

GFZ Guideline on Fixed-Term Employment Contracts

Preamble

The GFZ can only maintain and expand its position in the national and international research sector if it constantly reinvents itself by picking up on new, forward-looking topics and ideas, using innovative methods and equipment, and recruiting staff who has been trained according to the latest state of knowledge. Many new ideas and approaches have been developed by scientists still at the beginning of their careers. A high turnover particularly of younger personnel is therefore essential for the GFZ.

The following guidelines are the declaration of the GFZ's belief in reliable planning of career paths and clearly regulated employment conditions for fixed-term employment contracts. This complements the GFZ's guidelines on application for permanency. With active HR work, GFZ intends to promote the professional development of its employees, the meeting of training goals and the life-phase-oriented compatibility of profession and family. At the same time, the requirements of the Law on Fixed-Term Contracts in Higher Education and Research [WissZeitVG] are met.

Principles

Transparent personnel planning and clarity on contractual and development prospects are the foundation for a responsible hiring and fixed-term contract policy at the GFZ. All new hires at the GFZ must first receive a fixed-term employment contract. This principle applies to the same extent to all of the GFZ's employees. Exceptions are possible.

During their time at the Centre, the GFZ commits to offer especially to employees with fixed-term contracts, developmental possibilities which open to them a successful professional career regardless of whether their career is continued internally or externally.

Scope of application and legal context

This policy on fixed-term employment contracts defines the basic conditions on periods of employment / hiring contracts for all employees subject to wage negotiations and also the jointly appointed staff. Student and research assistants are expressly excluded from the regulation.

The valid Law on Fixed-Term Contracts in Research [WissZeitVG] establishes the essential legal framework for fixed-term contracts in research. Further reasons for fixed-term contracts can be found in the Part-Time Work and Fixed-Term Employment Law [TzBfG].

Duration of contract

Initial contracts are to be concluded for a duration of at least 24 months, unless the available budgetary resources or third-party funds are only available for a shorter period

or the employment is only necessary for a shorter period. These cases require special justification.

The duration of contracts for doctoral candidates at the GFZ is 36 months. To ensure the basic conditions are met, the employment contract of doctoral candidates is backed up by a supervision agreement. The details are recorded in the guidelines on structured training of doctoral candidates at the GFZ.

Fixed-term employment contracts in research, taking the doctoral studies and postdoc phases together, should as a rule not exceed a total of twelve years. For researchers who are active in the research system for eight years, a meeting on prospects is already planned at this point. At this meeting, the manager and the researcher discuss his/her further career progression at the GFZ. The manager then composes a binding statement which indicates the planning for a further four years at the GFZ or the planning for a targeted conversion of the fixed-term contract into a permanent contract. The process of receiving a permanent contract as a researcher is regulated by the GFZ's current guidelines on converting a fixed-term contract into a permanent contract.

Contract extensions (outside funding time-limits) that exceed the maximum term are possible as an exception, if there are personal reasons (e.g., absence and downtime for family reasons), and if the annual performance review results in viable prospects for further professional development of the affected person.

The maximum duration of a fixed-term contract for technical/scientific staff must not exceed a total period of six years in the same function and organisational classification. After three to four years, a prospects meeting is planned followed by a binding statement by the manager about the employees a further professional career at the GFZ.

In administration, fixed-term contracts exceeding the period of two years are only possible as covers or for special tasks.

Expiry of employment contracts

Contract extensions on employment contracts and the expiry of employment contracts are in principle the subject of the annual performance review. The decision on the extension or the expiry of fixed-term employment contracts must be made six months before the end of the valid employment contract. To this end, the appropriate manager holds a meeting with the employee in which he/she clearly indicates whether and which further employment options are available at the GFZ. If the employment relationship is to be continued, the manager submits the relevant application to the Human Resources

Department (V1). If the contract is to be made permanent, the GFZ's guidelines on converting a fixed-term contract to a permanent contract must be obeyed.

Independent of the established minimum term, there exists the option at the GFZ to negotiate bridging contracts (e.g., between two projects with outside funding). These

contracts are in the interest of both parties (the employee and the GFZ), and their durations are dependent on the possibilities of financing and time-limits.

Career phases for postdocs

Two career phases for postdocs are defined, which encompass, in the first place, the first three years after obtaining the doctorate and next a further phase of a maximum of three years. The duration of the fixed-term employment contracts for postdocs must be in an appropriate relationship to the respectively planned qualification. The management ensures that sufficient time for the qualification is available. The qualification in the postdoc phase must be discussed at the annual performance interview.

Examples of qualifications[1] in the early postdoc phase are the development of technical and methodical skills, skills for teaching (teaching skills, supervisory skills), project management (project management, conflict management, intercultural skills) and creating their own professional profile in the research community (attraction of external funds, networking, issuing of expert opinions). Likewise, this phase should be used, if possible, to acquire experience abroad, which is funded by the GFZ mobility program.

If the career goal is a scientific career without a professorship, the qualification in the second postdoc phase aims, in addition to the development of further technical and methodical skills, at the consolidation of skills in management of employees, in communication (moderation, conflict resolution) and in interdisciplinary thinking and working. For the career goal of professor, in addition to the aforesaid qualifications, the later postdoc phase requires to include experience in committee work and skills in creating a profile and field skills in appointment processes. For a career in research management or in business, management-related key skills can be of central significance for the qualification.

Support tools and measures for career planning

Using organisational measures, including

- annual performance interviews,
- continuing development options,
- language courses,
- management development,
- mentoring,
- mobility programs,
- family-friendly employment and framework conditions

and also the commitment of the GFZ's management to strive to allow all employees with fixed-term contracts to acquire important skills and professional experiences in order to continue to develop in their profession within or outside of the GFZ.

Transitional arrangements

When the policy on fixed-term employment contracts takes effect, it applies in an unlimited manner to all subsequent new employments. For GFZ employees with on-going fixed-term employment contracts, which exceed or fall short of the maximum and minimum employment periods established here, a solution will be sought on an individual basis that is targeted, transparent and fair, in collaboration between the manager, the employee, and the human resources department and if applicable the Board of Directors. This process will take into account technical, organisational, financial and social aspects.

Human resources controlling will observe the GFZ's policy on fixed-term contracts and provide the findings obtained for the annual strategy and budget meetings.

[1] cf. "Skill model according to career phases" by Miriam Müller; in von Bülow, I. (2014). Promotion of young researchers [Nachwuchsförderugn in der Wissenschaft] Berlin: Springer.