

REPLACING PROFESSORIAL CHAIRS WITH DEPARTMENTS: A MODERN HR STRUCTURE FOR A SUSTAINABLE HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM

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Debate contribution by the *Junge Akademie's* Research Group on Science Policy

This series publishes the ideas and position statements of members of *Die Junge Akademie*. This particular publication emerged from the Research Group “Science Policy”. It represents the views of the authors and their supporters who are referred to by name, but not necessarily those of the entire Research Group or of *Die Junge Akademie* as a whole.

REPLACING PROFESSORIAL CHAIRS WITH DEPARTMENTS: A MODERN HR STRUCTURE FOR A SUSTAINABLE HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM

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Preface

A departmental structure – as opposed to the system of professorial chairs which has existed up until now – has the potential to correct several imbalances in today’s higher education system. But what exactly does this mean? How might it be implemented? And what consequences – some more desirable than others – would be associated with such a structural change, especially if strict cost neutrality had to be achieved?

We five members of *Die Junge Akademie* met in the tranquil setting of Bad Soden-Salmünster in May this year to consider these very questions. The resulting draft paper was later scrutinised in a series of interdisciplinary discussions within *Die Junge Akademie*, before being revised and supplemented on the basis of their comments.

But as far as we were concerned, that was not the end of the matter. We want to bring the issue of a departmental structure to the attention of higher education policymakers and have it discussed in the public domain. What different views are held on this topic? What opportunities, concerns and practical hurdles are associated with a departmental structure? Individuals from academic and political backgrounds have expressed their views on these matters in a total of fourteen commentaries. We would like to thank them all very much indeed for their time, effort and commitment. Together, we have succeeded in compiling a wide range of perspectives, including those of individuals with practical experience of introducing a departmental structure (in Mannheim, Bremen and Lübeck), national and state politicians (from the CDU, SPD, the Greens and the Left), representatives of a variety of different status groups (middle-ranking staff, junior professors, tenured professors and Board members) and others in the research community. We hope that this initiative will generate a lively discussion on the theme of departmental structures, or indeed take the issue to the next level.

Replacing professorial chairs with departments: a modern HR structure for a sustainable higher education system

The creation of a modern departmental structure represents a key step towards achieving a high-performing and socially acceptable higher education system. This would go hand in hand with the dissolution of the traditional structure based on professorial chairs. By calling for the abolition of budget-financed middle-ranking posts and instead doubling the number of professorships in Germany at no additional cost, members of *Die Junge Akademie* spoke out in 2013 for the establishment of an HR structure which could compete at an international level.¹ When we consider current developments in the field of higher education policy – such as the lopsided relationship between core and external financing and the recently launched Early Career Pact – we see it as a matter of urgency to flesh out the details of this restructuring programme and pursue it as a matter of priority.

The rationale behind the need for a departmental structure, which was set out in the 2013 paper, still holds good today. Factors include the lack of attractiveness of university career paths and positions, insufficient dynamism in research subjects, the poor structural reliability experienced by a consistently large number of students, plus the negative consequences both of rigid hierarchies in academia and of the demarcation between research and teaching. In their paper, the authors demonstrated how these problems could be solved in a cost-neutral manner; by converting budget-financed middle-ranking posts into professorships and thus substituting a structure based on professorial chairs with one based on departments.

A departmental structure is characterised by a relatively large and diverse body of professors. These are both established academics and younger colleagues with a tenure-track position. A departmental structure would emulate an internationally recognised model which is in widespread use throughout North America, other English-speaking countries and Scandinavia. With a departmental structure, core-financed resources such as research equipment and rooms are shared between the professors, and employees in technical and administrative roles are assigned to the department instead of to individual chairs. Collaboration between the professors and a large-scale abolition of budget-financed middle-ranking posts on a rank subordinate to that of the professors lie at the heart of a successful departmental structure. Only a reduced number of these middle-

¹ Cornelis Menke, Moritz Schularick, Sibylle Baumbach, Robert Wolf et al. (2013). After the Excellence Initiative: the HR structure as a key to higher-performing universities. Link: https://www.diejungeakademie.de/fileadmin/user_upload/Dokumente/Personalstruktur_11_2013.pdf (Accessed: 11.07.2018)

ranking posts would be preserved; these would be externally funded and held by academics – doctoral candidates and postdoctoral researchers.

A departmental structure would make an important contribution towards correcting the growing imbalance between academics in temporary and permanent positions. This imbalance can be traced back to the massive increase in external funding,² which has resulted in a large number of academics holding temporary positions.³ At the same time, universities are also investing their core resources to an increasing extent in academics with temporary positions.⁴ This has created a disproportionate relationship between the ever greater number of academics with temporary contracts and the consistently low number of permanent academics.⁵ This asymmetry leads to precarious employment conditions⁶ and rigid hierarchies in academia.⁷

A departmental structure, on the other hand, uses the existing core funds of universities exclusively to pay for tenured professors and possibly also for professors in tenure-track posts. It improves the prospects of highly-qualified young academics, in that the decision for (or against) a career in academia is made at an earlier point in time. Overall, this improves conditions for all status groups in the academic community in a number of different ways, which we will discuss in more detail below.

To summarise, a modern departmental structure facilitates a dynamic academic life which is competitive on an external and international level and

2 cf. Chapter 5.3 from: Statistisches Bundesamt (2016). Hochschulen auf einen Blick. 2016 edition. Link: https://www.destatis.de/DE/Publikationen/Thematisch/BildungForschungKultur/Hochschulen/BroschuereHochschulenBlick0110010167004.pdf?__blob=publicationFile (Accessed: 11.07.2018)

3 cf. Table B10 from: Consortium for the Federal Report on Junior Researchers (2017). Federal Report on Junior Researchers 2017: Statistical Data and Research Findings on Doctoral Candidates and Postdoctoral Researchers in Germany. Link: <http://www.buwin.de/dateien/buwin-2017.pdf> (Accessed: 21.5.2017)

4 cf. Footnote 3

5 cf. Chapter 3.3 from: Statistisches Bundesamt (2016). Hochschulen auf einen Blick. 2016 edition. Link: https://www.destatis.de/DE/Publikationen/Thematisch/BildungForschungKultur/Hochschulen/BroschuereHochschulenBlick0110010167004.pdf?__blob=publicationFile (Accessed: 11.07.2018)

6 Dieter Imboden et al. (2016). Final report of the international commission of experts on the evaluation of the Excellence Initiative. Link: <https://www.gwk-bonn.de/fileadmin/Redaktion/Dokumente/Papers/Imboden-Bericht-2016.pdf> (Accessed: 11.07.2018)

7 The structural change we are seeking is all the more urgent because of the powerful influence of time-limited external funding. However, the benefits of structural change would also exist if the German higher education system were once again to be financed increasingly through core funding rather than temporary external funding.

is characterised internally by collaboration among equals. It offers younger academics attractive working conditions even at an early stage in their career, and allows established academics to benefit from a diverse range of staff, in that there are more shoulders available to bear the numerous tasks which must be performed.

We have based this submission on the findings of the draft paper written by members of *Die Junge Akademie* in 2013; it examines the consequences of this kind of structural change for the teaching load and the repercussions it will have for various status groups in the higher education system; it also, addresses some of the typical questions and concerns which are constantly being raised with us in the course of our numerous discussions, and describes how the changeover to a departmental structure fits into the context of current trends in German higher education policy.

The impact of the departmental structure on different status groups

Professors

Professors have to cope with a range of responsibilities in the fields of research, teaching and examination, supervision and HR management, transfer of knowledge and self-management. By converting the posts of non-professorial academic staff into new professorships which are on equal footing with the existing ones, these duties – especially in the areas of academic self-management, HR management and examinations – will fall on a larger number of shoulders. There will be more time to devote to core responsibilities in the fields of research and teaching. An increase in numbers of professorial staff will also extend the breadth of knowledge within a department, allowing a dynamic research landscape to be established. This will facilitate an impetus for cultural change, in that a professor's role will no longer be dominated by managerial activities. At the same time, the wider range of subjects on offer and/or the greater depth in which they are studied will make the department more attractive to students and to new, high-calibre colleagues, and will in turn help to improve its international reputation. In addition, dynamic allocation can allow flexible access to departmental resources.

Existing non-professorial academic staff

Converting the posts from existing non-professorial to professorial ones will increase the number of posts available at professorial level, and thus improve career prospects within academia. At the same time, non-professorial academic posts which previously received external funding will remain in place, and will provide adequate resources to enable the next generation of highly qualified academics to come through.

