

Science policy

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The agreements between the Federal Government and the Länder on the third Pact for Research and Innovation (Pakt für Forschung und Innovation, PFI III), the Higher Education Pact 2020 (Hochschulpakt 2020) and the Programme to Improve Study Conditions and the Quality of Teaching and Mentoring (Quality Pact for Teaching, Qualitätspakt Lehre) will all expire at the end of this year. In June 2019, the heads of the Federal and Länder Governments adopted corresponding follow-up agreements – the fourth Pact for Research and Innovation (PFI IV), the ‘Contract for the Future Strengthening of Higher Education and Teaching’ (Zukunftsvertrag Studium und Lehre stärken) and the agreement on ‘Innovation in Higher Education Teaching’ (Innovation in der Hochschullehre).

Planning security for non-university science organizations

For the period 2021 to 2030, the PFI IV provides for an annual increase of three percent in Federal and Länder funding for non-university science organizations.⁴² At ten years, the PFI IV’s term is significantly longer than the previous five-year pacts for research and innovation. This gives the science organizations a great deal of planning security.

The PFI IV formulates five research-policy objectives to be pursued by the science organizations. The objectives are entitled ‘Promoting dynamic development’, ‘Strengthening the transfer process in business and society’, ‘Consolidating networking’, ‘Attracting and retaining the best talents’ and ‘Strengthening research infrastructures’. They are closely linked to the objectives of the PFI III,⁴³ but also include changes in emphasis. The Commission of Experts supports the increased importance being assigned to the transfer of knowledge and technology. For example, the PFI IV has incorporated an agreement according to which science organizations

should develop new instruments of knowledge and technology transfer and use internal incentive instruments to acknowledge and promote successful transfers. In addition, the Commission of Experts supports the objective stated in the PFI IV of strategically orienting the transfer of knowledge and technology also towards SMEs.

The science organizations commit themselves respectively in target agreements to implementing the research-policy objectives by taking measures of their own. The current target agreements relate to the first five years of the PFI IV. They are to be renegotiated in 2025 for the second five years. The Commission of Experts expects suitable indicators to be developed so that the Joint Science Conference (GWK) can make a well-founded assessment of the results achieved up to that point. International benchmarks can also contribute to this, as mentioned in the PFI IV. The target agreements should then be updated on this basis.

Federal Government permanently involved in the financing of higher education teaching

The ‘Contract for the Future Strengthening of Higher Education and Teaching’ aims to achieve a high quality of study and teaching throughout Germany, good study conditions across the entire German higher education landscape, and to ensure that available study capacity remains in line with demand.⁴⁴ It was concluded for an unlimited period of time on the basis of Article 91b (1) of the Basic Law for the Federal Republic of Germany. The Federal Government is providing €1.88 billion per year for the implementation of the Contract for the Future between 2021 and 2023. As from 2024, it will increase its budget to €2.05 billion per year. The Commission of Experts welcomes the fact that the Federal Government is now permanently involved in the financing of teaching.⁴⁵

The Länder undertake to provide additional funds matching the federal funding received each year. They must report the provision and use of federal funds and their additional own funds every year in a standardized form. If a state fails to meet its funding commitments under the Contract for the Future, its entitlement to federal funding is reduced accordingly. The Commission of Experts regards it as appropriate to include this sanction mechanism in the Contract for the Future.

The percentage increase in funds in the Contract for the Future initially matches that of the PFI IV. If, on the basis of the Higher Education Pact funds for 2020,⁴⁶ the funds were increased by 3 percent each year, the tertiary education institutions would not be in a better position in the period 2021 to 2027 than they are now with the funds agreed for the Contract for the Future. In 2027, the Federal and Länder governments will discuss and decide on any needs for financial adjustment.

While the main aim of the Higher Education Pact is to expand the capacity available for additional first-year students,⁴⁷ the Contract for the Future focuses primarily on improving the quality of teaching in higher education. Within the framework of the Higher Education Pact, the Federal Government allocates funds to the Länder on the basis of the number of first-year students. The allocation of funds under the Contract for the Future additionally takes into account the number of students within the standard period of study plus two semesters, as well as the number of graduates. The Commission of Experts supports this first step towards a quality-oriented allocation of funds.⁴⁸

All Länder are obliged to draw up seven-year written commitments containing statements on objectives, priorities and measures for implementing the Contract for the Future. Declarations on the expansion of permanent employment relationships for full-time academic and artistic staff involved in study and teaching are an obligatory component of this. The Commission of Experts is concerned that this will result in a disproportionate increase in the number of permanent non-professorial academic staff. It is of the opinion that employment relationships in the field of non-professorial academic staff should generally be linked to qualification targets. By limiting the duration of the corresponding employment relationships, the

respective following graduate cohorts also have an opportunity to qualify.⁴⁹

The Commission of Experts welcomes the fact that the Contract for the Future provides for a regular review by the German Council of Science and Humanities (Wissenschaftsrat), the results of which must be taken into account in discussions between the Federal Government and the Länder on the need for adjustments in content and funding.

Separate organization for Innovation in Higher Education Teaching is in the pipeline

The administrative agreement on 'Innovation in Higher Education Teaching' aims to support tertiary education institutions in the quality-oriented further development of study and teaching.⁵⁰ Incentives are to be created for tertiary teachers and managements of tertiary education institutions to continue working towards improvements in the quality of study and teaching. The Commission of Experts supports this aim and advocates using tertiary institutions' experience and ideas from the Quality Pact for Teaching in its implementation.

Like the Contract for the Future, the administrative agreement on 'Innovation in Higher Education Teaching' was also concluded for an indefinite period of time on the basis of Article 91b (1) of the Basic Law. In order to implement the objectives set out in the administrative agreement, the Federal Government and the Länder will finance a legally dependent organizational unit. In December 2019, Toepfer Stiftung gGmbH was selected as the supporting organization following an expression-of-interest procedure.⁵¹ The tasks of the organizational unit include project funding, the promotion of exchange and networking, and the promotion of knowledge transfer. A committee involving the Federal Government and the Länder will take all the essential decisions relating to the organizational unit. The project-selection committees will also include representatives of the Federal and Länder Governments. The Commission of Experts criticizes the fact that the new organizational unit was not initially set up for a limited period of time and that it is relatively open to influence from political representatives.

Programme allowance remains unchanged at a low level

The German Science Foundation (Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft, DFG) programme allowance, the second pillar of the Higher Education Pact, serves to cover the indirect project costs associated with DFG funding.⁵² After the expiry of the Higher Education Pact 2020, the DFG programme allowance will be granted on the basis of the 'Implementation Agreement on the GWK Agreement on Joint Funding by the German Research Foundation' (AV-DFG).⁵³ It will remain unchanged at 22 percent until 2025. As from 2026, the Federal and Länder Governments will enter into negotiations on the level of the percentage. The Commission of Experts again calls for an increase in the DFG's programme allowance,⁵⁴ since in most cases it will otherwise not fully cover overhead costs.⁵⁵