase of motherhood. Both funding lines encompass various support options.

2. Longer and more standardized contract terms

Good working conditions for assistants provide the framework for a high-quality career support. The University of Basel has taken note of assistants’ feedback from the avuba survey on the duration of employment as well as their desire for longer and more standardized contracts (beside others), and has used this to develop a university-wide process for employing and supervising doctoral students and postdocs. In the future, this will ensure good, transparent and equal conditions in the doctoral and postdoctoral academic qualification phases. Specific measures to ensure equal employment conditions for all assistants at the University of Basel and to increase planning security for assistants include:

- Empowering and raising awareness among those responsible for implementing employment regulations (particularly management personnel, executive directors, central/local Human Resources) by holding information events and establishing a process for employing and supervising doctoral students and postdocs at the University of Basel that has been approved by the President’s Office and is widely endorsed. Comment: The University of Basel is one of the few universities in Switzerland to have defined standardized contract terms for structural doctoral/postdoc posts for the entire institution (regulation for academic staff: Doctoral students 1+3 years, postdocs pursuing a Habilitation 2+4 years, postdocs not pursuing a Habilitation 2+2+2 years – provided this is approved by the University Council on 19 December 2019).
- It is now compulsory to clearly define contract terms for non-structural doctorates in the doctoral agreement and for non-structural postdoctoral posts in the postdoctoral agreement. Mandatory postdoctoral agreements have also been introduced that are similar to the doctoral agreements concluded at doctorate level.
- A funding plan must now be drawn up for non-structural doctoral/postdoctoral posts which is integrated into the doctoral/postdoctoral agreement. Comment: The new doctoral/postdoctoral agreements, which will be made available from the start of 2020, are designed so that all key points relating to the doctorate/postdoc – from the doctoral/postdoctoral topic, to financial planning for assistant posts, to keeping minutes of

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regular progress meetings – can all be recorded in one document (“all in one document” principle).

- Introduction of a two-month minimum period before contract expiry in which the doctoral student/postdoc must be informed in writing as to whether their employment contract will be extended. If the contract is not to be extended, a meeting with the doctoral student/postdoc must be held beforehand involving their supervisor and clearly defined third parties (for a doctorate, this is usually the doctoral committee; for a postdoc, this is usually the Dean of Research or their representative).
- Introduction of monitoring contract durations and staff categories: “Structural versus non-structural doctoral students and postdocs pursuing/not pursuing a Habilitation” (expected April 2020).

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

In addition to the process for employing and supervising doctoral students and postdocs at the University of Basel, an obligation has been introduced to conduct an initial meeting and at least one regular progress meeting per year (with minutes) to clarify mutual expectations for all doctoral students/postdocs regardless of their employment status. Furthermore, doctoral supervisors and postdoctoral mentors are encouraged to ensure good supervision. For conflict situations, an overview will be released next year of the various advice and support services available to doctoral students/postdocs and their supervisors at the University of Basel. This will inform them about the services offered and, where necessary, allow them to quickly identify the person they need to contact.

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

The revised doctoral agreement and the newly developed postdoctoral agreement include various points that must be agreed (f.ex. publications, credit points to be earned, etc.) and include a template for minutes of regular progress meetings that clearly covers (a) academic qualification work, (b) working conditions (in the event of employment), and (c) career paths. This ensures that, in the future, all relevant areas of a doctorate/postdoc, including career planning, will be addressed and bindingly defined in the regular progress meeting. From mid-2020, a discussion guide will also be provided to support supervisors and doctoral students/postdocs in regular progress meetings and career discussions.

5. Financial support for the Academic Editing Service

The “Academic Editing” funding instrument has been available to doctoral students at the University of Basel since September 2019. It was introduced at the request of avuba with an initial two-year pilot phase. It aims to improve the academic writing skills of doctoral students in English and to achieve a high quality of publication- and career-relevant research output in English.