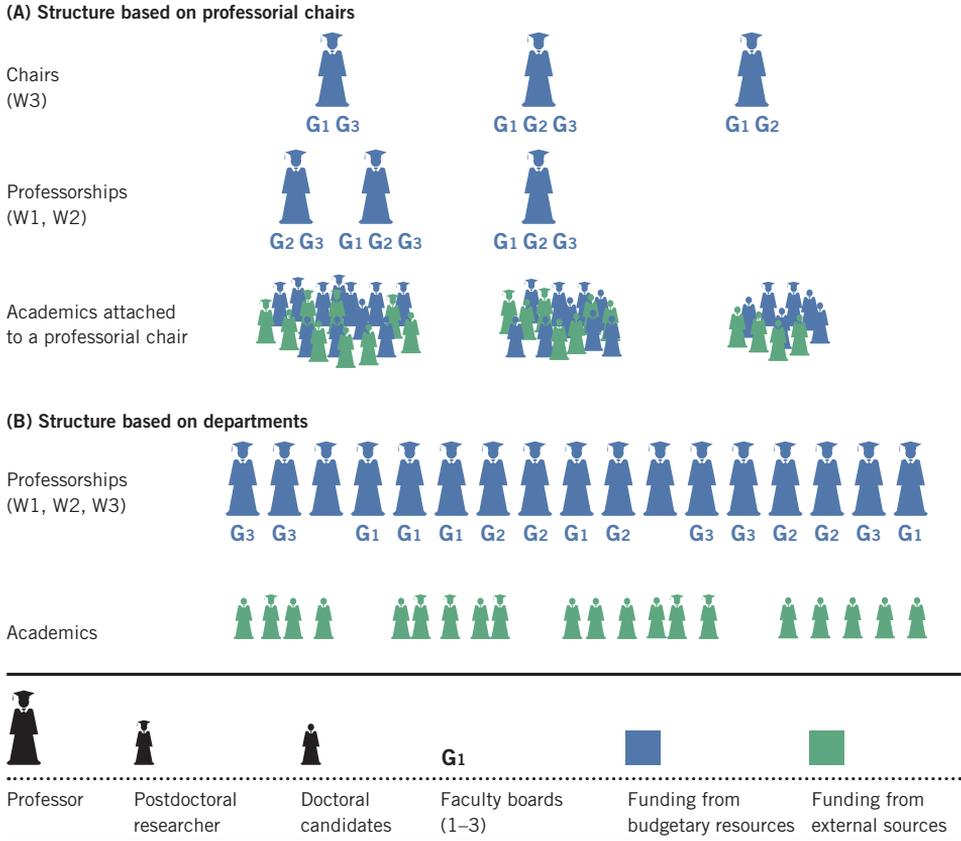


Fig. 1: Comparison of staff distribution between the existing structure based on professorial chairs and the departmental structure we desire. Five academics whose employment is subject to a professorial chair in (A) correspond to three independent professorships in (B).⁸ The distribution formula between professorships and the academic personnel subordinate to them represented in (A) is based on figures contained in the Federal Report on Junior Researchers (2017; full-time academic staff comprise 13% professors and 87% research assistants⁹; 59% of the academic staff that are subordinate to professors were funded from budgetary resources (blue) and 41% from external sources (green) in 2014¹⁰). The figure also compares the distribution of faculty board duties for which the professors are responsible. It is assumed that there are three boards, with five professors sitting on each.

⁸ cf. Footnote 1

⁹ cf. Fig. B19 in: Consortium for the Federal Report on Junior Researchers (2017). Federal Report on Junior Researchers 2017: Statistical Data and Research Findings on Doctoral Candidates and Postdoctoral Researchers in Germany. Link: <http://www.buwin.de/dateien/buwin-2017.pdf> (Accessed: 21.5.2017)

¹⁰ cf. p. 103 in: Consortium for the Federal Report on Junior Researchers (2017). Federal Report on Junior Researchers 2017: Statistical Data and Research Findings on Doctoral Candidates and Postdoctoral Researchers in Germany. Link: <http://www.buwin.de/dateien/buwin-2017.pdf> (Accessed: 21.5.2017)

Thanks to tenure-track professorships within a departmental structure, junior researchers are able to implement their own ideas in the fields of research and teaching at an earlier stage in their academic careers. This, in turn, improves their prospects of a realistic, long-term career in academia. A departmental structure also means that the responsibility of ensuring the quality of appointments no longer lies largely (bar roles in externally-funded projects) in the hands of individual professorial chairs – as is commonly the case with postdoctoral researchers; subsequent to the conversion of non-professorial into professorial post, this responsibility is in the hand of appointment committees.

Students

At present, each professor supervises an average of 66 students.¹¹ This staff/student ratio is not only disastrous when compared on an international level,¹² but it also renders direct, personal supervision impossible. The situation would improve considerably if there were a departmental structure with a larger number of professorships. In addition, more research priorities could be established, offering students a greater choice of subject areas in their own specialisation as a result.

Dean's office

Compared with a structure based on professorial chairs, the essential features of the Dean's office would remain unchanged. The leadership of the department could, for instance, rotate, or elections could be held. In the event of a rotating leadership process, each professor would have fewer self-management duties to fulfil overall than if he or she were in a faculty with fewer professors, as there would be longer intervals between each period in office. Alternatively, a dedicated leadership could be elected for an extended period of time from across the professors in the department.

Board/Rector's office

There would be greater scope in terms of governance: firstly, a departmental structure would – due to a larger body of professors – allow for broader, more flexible, and more differentiated research profiles. Secondly, the Board/Rector's office would be directly involved in a larger number of appointments by virtue of non-professorial posts being converted into professorial ones, provided that previous appointment procedures were maintained. At the same time, the Board/Rector's

¹¹ German Association of Colleges and Universities (2016). The staff/student ratio continues to deteriorate. Research and teaching. Link: <http://www.forschung-und-lehre.de/wordpress/?p=20087> (Accessed: 21.5.2017)

¹² The leading German university in the QS World University Ranking (the University of Jena) comes 83rd for 'Faculty/student ratio'. Link: <https://www.topuniversities.com/university-rankings/world-university-rankings/2018> (Accessed: 3.7.2017)

office exercise of influence could be extended through the creation of job pools. An early conversion to a departmental structure would offer universities a competitive edge over those which retained a structure based on professorial chairs: there would be greater opportunities for attracting external funding because of the larger number of potential applicants, and a better chance of drawing on the expertise of others; its professorships would be more attractive to national and international applicants and the improved study conditions would enhance the university's reputation; there would also be more room for manoeuvre when establishing university research and teaching profiles.

Political decision-makers

The departmental structure would improve the staff/student ratio for students and – because of the large number of professorships and associated new appointments – offer more flexible research dynamics with a larger variety of research fields. This would help individual universities to develop their profiles and create greater horizontal differentiation, which would increase diversity across the entire higher education system. The departmental structure would allow departments to develop their research profiles more flexibly and generate more equal-opportunity career paths; this, in turn, would improve the international visibility and competitiveness of the departments.

Implementation: from a structure based on professorial chairs to one based on departments

The advantages which the German higher education system could gain from the introduction of a departmental structure have by now been acknowledged (for example by the Science and Humanities Council¹³). Equally, a few subject areas at universities in Germany have often successfully begun implementing the change in structure. Examples where a progressive approach has been adopted include the department of economics at the University of Bonn, the department of political science at the University of Bremen, and that of genetics at the University of Lübeck. The shift from hierarchical professorial chairs to a situation in which academics work collaboratively in an environment that affords equal opportunities will generate both opportunities for and challenges to the German higher education system; these will be examined in more detail below.

13 Science and Humanities Council (2014). Recommendations on career goals and paths at universities. Dresden: Drs. 4009-14. Link: <https://www.wissenschaftsrat.de/download/archiv/4009-14.pdf> (Accessed: 11.07.2018)

Stakeholders in the creation of a departmental structure

The legislation that is necessary for the creation of a departmental structure already exists across the federal states and universities in general. The regional Higher Education Acts and internal university guidelines would simply have to be adapted to the new structure in individual cases (naturally pending careful review). Practical implementation could ultimately be initiated by various stakeholders at a number of different levels: the Ministry of Science, the respective university administration, or the faculties/institutes. University administrations and science ministries can use targeted incentives to motivate individual faculties/institutes which are keen to pioneer the implementation of this kind of reform project. Examples could include the offer of financial support, programmes such as the Early Career Pact, which also aims to increase the number of professorships, the provision of strategic advice, and the implementation of structural and regulatory changes (for instance in regional Higher Education Acts, in the contracts between the universities and the respective federal states, with regard to external funding sources, and through the revision of capacity legislation), so that structural change can lead to an improved quality of teaching.

Gradual transition to a departmental structure

Non-professorial fixed-term posts which are up for renewal and professorial chairs which are to be reappointed could gradually be integrated into a new departmental structure. We would recommend either of the following approaches: (1) When a member of staff vacates a non-professorial academic post, this post could – alongside other vacant posts – be converted into a professorship. Accordingly, it would take a relatively long time to fill a large number of professorships. This, in turn, would allow for a gradual structural change; a gradual shift would prevent succeeding generations from being ‘blocked’ from entering the career system as well as a ‘congestion’ of the system. (2) Alternatively, financial resources could be invested in additional professorships before all of the non-professorial academic posts fell vacant and could be converted into professorships. This could provide the institutes with an incentive to undergo fundamental structural change and budget resources for the transformation process.

In the long term, a departmental structure will lead to a reduction in the total number of academic staff because it replaces precarious employment in academia with socially acceptable, sustainable posts replace at no additional cost. The majority of the staff will have either a permanent post, or a clear expectation of their posts being made permanent through tenure-track. Because of the large number of professorships and the more vigorous recruitment process which is a corollary of this, the respective departments will nonetheless be able to dynamically develop its research and teaching profile; equally, universities will be able to respond rapidly to the latest challenges facing science and society if necessary.

Re-organizing the structural plan in terms of shared job pools and room plans

Within each department, the need to share resources would lead to a re-allocation of posts as well as rooms, both of which had previously been allocated according to a contractual agreement [with the professorial chairs]. In the departmental system, these would be allocated flexibly as required instead of being rigidly assigned to specific individuals. The actual needs would need to be monitored at regular intervals, which would ensure that the resources were used in the best possible way across the entire department.

This more dynamic HR structure would require departments to have a flexible staffing plan. Elements of the Mannheim tenure-track model could serve as an archetype for this.¹⁴ According to this model, staffing and promotions would not follow a fixed plan, but make use of a job pool to meet the respective demands. Suitable legislation would have to be drawn up in the Higher Education Act and at university level, depending on the legal framework in the respective federal state.

Improvements in teaching and capacity legislation

Through the creation of additional professorships, those delivering the teaching would mainly academics who conduct their research and teaching independently [from other postholders]. As they would tend to be in permanent posts (or on tenure track), this would allow for a high level of continuity. Consequently, less teaching would be delivered by individuals who hold qualification positions with temporary contracts and a reduced teaching load. On the one hand, students and universities would benefit to a greater degree than in the past from having experienced teachers, and on the other hand, existing teaching, supervision and examination duties could be distributed between a larger number of independent academics who on an equal footing with one another.

However, this opportunity for improved teaching, for which there has been considerable clamour, also depends on capacity regulations being redesigned. As it stands, an increase in the number of permanent professorships with a simultaneous reduction in the number of academics as a whole would be ‘capacity neutral’ (cf. Table 1). The structural change would help to improve the quality of studies, but also require a thoroughly modernised capacity directive, as has been demanded by the Science and Humanities Council (2017),¹⁵ the Conference of Ministers of Education and the Conference of University

¹⁴ Ernst-Ludwig von Thadden (2015). Tenure Track – Die neue Mannheimer Schule? VHD Journal. Link: http://www.historikerverband.de/fileadmin/_vhd/pdf/Mitgliederjournal/vhd_journal_2015-04.pdf (Accessed: 21.5.2017)

¹⁵ Science and Humanities Council (2017). Strategies for teaching in higher education: position paper. Link: <https://www.wissenschaftsrat.de/download/archiv/6190-17.pdf> (Accessed: 23.5.2017)

Table 1**Conversion to a departmental structure: neutral in terms of cost and teaching load**

A comparison of a fictional specialist field structured on the basis of professorial chairs and departments respectively, based on genuine average figures for Germany (cf. also Fig. 1). When rounded off, the percentages of different job categories in the overall job pool of the specialist field correspond to the current national figures for full-time job equivalents in the various HR categories.¹⁶ Thus, it would be possible for a departmental structure to be introduced in a way which was neutral in terms of both cost and teaching load.

STRUCTURE BASED ON PROFESSORIAL CHAIRS

Category	No. of posts	Teaching load		HR costs	
		WHS* per post	WHS* total	Cost per post ¹⁷ (Euro)	Total costs (Euro)
Professorship	6	9	54	99.000	594.000
Temp. research assistants					
Postdoctoral researchers	7	4	28	68.400	478.800
Postdoctoral researchers	14	2	28	31.650	443.100
Perm. research assistants	5	9	45	68.400	342.000
Total			155		1.857.900

* WHS = Weekly contact hours per semester

DEPARTMENT-STRUKTUR

Category	No. of posts	Teaching load		HR costs	
		WHS* per post	WHS* total	Cost per post (Euro)	Total costs (Euro)
Professorship	17	9	153	99.000	1.683.000
Temp. research assistants					
Postdoctoral researchers	0	4	0	68.400	0
Postdoctoral researchers	0	2	0	31.650	0
Perm. research assistants	0	9	0	68.400	0
Total			153		1.683.000

* WHS = Weekly contact hours per semester

¹⁶ Consortium for the Federal Report on Junior Researchers (2017). Federal Report on Junior Researchers 2017: Statistical Data and Research Findings on Doctoral Candidates and Postdoctoral Researchers in Germany. Link: <http://www.buwin.de/dateien/buwin-2017.pdf> (Accessed: 21.5.2017)

¹⁷ Based on average rate per post of the German Research Foundation in 2017. Link: http://www.dfg.de/formulare/60_12_-2017-/60_12_de.pdf (Accessed: 22.7.2017)

Rectors (2016).¹⁸ Angela Borgwardt (2017) has provided an overview of promising approaches to reforming capacity legislation.¹⁹

Adopting a more flexible approach to the setting of research priorities would increase the range of learning opportunities on offer. Unless a decision was made to offer a set syllabus, students would have greater freedom to supplement their basic timetable with their own choice of subjects. At the same time, the ability to cover teaching units on the fundamentals in a professional manner would, even in a more specialised department remain of key importance.

Adequate minimum level of resources for professorships

Our proposal to abolish budget-financed non-professorial academic posts in favour of a larger number of professorships would mean that professorships no longer have dependent postholders at their beck and call; at the same time, it retains the previous level of core funding for ongoing expenditure. In addition, participation in shared departmental resources would ensure an adequate minimum level of resources so that an adequate minimum level of resources would be guaranteed.

Consideration of financial needs in terms of retirement provision

A structure based on professorial chairs comprises comparatively few academics with civil service status and many academics in dependent employment. A departmental structure would increase the number of academics with civil service status, assuming that most of the additional professors were to be classed as civil servants. This would require changes to be made to pensions and/or retirement provision. While the employer – in this case, the university – directly contributes to the retirement provision through the social insurance contributions in the case of employees, civil service pensions are basically the responsibility of the state, so that any potential financial requirements in respect of retirement provision will have to be considered separately. Social insurance contributions would have to be offset against pension payments where necessary.

The departmental structure and the raising of external funding

The regulations of the German Research Foundation (DFG) which detail the funding of major externally-funded structural projects (such as collaborative re-

¹⁸ Conference of Ministers of Education and Conference of University Rectors (2016), European study reform: Joint declaration by the Conference of Ministers of Education and Conference of University Rectors. Link: https://www.hrk.de/uploads/tx_szconvention/EUStudienreform_GemErklaerung_KMK_HRK_2015_2016.pdf (Accessed: 11.07.2018)

¹⁹ Angela Borwardt (2017). The reform of capacity legislation – what is to be done? Hochschulpolitik series from the Friedrich Ebert Foundation. Link: <http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/studienfoerderung/13369-20170602.pdf> (Accessed: 11.07.2018)

search centres) require the applicant institute to supply its own share of academic personnel.²⁰ In the case of a departmental structure, this would no longer be provided by non-professorial academic posts as these would have been converted into professorships as a result of the structural change. Instead, one would need to create more professorships. This should be taken into account accordingly in the DFG regulations.

Applicability in various disciplines

In principle, a departmental structure could be introduced in any discipline; not only in the humanities and social sciences (cf. for example the teaching of economics in Bonn, political science in Bremen, history at the CEU in Hungary, and philosophy at the London School of Economics in Great Britain), but also in the natural sciences (the Janelia Research Campus in the USA²¹), in medicine (cf. for example the recommendations of the Science and Humanities Council²²) and in engineering.

At the same time, the introduction of a departmental structure must take into account the specific characteristics of individual subjects. For instance, subjects which bring in little external funding (such as the humanities and social sciences²³) must either increase their efforts to attract graduate schools, or create a pool of posts for doctoral candidates assigned to the entire department (rather than to individual professorships), if they are to secure the future of the next generation. We nonetheless expect that the departmental structure will largely prevail in the medium term.

The departmental structure in the context of current trends in German higher education policy

A departmental structure is perfectly compatible with current efforts to establish the tenure track as a new academic career path. An HR structure with more professorships and fewer non-professorial posts would provide the optimum foundation for the introduction of additional tenure-track professorships across

20 cf. Leaflet on collaborative research centres: http://www.dfg.de/formulare/50_06/50_06_de.pdf (Accessed: 21.5.2017)

21 cf. Report on Program Development: <https://www.janelia.org/sites/default/files/About%20Us/JFRC.pdf> (Accessed: 2.7.2017)

22 Science and Humanities Council (2016): Perspectives of University Medicine. Weimar: Drs. 5663-16. Link: <https://www.wissenschaftsrat.de/download/archiv/5663-16.pdf> (Accessed: 4.7.2017)

23 cf. Table 4-2 in: Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (2015). Förderatlas 2015: Kennzahlen zur öffentlich finanzierten Forschung in Deutschland. Weinheim: Wiley-VCH Verlag

the board, as called for in the Early Career Pact²⁴, which was agreed in 2016. As budget-financed non-professorial posts disappear (consisting, for instance, of fixed-term posts for academic counsels or candidates working on their habilitation treatise), tenure-track professorships would gain central importance within an individual's academic career. At the same time, the Pact's intention of creating additional professorships also provides an important impetus for the transition to a new HR structure such as the one proposed here.

A departmental structure is not, however, compatible with an increase in permanent non-professorial posts. The establishment of 'permanent posts for permanent responsibilities' is not a suitable way of "correcting the imbalances which already exist, which can be justified neither objectively nor politically",²⁵ and which currently draw a sharp distinction between professors and non-professorial staff. Our ambition to establish a departmental structure shares the desire to increase the proportion of permanent posts held by academic staff, but proposes to do so by upgrading non-professorial posts. Tenure-track professorships increase the attractiveness of an academic career because of the prospect of job security and an increase in salary, but also because one can take personal responsibility for one's research and teaching activities at an earlier stage in one's career. In exceptional cases, however, there will still be a need for permanent academic posts in non-professorial positions, for instance in the case of having to operate large-appliances or supervising specialist laboratories, which are the sole preserve of highly-qualified scientists. Technical and administrative posts would also be retained. However, just like the corresponding equipment or service facilities, these posts would be assigned to the department as a whole, and therefore also characterised by a certain degree of flexibility.

The role of the professor would change significantly with the establishment of a departmental structure: his or her duties would cover mainly research content (and less time would be spent issuing instructions to colleagues) and teaching in small groups such as seminars and practical courses (instead of facing large groups of students in a lecture theatre). The focus in the professorial role description would return to its core duties, in which the postholders have to excel in the course of their academic career and which qualified them for the role of professor in the first place. At the same time, their administrative burden

²⁴ Administrative agreement between the Federation and the federal states on a programme to promote junior researchers: <https://www.gwk-bonn.de/fileadmin/Redaktion/Dokumente/Papers/Verwaltungsvereinbarung-wissenschaftlicher-Nachwuchs-2016.pdf> (Accessed: 11.07.2018)

²⁵ cf. p. 148 in: Angelika Schenk, Frieder Vogelmann & Arndt Wonka (2017). *Jenseits der Infantilisierung: Plädoyer für einen Personalstrukturwandel an deutschen Universitäten*. Berliner Debatte Initial, 28, pp. 146–154

would be lightened, so that they would have to spend less time than previously with managerial matters; time, which they could in turn invest into their active research and into teaching students on a much more personal level. This new understanding of their role would go hand in hand with goals such as greater diversity in academia, equality of opportunity (for instance by abolishing discrimination against women and students from non-academic backgrounds), and the internationalisation of the faculty.

The large number of reform initiatives generated by academic and political stakeholders in recent years demonstrates that there is a need and an appetite for change in the higher education system. The fundamental reform of the HR structure at universities which we are proposing here offers solutions to many of the shortcomings and challenges which we have identified. It provides an impetus for a higher education system which is fit for the future.

COMMENTARIES

Commentary by Ernst-Ludwig von Thadden

This text complements the acclaimed article on the departmental structure written in 2013, and takes it to its next step. A genuine tenure track, such as it is currently being introduced, basically requires the research and teaching resources of a faculty to be communalized to a large extent. The hierarchical nature of academia, (as it is evident in the traditional German structure which is based on professorial chairs, and in which the academic staff, rooms and other resources of a specialist field are largely assigned to individual full professors and managed by them under civil service law), makes it difficult for a junior professor to progress to the status of a full professor since this requires a concomitant transfer of resources on a large scale. Within a departmental structure, professors are promoted with little change to the management of the resources at the disposal of the department. Similarly, junior professors replace or full professors upon retirement. This facilitates mobility, and makes the department more structurally dynamic.

The article illustrates this and other structural changes in a compelling and interesting way. However, there is still a need for discussion about the form – not the extent! – of the communalization required to ensure a well-functioning departmental structure, especially as there may be subject-specific requirements. In particular, I would question whether it makes sense to convert the entirety of temporary and permanent budget-financed posts for academic staff into professorships, as Table 1 suggests. Firstly, it can be expedient to assign certain regular teaching duties to specific teaching staff. I am referring here to such examples as lectures and exercises in foreign language classes, as well as propaedeutic and auxiliary lessons in mathematics and statistics within the fields of social sciences, economics, etc. Academic advisors, lecturers, *maîtres de conférences* and other permanent staff are deployed in the majority of university systems for this purpose, and this should also be possible if we were to introduce a departmental structure. It is important that these colleagues, who are more heavily involved in teaching, should be assigned to the department and not to individual professors. An approach such as this would also be consistent with the oft-expressed demand for ‘academic career paths in addition to professorships’, which also make sense within a tenure-track system.

Secondly, I would be wary of placing too much importance on external funding when it comes to the training and funding of doctoral candidates. I would take issue with the aforementioned table in that I would consider it expedient – and

certainly compatible with a departmental system – to pay doctoral candidates at least partly from budgetary resources, or to manage their activities via budget-financed posts. A good department needs doctoral candidates, and at least a minimum number of them should have a reliable funding source, i. e. one that does not depend on occasionally unreliable, external financing. In the departmental structure, it is, however, crucially important to separate the doctoral candidates' academic attachment as clearly as possible from the managerial authority they are answerable to. As far as the funding is concerned, doctoral candidates should be financed through the departmental budget and not via staffing budget of individual professors. Where external funding is concerned, matters are typically more complex, because in this case the doctoral candidate earns his or her money by conducting research for a project overseen by a professor, and is therefore answerable to them under civil service provisions; as a result, they are also often at least co-supervised by the professor in question when working towards their PhD.

A departmental structure should therefore also comprise a graduate school in which all of the doctoral candidates are taught and supervised by a relatively large number of professors from the department; it should also be possible to change one's original field of research and consequently one's primary supervisor, and for a small group of supervisors to form the 'dissertation committee' for the dissertation as a whole.

In my experience, it is not a simple matter to transition from a structure based on professorial chairs to one based on departments: firstly for formal reasons, because the resources attached to a chair enjoy a certain degree of protection by virtue of the agreement concluded when the appointment was made, and more importantly in practical terms, because faculties or specialist fields are able to foil the communalization of resources dictated from above by reproducing a consensually agreed, decentralised distribution of resources at division or faculty level.

Therefore, departmental structures can only be introduced if the majority of staff in the respective subject area supports the decision voluntarily. The university administration can, however, play its part in this process by creating the practical conditions required and offering incentives. In my experience in Mannheim, there are three main points which are of particular importance here.

Firstly, a department requires a certain spatial coherence. If six professorial chairs in a specialist field are accommodated in wholly different parts of the university buildings, it can be difficult to make use of shared physical and staff resources (the secretarial pool being a case in point), and communication will by necessity tend to occur vertically (i.e. within a chair) rather than horizontally

(i. e. between different academics with different specialisations). It is therefore the task of the university administration to accommodate professorial chairs as near to one another as possible, for instance in the course of natural staff fluctuations or renovations; this would of course have to take place on the basis of an in-depth dialogue with all parties.

A second important element is recruitment policy, which is after all of key importance with regard to the development of a university as a whole. Colleagues who may, for instance, have familiarised themselves with the benefits of a more collaborative structure abroad, will find it easier to feel at home in a departmental structure. Irrespective of the general contribution they make to a faculty, recruitments from abroad will generally lead to the introduction of new ideas, including when it comes to matters of structure.

A third element relates to material incentives. In Mannheim, for instance, the university administration supports the establishment of junior professorships by arranging for junior professors to receive their own financial settlement, half of which is paid for out of central university funds. The other half must come from the specialist field, partly to avoid creating excessive material disparities within the university. But the additional funding ensures that existing parts of the university structured on the basis of professorial chairs do not have to spend too much of their 'own' resources, and the specialist field benefits from additional funding, which it receives by converting the posts of dependently employed staff into junior professorships.

The text provides an excellent basis on which to evaluate this change in the structure of universities, which is essential in Germany. As things stand, it is largely the responsibility of the universities themselves to implement it. The extent to which politics can play a supporting role in this by providing funding or a regulatory framework remains an interesting question.

Prof Dr Ernst-Ludwig von Thadden is a Professor of Economics and the Rector of the University of Mannheim.

Commentary by Susanne K. Schmidt

With their 2013 proposal, members of Die Junge Akademie have set an important ball rolling. It provides the opportunity for the details to now be discussed in greater detail. This is a very welcome development, because there is nothing trivial about the shift from a structure based on professorial chairs to one based on departments. At the instigation of our non-professorial academic staff, we at

the Institute of Political Science (IPW) of the University of Bremen began to discuss a new staffing strategy in 2014; at the end of a lengthy process of coordination, we agreed to adopt a departmental structure. The colleagues involved in this decision did not find it a difficult one to reach.

Although the proposal was, by and large, favourably received by the Rector's office and the Senate, we still await its implementation, partly because of the very issues raised in this new paper.

Since temporary staff have a lower teaching load, we also believed a capacity-neutral transition to be feasible. However, the picture changes if one first wishes to set up junior professorships to facilitate early academic independence with a genuine tenure track because this results in a reduced teaching load. Moreover, we believed that as 'trailblazers', we could only succeed with a departmental structure in Bremen if the teaching load for professorships was reduced slightly. After all, we need to remain competitive vis-à-vis institutes which continue to offer posts for (dependent) staff. Our model suggests that academics should bring a larger share of their own research capacity rather than staff and basic facilities to proposals for third-party funding. It was acknowledged that the original German teaching load of eight weekly contact hours per semester was high compared with other countries (5-6 hours in the English-speaking world); the transition to 9-10 weekly contact hours per semester has only exacerbated this competitive disadvantage.²⁶ If this higher workload can justifiably be offset by a division of labour within the professorial chair, one might have to review current practices and revise the capacity legislation at universities. Accordingly, a cost-neutral reform would require changes to the curricula.

Our projected changes would require the qualification of doctoral and postdoctoral researchers to take place by their obtaining and occupying externally-funded posts. This, in turn, would lead to an increase in the number of such posts. One consequence might be that there would be problems filling posts on university committees; more importantly, however, transitional funding would be required if there were any delay in obtaining approval for the next project. Otherwise, it would be the next generation who would bear the brunt of the changes. Similarly, it is clear that if the new model were to be introduced, the already moderate core financial resources would have to be spread across an increasing number of academics. There would be a corresponding increase in pressure on external funding as competition increase with more and more professors chasing such resources.

²⁶ Augsburg resolution to improve conditions in research and teaching, 2000. https://www.hochschulverband.de/511.html#_

So even if one sets aside matters as staffing plans and pension liabilities, the transition to a departmental structure requires careful planning and a wide-ranging discussion. The strengths and weaknesses of the German university model are all interlinked. In an international comparison, Germany offers its professors a high degree of freedom and independence, thanks to academic freedom being enshrined in the Basic Law, and the fact that they enjoy the status of civil servants. Even irrespective of the status as civil servants, forced redundancies which are clear options in the tenure models in the Anglo-Saxon and Dutch academic world are hard to imagine under German public service law. Politicians have attempted to counterbalance their limited regulatory influence by allocating external funding competitively. However, they refuse to acknowledge the consequences which this will have in terms of employment market policy, the result being the ever stricter provisions of the Act on Temporary Employment in Higher Education. Where possible, posts should be occupied permanently, even if resources are available only temporarily and upon application.

If the transition to a departmental structure is to succeed, the institutional conditions of the German system as a whole must be reflected. As the competitive allocation of external funding does not deliver the desired effect, there is now a clear opportunity for a transition to the departmental structure.

Prof Dr Susanne K. Schmidt is a Professor of Politics at the University of Bremen.

Commentary by Oliver Grundei

This paper references many of the factors which prompted me in my earlier role as a University Chancellor to consider pushing forward with an (at least partial) change from a structure based on professorial chairs (identical to Lübeck's institutional structure) to a departmental structure (although this new structure has not yet been implemented in Lübeck, even if the governance of 'Institute of Psychology I' already corresponds to a departmental structure as far as I am concerned).

Human as well as material resources can certainly be used more efficiently on a scale larger than that of a professorial chair; at least, backroom functions such as secretarial services and technical support can be tailored to meet needs more efficiently. Duties of self-management could also be distributed more fairly if it occurs across a larger number of professors. If one took the opportunity to convert some of the non-professorial academic posts that are paid for out of the university's basic budget into professorships, it might finally be possible to increase the likelihood that members of the academic staff – whose numbers have

been increasing steadily in recent years – can advance to a professorship. Given the relatively large number of non-professorial academic posts which are externally funded and the relatively small number of professorial post that are similarly funded, this would be a particularly sensible way forward. However, if one is to keep the additional cost as low as possible, this kind of conversion can only be implemented within a relatively large structural unit such as a department (ultimately, this partly depends on how the instruments of capacity legislation, which the present paper describes well, are used), as otherwise even more posts for non-academic support staff would need to be funded.

Departmental hierarchies do not discriminate between W₂ and W₃ professorships; nor is there any difference in grade between professorships with or without a management function. In my opinion, higher education legislation draws no distinction with regard to differences in qualification between W₂ and W₃ professorships with and without a management function in any case. It is to be hoped that dispensing with hierarchical relationships between professorships will lead to less rather than more attrition along the way, and that, overall, staff will perceive the change as having a motivational effect. Naturally, it will remain to be seen, if the departmental structure can deliver this in the long term. It will be particularly interesting to observe how the professors in a department react if retention negotiations provide them with the opportunity to increase either the resources placed at their direct disposal or the shared resources of the department.

Dr Oliver Grundei (CDU) was appointed Secretary of State for Science and Culture of Schleswig-Holstein this year, and was previously Chancellor of the University of Lübeck.

Commentary by Jan-Christoph Rogge

A structure based on departments rather than professorial chairs: Fine! And then what?

Despite all attempts at reform, the HR structure at German universities continues to give one the impression of an assemblage of feudally governed principalities which are crudely held together by Deanships and university administrations (post which come with varying degrees of power) and are constituted by ‘junior researchers’ as they are commonly referred to. With this paper, members of Die Junge Akademie are putting forward a reform proposal for the second time in four years. The piece proposes to do away with the existing structure and implement a more attractive, reliable, democratic, transparent and dynamic model instead. Given the lack of action we have seen meanwhile – with the exception perhaps of a few minor local initiatives – their persistence is very much to be

welcomed. The very fact that the infantilising concept of ‘junior researchers’ is practically an alien concept in any other country illustrates how outdated the German model of academic careers is compared with that of other countries. The introduction of a departmental structure would indeed be a suitable means of addressing several major defects in the present model in one sweep: the increasing gulf between temporary and permanent posts, the internal employment market which is reliant on patronage when it comes to appointing postholders who are gaining the next qualification in their academic career to posts which require them to be answerable to a senior academic, and the lack of professional job security, which extends beyond the age of forty (on average).

However, the reform fails to solve one of the greatest problems we face: the hard barrier between appointed personnel on the one hand, and non-appointed personnel on the other. On the contrary: the gulf between academic staff receiving external funding, who have temporary contracts and usually answer to others, and professors funded from core resources, generally on a permanent basis and with a high degree of autonomy, would widen even more. One way of counteracting this further reinforcement of a two-tier academic society would be to award contracts based on qualifications and status. These should by and large be permanent, and not link the length of contracts for externally-funded staff to the length of the project (although this provision of the Act on Temporary Employment in Higher Education already represents a marked improvement on the status quo ante). Additionally, externally-funded projects should only be worked on by pools of colleagues. This would transfer the inherent funding risks of projects from the individual academics to the universities. After all, the diagnostic analysis of the text actually hits the nail on the head: in the German higher education system, the problem is not primarily a lack of posts, but a lack of perspectives.

The status of doctoral candidates within the departmental structure remains largely unclarified. It is true that in Germany, too, structured doctoral training in graduate schools and colleges has become increasingly important during the past few decades. More often than not, it is however still the case that a doctoral candidate will obtain his or her PhD whilst occupying a post in which they generally have to perform many varied tasks that are entirely unrelated to their doctoral research. Yet, one should not seek to solve this problem by abolishing these centrally financed qualifying posts without providing an alternative. In other words, the type of departmental structure proposed here will be unacceptable unless the training of doctoral candidates is reformed as well.

A third point to bear in mind is that of the all-encompassing demands made on the role of the professor: the paper reads that, “Professors have to cope with many different responsibilities in the fields of research, teaching and examina-

tion, supervision and HR management, transfer of knowledge and self-management.” That is true, but the passage fails to problematize. To put it bluntly, the universities do not recognise any division of labour other than their dual hierarchy. In its ‘Recommendations on career goals and paths at universities’ in 2014, the Science and Humanities Council called for greater differentiation between areas of responsibility. It would be worthwhile to incorporate this element in the discussion about a departmental structure.

None of the above is to be taken as an argument against the shift from a structure based on professorial chairs to one based on departments. Such a reform is long overdue. Rather, I would like to point out that the academic staffing portfolio as a whole is in need of a review.

Dr Jan-Christoph Rogge is a research associate with the research group on “Higher Education Policy” at the Berlin Social Science Centre (WZB) and a member of “Initiative für gute Arbeit in der Wissenschaft”.

Commentary by Jens Pöppelbuss, Stephan Scherneck and Felix Krahmer

As the German Society of Junior Professors (DGJ), we advocate the creation of long-term career paths in higher education. We therefore support the thrust of the text with its demand for a modernisation of organisational structures in the German higher education system. The departmental structure which the paper develops suggests a model which is both promising and already recognized. It would help to discard hierarchies which are unnecessary and ultimately hinder the research process. It would instead promote dialogue and cooperation between academics. Students would benefit from this structure in the form of greatly improved supervision. The number of precarious jobs in the higher education system could be reduced. Sharing resources across an entire department would also help to achieve more with the moderate means available.

Gratifyingly, this proposal does not merely flag up an abstract conceptual objective; instead, it actually specifies necessary practical changes, and points out possible ways of implementing a gradual and sustainable transition. We especially support the call for a marked increase in the number of professors with proper tenure-track positions and a simultaneous reduction in the number of doctoral positions which are funded through the central university budget.

However, we do not believe that it would be either practicable or expedient to abolish this type of doctoral positions altogether, especially if one takes account

of the different academic cultures which prevail in various subject areas. The paper also addresses this issue by pointing out the potential drawbacks for subject areas which attract lower levels of external funding. We believe that all subjects need to retain a certain baseline number of doctoral positions as well as temporary and permanent (non-professorial) academic posts. On the one hand, this might give outstanding doctoral candidates and postdoctoral researchers an opportunity to spend at least part of their working day conducting their own research and developing their academic profile at an early stage in their career; the substance of this research would be independent from that of the communal research proposals (for third-party funding), which are often written by others, and it might help them to qualify for a tenure-track professorship.

On the other hand, this is the only way in which professors can, for instance, be guaranteed the opportunity to conduct time-consuming and above all experimental research which is often a core objective for many natural scientists, without depending on external funding. If that were impossible, there is a danger that one would focus only on those research topics that promise to attract external funding. It is precisely this sort of blinkered approach which the departmental structure with its increased dynamism of research activities is intended to counteract. It should also be noted that it is not only technical staff that can ensure the appropriate supervision of complex, large-scale equipment in the experimental sciences. However, we do not consider any of the above to be an argument in favour of a structure based on professorial chairs; the requirements and objectives referred to here could largely be met within a departmental structure which offers marked increase in the number of professors and a pool of centrally appointed, (non-professorial) academic posts (as is, for instance, commonly the case in some departments in the USA).

Finally, we feel it is important to establish that changes to the organisational structures of universities cannot be implemented against the will of their organisational members, but has to proceed with their support. Faculties and/or special subject areas should therefore be given the freedom – and not just the monetary incentives – to modernise their organisational structures as they see fit. In our opinion, this is also illustrated by the positive examples which the paper cites and which attract attention because of their approach to modernising their institutional structures. The present proposal represents a valuable basis for faculties, special fields, or indeed entire universities; however, such a structure should always be imbued with life and concrete ideas at local level.

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in Braunschweig, and Prof Dr Felix Krahmer is Assistant Professor for Optimisation and Data Analysis at the University of Technology in Munich.

Commentary by Anne Schreiter

It is imperative to finally initiate reforms which enable the German higher education system to be able to develop and grow again. The proposal presented here is a well-thought-out step in the right direction. I would like to highlight two aspects in particular, with a view to encouraging others to give them further consideration.

1. Competition/a competitive edge through diversification

The great strength of the departmental structure is that it dispenses with hierarchies which operate kin to silos. Hierarchies per se are by no means a bad thing; they will emerge even in a structure where there are several equal professors; in this case, however, they will be based not on status, but on the expertise demonstrated by the professor in question in a particular subject at a particular time. This promotes competition between different alternatives and ideas. This, in turn, does not only benefit the research in question, but also improves the quality of structural decisions. It invariably challenges deep-rooted patterns of thought and automatically promotes diversity and the necessary change if one pays equal heed to points of view which depend on the respective career level, gender, nationality, situation in life or something else; after all, proficient international researchers, for instance, tend to attract others of their kind, and funds can be put to better use.

However, such cooperation between equals does not only require academic excellence, but also a much higher level of adequate leadership skills; these include appropriate communication skills as well as the abilities to establish close work relationships, , and to facilitate complex decision-making processes. As I see it, it is at this point that one comes to the nub of the much demanded cultural change: a scientific community must want to be just that, even if this may take considerable effort to achieve.²⁷

In order to achieve this, however, it is necessary to develop an even more resili-

²⁷ The idea of a horizontal organisational structure was well received, at least amongst the professors we questioned. They feel that the need to loosen the current structural constraints outweighs their desire to maintain their personal status in a chair-based system. Sadly, we are unable to supply any empirical evidence, but we still felt it was worth pointing out the welcome open-mindedness of our sample of $n = 8$.

ent departmental staff development strategy, which can – among other things – guarantee transparent and independent evaluations and institutionalised training programmes.

2. Professionalised support for academia

Top-class research requires top-class support structures. Thus, not every academic who conducts excellent research has to be an outstanding communicator or manager – as long as there are people around them who are.

Slimming down the number of non-professorial and administrative posts will lead to the emergence of new, specialised job profiles, for instance for departments that specialize in the acquisition of external funding or knowledge transfer. This will create new employment models for highly-qualified staff aside from purely administrative positions. At the same time, there would be fewer conventional administrative positions as a consequence; clearly, this needs to be borne in mind as well.

Sharing resources within departments would also allow for greater research specialisation (as researchers would not have to devote their energies to setting up a suitable research environment for themselves). It would also help to improve teaching because highly-specialised researchers would not be required to give any introductory seminars, and could use this time to pass on the latest research findings to more advanced students or postgraduates. The basic courses could then be covered by professors whose role primarily consists in teaching or, in part, by associate professorships; the latter, however, should teach only by way of extra income while being in a full-time post (elsewhere), so as to prevent a return to the creation of insecure jobs. In fact, it is about enriching university teaching with practical or intersectoral experience (for example, in the training of doctors or teachers, but in other disciplines, too).

A final thought: it would be interesting to learn more about the unanticipated challenges and side-effects which universities abroad have faced in implementing the departmental structure, and to discover what Germany can learn from these experiences.

Dr Anne Schreiter is the Managing Director of the German Scholars Organization e.V. (GSO)

Commentary by Frieder Vogelmann and Arndt Wonka

Common Consent

We would like join the authors in calling for the introduction of a departmental

structure that is adapted for German universities. It should do without non-professorial academic posts that are financed via the central budget and instead, considerably increase the number of professorships, in particular those with proper tenure-track.²⁸ In our view, there are two key advantages: firstly, hierarchies, which force so-called ‘junior researchers’ to remain their positions until they reach the average age of 42,²⁹ hinder their independent research, and which perpetuate the current HR structure (which is neither objectively nor politically justifiable) at universities, would be abolished. Secondly, the departmental structure would allow for the creation of job security at an early age. At the same time, one would not need to put up with the disadvantage which the trade union model of permanent non-professorial academic posts entails and which grants staff far fewer opportunities and rights when they work on research projects and collaborative ventures, or when they contribute to course structures and the development of the institutes themselves.

In favour of more core funding

We regard the idea of cost neutrality, which the authors have emphasised on several occasions, with a degree of scepticism. From a political perspective (and with regard to higher education policy), it is understandably desirable to stress the aspect of cost neutrality – in particular with a view to the eventual implementation of reforms and the necessary negotiations with authorities on institutional and state levels. However, even the authors note on p. 11 that the new professorships would create an additional pension burden. We do not believe that this could be ‘adjusted away’. And neither do we recognise the need to do so. The lack of core funding at German universities to which the paper also refers (p. 3) means that we can no longer make the political case for cost-neutral reforms. This would represent an implicit justification of a situation which is inadequate and which will soon be untenable given the growing numbers of students. Instead, we should have the confidence to step up our demands: high-quality research and education come at a cost. If departments were to be introduced, additional financial resources could be used to create additional teaching capacity in the form of jobs. And this extra teaching capacity could be used, at least in part, to reduce the teaching load of professors who have always spoken out in favour of professorial chairs; it might incentivise them to increase their support for a departmental structure.

28 Angelika Schenk, Frieder Vogelmann and Arndt Wonka (2017): Jenseits der Infantilisierung: Plädoyer für einen Personalstrukturwandel an deutschen Universitäten. In: Berliner Debatte Initial, 28 (1), pp. 146–154 Consortium for the Federal Report on Junior Researchers (2017). Federal Report on Junior

29 Consortium for the Federal Report on Junior Researchers (2017). Federal Report on Junior Researchers 2017: Statistical Data and Research Findings on Doctoral Candidates and Postdoctoral Researchers in Germany. Bielefeld: W. Bertelsmann Verlag. DOI: 10.3278/6004603w

Transitional problems

As the authors point out, the transition from today's HR structure to a departmental model would raise a number of issues. In addition to the problems which we have already referred to – which, moreover, do not represent 'red lines' or insurmountable hurdles in our eyes of those of the authors – we believe it is both reasonable and important to raise two other points of discussion: the gradual change in the staffing structure as it is envisaged will require a considerable readiness for consensus and compromise in the institutes. Above all, it requires a consensus regarding the research foci of the institute, to which the new tenure-track positions with their respective specialism will contribute. It is particularly important to create a willingness to work towards a consensus and accept compromises in order to prevent individual members of institutes from opposing a reform because of their fear that groups within the institute may use a change in staffing policy to unilaterally push the interests of their subject area and their research. In order to enforce a willingness for consensus rather than just formulating a desire for the latter, it might prove expedient to offer a veto right to all members of the institute (and not just the existing professors); at any rate, the procedure one adopts should guarantee the protection of minority positions, so as to dismantle existential fears and encourage compromise. Our experience shows that, with just a little willingness to compromise and mutual consideration, a departmental structure could be introduced successfully even though the process of restructuring institutional committees and working groups give rise to controversy and conflict almost as a matter of course.

Moreover, it will be necessary to reach agreements during the process of restructuring in order to ensure that the various status groups continue to be represented on committees to an adequate degree during the transitional period. This will, for instance, apply to the ever-decreasing non-professorial academic positions. Additionally, it is highly relevant with a view to the makeup of committees which transcend to institutional boundaries of a single institute, for instance on a divisional level; if individual institutes adopt a departmental structure ahead of others, they may as a consequence suddenly have a disproportionate number of professorships compared with the other institutes. Provided the departmental structure proves successful, these phenomena will undoubtedly be short-lived. But precisely because it is reasonable – and only to be expected – that this transition will take some time – one will need to seek solutions which ensure that different groups and interests at the universities are able to introduce departments, a process which is desirable both from a political point of view and the point of view of the subject areas in question.

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Commentary by Stefan Kaufmann

An excellent higher education system requires modern HR structures

Germany has been – and remains – famous for its scholarship and is hence risking its reputation as a top location for higher education. In the increasingly globalised competition for the best academics as well as the best students, it is therefore important to ensure that German universities and research institutions maintain their positions in the international lead. Thanks to their targeted promotion of excellence through the Excellence Initiative/Excellence Strategy, our top universities have been able to make up a lot of ground in the international arena. However, they still do not figure among the top thirty or forty universities in the relevant international rankings. One might therefore assume that the increased investment made on the national level as well as that of the individual states is simply not sufficient, and that our universities require further financial resources to be able to keep pace with their international competitors. It is certainly true that the federal states need to provide better core funding for German universities. That is why, for its part, the federal republic invested billions in the Higher Education Pact, the Excellence Strategy and the Pact for Teaching Quality, and even took overall control of the Federal Training Assistance Act (BAföG) in 2015 so that the individual states could contribute additional resources to fund their higher education sector. It is simply will not suffice to invest more in universities; not least since the international comparison reveals that Germany already spends a great deal of public money on research and development – on a level that is comparable with the USA, and that exceeds the amount invested by Great Britain or Switzerland.

Besides, more money is not what is essential for the higher education system. It is much more important to improve performance with the given resources. That is why structural issues are at the heart of any discussion about the future of universities. In this regard, a cost-neutral approach – such as the transformation from a structure based on professorial chairs to one based on departments which this text proposes – is also very interesting from the perspective of higher education policy. The authors calculate that the resources available today could pay for twice as many professors as there are at present if many budget-financed non-professorial positions were to be abolished in return. They provide a valid justification for abandoning the venerable German system of professorial chairs in favour of a departmental structure, which has widely been adopted in other countries: a large and diverse body of professors offering better prospects for young academics, a more dynamic academic environment, with positive out-

comes for both research and teaching, and finally a more attractive international profile. All status groups within the universities are meant to benefit: more (permanent) professorships would mean better career prospects and extra time for research and teaching in place of administrative duties. More professors would equal better supervision for students and a wider choice of subjects for their studies. The administration of the respective institute would enjoy a wider scope; it could thereby improve the university's standing internationally and build its reputation thanks to better conditions of study.

It is not only universities abroad that demonstrate how well a departmental structure can work and that it boasts advantages vis-à-vis the 'chair' system. In Germany too, positive experiences have been made, in some cases going back decades. It is up to the federal states to create the corresponding legal framework and to give their colleges and universities the necessary autonomy to pursue this promising path of reform. Even politicians have long understood that outstanding institutions do not only need satisfactory funding, but, above all, modern staffing structures. With their programme of support for junior researchers, the republic and its states have set the stage. Together, they are providing a total of one billion Euro in the years 2017-2032 in order to improve the plannability of careers as well as the transparency of possible career paths for junior researchers; they seek to make the German system of higher education more attractive at an international level, and to help the institutions to attract the best national and international junior researchers. The transition to a departmental structure could play an important role in this process, which is why this proposal is definitely worth a closer look.

Dr Stefan Kaufmann (CDU) is a Member of the German Bundestag and Chairman of the CDU/CSU group on the Committee for Education, Research and Technology Assessment of the German Bundestag.

Commentary by Eva-Maria Stange

The law already allows universities to opt for anchoring the professorial role in a structure such as a department rather than tying it to a professorial chair. According to the strategy presented in the text, all non-professorial academic posts would have to be converted into professorial ones; these postholders in turn would fulfil research and teaching duties within the department and be on an equal footing with one another. This would mean that all career paths in academia would lead towards a professorship. Opportunities for permanent employment in the institute, for instance for those obtaining a PhD without any aspiration for a professorship, would no longer exist. Similarly, there would be

no temporary qualification posts – other than a junior professorship or a tenure-track professorship. I believe this to be wrong because there should be an opportunity to specialise in teaching while contributing to research endeavours. A professional life in academia should not be tantamount to obtaining a professorship. In addition, it should be possible to obtain one's PhD while holding a temporary postgraduate position – independently of external funding structures and without having to remain at university, or in academia more generally, afterwards.

There are permanent responsibilities to be fulfilled at universities; these should be the responsibility of staff occupying permanent posts. This is true of teaching, but also of technical, administrative and managerial duties. Thus, the academic administrator who manages projects, for instance, does not have to be a professor, but will undoubtedly have to have a PhD. I am not convinced either that only professorships provide the key to better teaching. A well-qualified non-professional member of staff can also assure a high standard of teaching.

In my opinion, the greatest problem in this proposal pertains to the university system becoming 'clogged up' if fixed professorial positions are the only alternative to externally-funded posts. In this case, extending the period of transition from flexible to fixed posts would not make any difference. It would merely delay the problem, but it would remain to be dealt with in the near future. This would leave the university system paralysed and unable to seek out new academic avenues. Departments aside, the introduction of open-topic professorships would require additional resources in any case.

It is certainly true that there need to be more permanent positions at universities than is currently the case. The reworked Act on Temporary Employment in Higher Education does not go far enough. There needs to be a mind shift at universities – as well as better basic funding in order to be able to establish more permanent positions.

It is also true that rigid ties between staff and an individual professorship, an individual chair, are incompatible with the freedom of research and teaching. The practice of making appointments and binding a cohort of staff to the professorship (thereby assigning certain values to the different chairs), is certainly outdated, but it is a difficult habit to break. A departmental structure is hence certainly worth further discussion.

Dr Eva-Maria Stange (SPD) is Minister of State for Science and Art in Saxony.

Commentary by Kai Gehring

Academic employment conditions have got completely out of hand. Even established individuals have to claw their way from one half-year contract to another years after earning their doctorate. Teaching is increasingly the province of the precariously employed. The position in which assistant lecturers and associate professors find themselves is scandalous. It becomes impossible to plan one's academic career – never mind it being conducive to family life. We must fight the monstrous state of affairs, the practice of time-limited contracts in academia, effectively and with determination.

A new balance between external funding and basic funding for universities will help to counteract insecure career prospects. There needs to be a much better basic funding; equally, there is a need for institutional administrations to become more aware of their responsibility towards their own employees with regard to HR development and career paths. However, the persistent underfunding of higher education, which concurs with growing expenditure, is not the only reason for the unsatisfactory situation in which junior researchers find themselves. It is indeed the case that antiquated HR structures and qualification paths contribute to a lack of reliable job prospects for junior researchers, and ultimately cause a professional life in academia to seem to be an unattractive option. In this context, the paper makes an important contribution to the debate, which sadly takes a back seat in the everyday parliamentary business.

The objectives of breaking with the principle of professorial chairs at universities and of introducing a much less hierarchical system is necessary and makes a lot of sense. A cooperative environment, more say in decision-making processes, and equal rights would make higher education more democratic. However, the paper is too vague when it comes to the following questions: Who are its addressees? Are there to be pilot projects? Is there to be a new federal programme? How can the holders of chairs be convinced of the need for these far-reaching changes and be encouraged to lend their support?

A few universities in Germany already have some experience with a departmental structure. It is unclear whether, or to what extent, their findings have informed the paper. Also, some federal states (Berlin and Bremen) made similar attempts in the 1970s and 1980s to abolish professorial chairs, to pool resources such as secretarial support and undergraduate assistants, to give more rights to staff in middle-ranking positions, and to employ some of them on permanent contracts. The positive and negative experiences gained at the time should also be taken into account. However, we are unaware of any genuine evaluation of these structural reforms.

It is fair to assume that a department will gain a more considerable, international reputation than a chair. It is also safe to say that there will be a greater breadth of subjects on offer, and a more dynamic research landscape. Less optimism is in order apropos the success of attempts to abolish hierarchies. In other countries, too, there is a world of difference between whether one is a full professor (W₃), associate professor (W₂) or assistant professor (W₁); to put it bluntly, a W₁ does all the donkey work while the true decision-making power lies with the W₃.

The introduction of a departmental structure is to go hand in hand with the conversion of non-professorial academic positions into professorships. Twelve percent of the academic staff at German universities whose main employment consists in their academic pursuits in Germany are self-employed university teachers. The remaining 88 percent are dependent academics who count as junior researchers until they reach their forties, and are in part also treated as such. In France and England, on the other hand, around two-thirds of academic staff whose regular occupation consists in their academic work are self-employed university teachers, with the figure even rising to 80 percent in the USA. Clearly, there is a need to create more positions for academics in Germany in order to enable them to both teach and research independently.

However, the proposal of converting non-professorial academic posts into professorships does not convince me entirely. One problem lies in the self-imposed cost neutrality. Not every reform has to come at a high price, but the assumption that five non-professorial academic positions would correspond to three professorships implies a reduction in staff numbers of 40 percent – assuming one talks of full-time job equivalents. Moreover, the teaching requirement of the academic staff at the universities, which has been assumed to be at nine weekly contact hours per semester, is in fact nearer to a figure between four and twenty-five hours. The performance of lecturers who made up the fastest rising staff category between 2005 and 2015 even though they are not directly appointed at the universities, has been completely overlooked. These lecturers have largely been responsible for supervising the many extra students we have seen in recent years. The blanket will not stretch far enough if one it ensures a better ratio of student per professor while at the same time reducing the quota of supervision undertaken by non-professorial academic staff. There is a clear need for more staff in higher education, and this needs to be shouted from the rooftops.

One crucial question that is omitted from the paper is the question of how to increase the value of teaching to achieve an improvement in quality. It is optimistic to assume that having more professors who conduct more diverse and more flexible research will ensure that teaching is more research-related. It is of course accurate that permanent employees “allow for a high level of continuity in their

teaching”, but that does not automatically entail that teaching will improve for the students.

It makes sense to implement reforms cautiously and to phase them to avoid any one-off effects and their long-term repercussions. The practice of qualifying as a young researcher while occupying a so-called doctoral qualification post is called into question if one abolishes these posts are abolished in order to ensure the cost neutrality of professorships. The only other way one could earn one’s doctorate would be by obtaining a grant, which has little social protection, or by securing external funding, which would probably also worsen the position of the doctoral candidate.

Instead of increasing the number of permanent posts solely by appointing more professors, the Green Party faction in the Bundestag supports the creation of permanent career paths in addition to the professorship – as it is also the case abroad. We continue to believe that it is right to create non-professorial permanent posts in addition to professorial tenure-track positions for good academics so that they can teach and research independently. The universities must improve their ability to implement a systematic HR development in parallel to their achieving greater autonomy.

Junior researchers invest considerable creativity, talent, and time in research and teaching. The ideas and innovation they contribute go a long way towards guaranteeing the quality and performance of the German university system. It is hence all the more outrageous that precarious rather than fair employment conditions continue to be a daily occurrence.

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Commentary by Tobias Schulze

United in our goal of creating more independence for academics earlier in their careers

Firstly, I should like to thank the authors; anyone who advises politicians in this way takes into account the consequences and counter-arguments of their proposals, and concerns themselves with their political implementation, has earned their stripes in terms of democratic discourse.

We agree on the analysis: the HR structure in the German university system

has run off the rails. Increasingly, university professors are compelled to become managers of their professorial chair apparatus rather than able to conduct innovative research and teaching. They choreograph a horde of temporary academic staff in dependent employment. The majority are engaged in externally-funded projects – at the large Berlin universities, this figure is at about 66%.³⁰ Yet, if one considers their international peers, it becomes immediately apparent that academics require good prospects and autonomy while they are at their most innovative.

Despite decades of criticism, the dogma of New Public Management has persisted unremittingly in the sphere of higher education³¹, especially within higher education administrations, although even the Science and Humanities Council believes that the sad state of affairs as generated by fixed-term contracts is a qualitative problems.³² Consequently, we will only achieve structural change by mounting political pressure – both on the inside of universities and on their outside.

There is often immediate unanimity about the concrete goals such pressure should aim to achieve: more permanent employment and, alongside, clearer career paths and earlier academic independence. But we also need to consider the changes in the academic work itself. Collective, often interdisciplinary structures – and not solitary thinkers – dominate the scene. Trends towards the digitalisation, the “opening up” and internationalisation of knowledge play a large part in this. These developments are just one of the reasons which should prompt us to do away with the centuries-old principle of professorial chairs in favour of new structures; not only for reasons of justice, but above all to protect the quality of academic work. Over the past fifteen years, my party has also repeatedly raised the topic of abolishing the structure of ordinaries, and has developed possible ways of doing so.³³

30 cf. the reply of the Berlin Senate to a written enquiry on the employment contracts of academic staff in higher education in Berlin, printed paper 18/10497 of Berlin City Parliament, online at <http://pardok.parlament-berlin.de/starweb/adis/citat/VT/18/SchrAnfr/s18-10497.pdf>

31 cf. Association of German Scientific Foundations: press release on the results of the 2017 university barometer. Online at https://www.stifterverband.org/pressemitteilungen/2017_04_24_hochschul-barometer

32 Science and Humanities Council: recommendations on career goals and paths at universities (2014). Online at <https://www.wissenschaftsrat.de/download/archiv/4009-14.pdf>

33 Most recently with a bill by the Left Party faction in the Landtag of Saxony on reforming the Higher Education Act of Saxony, which favours a departmental structure. Printed paper of the Landtag of Saxony 6/9585. Online at http://edas.landtag.sachsen.de/viewer.aspx?dok_nr=9585&dok_art=Drs&leg_per=6&pos_dok=0&dok_id=undefined

The authors of this text propose to achieve this objective by converting budget-financed non-professorial posts into professorial ones. This strategy has the advantage of being practicable; the HR categories it requires already exist. With new professorships which would exercise the basic right to academic freedom *ex officio*, a collaborative academic structure based on flat hierarchies could be developed. The tenure track model also constitutes a career path which might generate the new professorships. In its strategy for the future funding of higher education, the Left Party faction in the Bundestag made a point of not specifying whether the permanent and independent academic career paths that are to be funded should be set up as a professorship [i.e. as civil servants] or in the default form of employment [i.e. as opposed to officialdom].³⁴ Despite our openness to the concept of new professorships and departments, there remain questions to be asked: We maintain, for instance, that one can only justify the status of university teachers as civil servants by recurring to a historical argument. Civil servants with their pension entitlements have a long-term impact on the budget, as the authors are right to point out. Experience shows that such resources are precisely what today's more flexible higher education structures lack; this, in turn, constitutes a risk for the federal states which fund the sector.

In my view, practice shows that posts which come with the status of civil servant are not a prerequisite for innovative and independent academic work, provided such posts are given autonomy and independence. Moreover, any reform will prove inadequate if it merely targets non-professorial posts that are funded out of the central budget: at the aforementioned Berlin universities, these posts only account for about a third of all non-professorial posts. Ultimately, the relationship between professorial and non-professorial staff would shift, but it would not be completely reshaped. There also remains the question of how to obtain one's qualifications: will only externally-funded posts serve this purpose in future? I would want to call this aspect into question, too.

To summarise: this is a lucid contribution to an essential debate.

Tobias Schulze (Left Party) is a Member of Berlin City Parliament and is the Left Party Spokesperson for the federal working committee on higher education policy.

34 Left Party faction in the Bundestag: policy statement on promoting cooperation: for fully-funded universities, good study and working conditions, and strong and independent research. Resolution dated 16 February 2016. Online at https://www.linksfraktion.de/fi_leadadmin/user_upload/PDF_Dokumente/wissenschaftsfi_nanzierung-linke.pdf

Commentary by Otfried Jarren

Essential key objectives

There is little doubt that the HR and organisational structures of universities must occasionally be subject to scrutiny, too. Hence this paper, which picks up on many earlier considerations and supports these convincingly, is very much to be welcomed. And yet: the proposed HR and organisational reform tries to achieve too much at once. Considerable hazards are part and parcel of every major reform within our federalist system: mainly because of the existing division of responsibilities, one can expect considerable asynchronicities and inconsistent practices (between federal states and thus between universities) to be the result. Consequently, it is the amendment of HR structures alone which offers (considerable) leverage. The argument in favour of changing the HR structure, which is the primary intention of the paper, is a convincing one: away with the structure based on professorial chairs in favour of a flexible professoral model! Assistant professors with tenure track (AP TT) would be en route to a professorship. The holder of a chair would have no personal resources at their beck and call; yet, the respective subject area would have to adequately staffed to be able to deliver what is required. However, the change in HR structure would not necessarily have to go hand in hand with a change in organisational structure; or at least, not at once. Still, implementing the AP TT system would be tantamount to saying goodbye to that German anomaly, the WI professor (infantilised as a ‘junior professor’). The present paper, however, fails to address these issues, incl. the consequences of implementing the AP TT model.

Fortunately, universities are extremely stalwart institutions and very slow-moving organisations. Organisational structures at universities are generally sluggish to develop, and have a long shelf-life – and for good reason. For why should existing faculties or specialist fields not be able to develop new fields of study and specialisms? Departments, once formed, would need to allow for that, too (once implemented). One can assume that the organisational lethargy which the paper ascribes to the existing faculties would be applicable to departments, too. Anyone seeking more diversity in terms of specialist fields will have to proceed otherwise, and at this point, hierarchy will inevitably come into play.

But what *are* these departments? In the paper, the proposal remains terribly vague. How big? What specialist fields, subject groups or subjects – i. e. professorships – should be anchored in which department? How about their management structures? In the paper, departments are considered ‘a good thing’ per se: no-one in authority, a good level of cooperation between the professors (“collaboration in a partnership of equals”), dynamism as well as more time for research, and – of course – for the students, too.

Departments are presented as a model for solving many problems; reading the paper, one might almost believe them to be a panacea. This impression arises when it is claimed that the departmental structure will abolish inequalities – between status groups and in the allocation of resources (the (in)famous battles over rooms). Yet, the “shared job and room pools” as it is proposed in the paper would require management, too – and it would still be necessary to take decisions. And what would departments do in the event of new appointments (gains) or retention negotiations when it came to resources? These would have to be (re) distributed, one would need to negotiate (individual) requests, and differences would ensue, both occasionally as well as lastingly. Is that problematic?

Well then: departments, too, require people to perform particular roles; they have their own procedures, need to take account of differences, etc. Not even departments can get by without a hierarchy. Especially not if matters relating to AP TT – for instance the question whether tenure is to be given or withheld – have to be dealt with. On the contrary: the AP TT model requires a sophisticated HR management – at all levels within the university. Hence, it will not be possible to stick with “previous appointment procedures”. Rather, the many appointment and evaluation procedures will add significantly to costs, whether it be on advice, mentoring, or appraisal.

Some of the points mentioned in the paper also call for an in-depth discussion on account of their long-term consequences. I’d like to address three key questions issues:

- Are there really going to be no posts other than externally-funded junior researcher positions? And what are we to understand by “qualification positions with a reduced teaching load”? Where and how can teaching experience be acquired to access the AP TT procedure if there is no longer a postdoctoral phase? What does it mean if we are to dispense with a “set syllabus”?
- The paper makes promises which it cannot deliver: the attempts to change the HR and organisational structure will not result in “upgrading non-professorial staff to the status of professor” unless one intends to use the AP TT model as a sort of ‘in-house supply chain’. We cannot, should not, and must not want such a thing: AP TT relies on a high level of skill and international competitiveness between junior talents. Yet, even if they follow this route, they will not all end up in a professorship with lifetime tenure. AP TT is a highly selective process, as is indeed only right and proper.
- Will student supervision improve because we have departments instead of specialist fields or faculties? Partly yes, but probably, partly no; because decisions regarding the department’s resources must be taken – on an academic

as well as a political level; this concerns, for instance, the number of professorships and, consequently, the teaching load. And it is common knowledge in academic circles that in Germany, the (administrative) courts have a say in capacity regulations.

The paper presents a persuasive, central notion: the establishment of an AP TT system. Its implementation will take (rather a lot of) time. We will learn things in the course of the process, things that might even help us to address organisational matters. And maybe a departmental structure even makes sense – who knows? Yet, there is one statement towards the end of the paper that does not convince me at all: “The role of the professor would change significantly with the establishment of a departmental structure: his or her duties would cover mainly research content (and less time would be spent issuing instructions to staff) ...” So now I’ll head off to my chair in the faculty, take a seat... and exercise myself in issuing instructions ...

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Commentary by Dagmar Simon

Is it all now just a question of departments?

A plea for diversity in HR structure

First and foremost: this plea is ambitious, cleverly argued, and it makes a helpful contribution to the debate on reform, and in particular the situation of non-professorial roles, especially as it takes into consideration all of the potential repercussions of the envisaged shift from a structure based on professorial chairs to one based on departments. This is especially important in the light of the ‘appetite for reform’ in the German higher education system if one considers how implementation of the Bologna Process in Germany and compares it with the approaches taken in other European countries. And yet – or perhaps precisely because of this – one gains the impression that the introduction of a departmental structure across the board should cure all of the current needs for reform with a one-size-fits-all solution. And that has almost certainly not been the intention.

I will focus on two central arguments, touching upon the thematic breadth and diversity of research in departments before arriving at the core argument: that the shift to permanent professorships from what are generally only temporary academic posts is a means of escaping a system of hierarchical dependencies and finding liberation from an insecure job market.

By its very size alone, a department can offer a breadth of topics for research (and for teaching, too), which facilitates cooperation between subjects and disciplines. Our own studies in the research group on higher education policy at the Berlin Social Science Centre (WZB) have also shown that a departmental structure is more conducive to the promotion of interdisciplinary cooperation than a structure based on professorial chairs. The argument in favour of departments cannot reside solely in the claim to (increased) diversity, but one also needs to consider how this diversity is beneficial to research (on an interdisciplinary level). Adequate structures are an essential, but not the only criterion. In her works on dis-disciplinarity and interdisciplinarity in the advancement of research, Michèle Lamont showed that openness towards interdisciplinary approaches is also dependent on the cultures prevalent in academic disciplines, which often continue to have national characteristics despite the basically international nature of research. These cultures cannot just be transferred into the German higher education system. However, a departmental structure would indeed constitute a better starting point.

Let's move on to the central argument: the precarious situation faced by temporary, externally-funded staff turns even more grievous by the postdoctoral phase (at the latest) when it becomes apparent that academia offers few career prospects. An almost archaic dependence on the chairholders, and the inherent need to constantly fight for one's professional future by acting 'like an entrepreneur' and attracting what is, as a rule, new external funding, is a thought-provoking mix in itself – and has moreover little to do with the idea of a chance at professional development. In this sense, tenure-track seems the way to go, and as does the conversion of non-professorial posts into permanent professorships. However, one cannot help but wonder whether attractive non-professorial posts for academics which are not externally funded could not actually be compatible with a departmental structure. Why not in fact have distinct career paths, as recommended by the Science and Humanities Council in its latest set of recommendations on career paths in academia? As I said: this should be with the emphasis on 'attractive' posts with a prospect of them being made permanent, and possibly a role as line manager in, say, a research or working group. Not everyone who wants to remain in academia conceives of their future in terms of becoming a professor; in non-university research, for instance, there is a particular type of academic who has an affinity for research and its application. A diverse of posts, and the resulting diversity in the tasks and goals of academia, will also prove advantageous for the institutions themselves. It is also crucial to not only talk about colleges and universities as social institutions which must perform various tasks in addition to research and teaching in the context of developing and diversifying the profile of higher education as such.

Oh dear, there is a third point after all: the question of resources! Just at the moment when we are talking with increased fervour about tenure-track professorships, the USA is cutting back on them again. But of course, that is not necessarily an argument against them.

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Commentary by Stefan Hornbostel

“The question whether or not such a Privatdozent [associate professor], and still more an assistant, will ever succeed in moving into the position of a full professor or even become the head of an institute. That is simply a hazard.”

Those were the words of Max Weber in 1919 when he compared German universities with the (departmental) structure adopted in America. Given that the number of tenured posts in the USA has long been in steady decline, and given the ever shorter periods for which employment contracts are awarded, one would not necessarily want to use the American (departmental) structure as a point of reference today, but at the same time, the fact that the relative numbers of temporary non-professorial employees and professors are drifting apart constitutes a serious structural problem in the German system. And this problem is by no means a new one: even the student movement had an axe to grind with full professorships while legislation and funding programmes have limited their former supremacy; yet, alongside the growing importance of external funding to research, the professorial chair is regained significance even if the paths leading up to it have since become very diverse, (if not impossible to trace).

A system of higher education which facilitates strong academic performances does not require good organisation (regardless of whether one is talking about a department or an institute), but also a shrewd and flexible HR development strategy. Such a strategy has to ensure that academic careers become more predictable, but also more diverse; to combine long-term planning with short-term recruitment decisions; to imbue spatial and sectoral mobility with a predictable level of risk; to combine stability with change.

So what would result from the reform proposed in this paper? A two-tier society

to start with – since externally-funded staff are not usually offered the option of tenure, and since their number will increase if more professors apply for this type of funding. The constantly growing number of doctoral candidates illustrates that such a model can only function if we introduce a new culture of rejection. This would entail the continuation of the German chair because no-one challenges the model of the professor as civil servant, and because the power of socialization which is inherent in tradition is considerable. Finally – assuming there is no vast, long-term increase in resources – the number of academic staff will diminish markedly; as will the influx of new recruits (and ideas).

To that extent, this is a half-hearted reform proposal which – despite containing some good ideas – does not possess the radicalism of a masterstroke. A genuinely new strategy will have to ruffle a lot of old feathers: professors assuming different responsibilities, partly scalable research and teaching loads, different formats governance (including new hierarchies), more flexible financing options, strategic orientations of organisational units, serious evaluations, transparent HR planning, mobility incentives (if the ban on tenure track no longer exists), decision-making cultures without clientelism, a rethink on the civil service status, the creation of new, permanent areas of responsibility even without professorships, and much more.

Departmental structures and tenure-track positions alone will not suffice because experience has shown that the importation of cultural and organisational solutions is not usually possible, at least not without fundamental transformations which leave behind only shadowy traces of the original. The fondly-quoted Anglo-American system has its own competitive culture, and is by no means wholly positive.

The present venture is to be welcomed; it chimes in with many higher education policy positions, but a long-term, sustainable reform of the German higher education system should go further than merely placing inflated expectations on an organisational model.

The prescription is not new: ‘*Tempora mutantur, nos et mutamur in illis*’ (‘Times change, and we change with them’). In other words, we should use our imagination, a critical spirit, and the pleasure of experimentation to think beyond what we previously took for granted. In the spirit of Max Weber, we should be able to live for and from academia. This does not necessarily require a national masterplan; rather, it can also be undertaken by individual universities and federal states. Fortunately, things have already started moving, even if our patience might be sorely tried! At any rate, we derive encouragement from the words of Friedrich Schiller: “Who rants more against reformers than the gaggle of bread-fed

scholars? Who more holds up the progress of useful revolutions in the kingdom of knowledge than these very men?"

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