



First accompanying evaluation of the Joint Federal Government-Länder Programme for Junior Academics (Tenure-Track Programme)

Executive Summary

The **Joint Federal Government-Länder Tenure-Track Programme** (hereafter: Tenure-Track Programme) is a pivotal policy initiative of the Federal Ministry of Education and Research and the Länder (federal states) for supporting early career researchers in the German science system. Until 2032, the programme funds a total of 1,000 tenure-track professorships. Through this, the career prospects for early career researchers in Germany are to be made more reliable, predictable and transparent. Through the programme, the tenure-track professorship was to be established and consolidated as an additional career path towards a professorship at German universities.

When setting up the programme, the German federal and state governments had agreed on accompanying the programme by systematic evaluations. The first evaluation of this kind was carried out from June 2022 to Mai 2024 by **Technopolis Group** together with the **German Centre for Higher Education Research and Science Studies (DZHW)**. The evaluation used various empirical instruments: online surveys addressed to the 75 funded universities and all tenure-track professors funded by the programme, interviews with experts and selected universities, and the analysis of documents such as project descriptions and tenure-track statutes (Satzungen) of the universities, monitoring reports of the Joint Science Conference (Gemeinsame Wissenschaftskonferenz – GWK) and other (public) data sources.

Overall, the evaluation shows that the tenure-track programme was instrumental for establishing the tenure-track professorship much more broadly among German universities than in the past. Already by the time of the first evaluation of the programme, the establishment of the tenure-track professorship in the German science system was thus successfully promoted.

The first evaluation shows, that the specific **programme objectives** were achieved as follows:

As of May 2023 a total of **971 professors were appointed for the first time**. The (operational) programme goal of appointing 1,000 tenure-track professors was thus nearly achieved. Due to the programme, tenure-track professorships were established across many departments (Fakultäten) at the funded universities. The format of the tenure-track professorship is also increasingly taken into account for the recruitment of professors outside the programme. The evaluation shows that, in addition to the appointment of professorships, the programme mechanisms aiming at triggering structural effects (e.g. the requirement of funded universities to design staff development plans and tenure-track statutes; requirements to establish quality-assured appointment and evaluation procedures; binding agreements on reforms to the legal framework for tenure-track professors by the Länder governments) were effective **instruments for the structural establishment of the tenure-track professorship in Germany**. These structural effects have led to clearly defined framework conditions for the appointment to a tenure-track professorship at German universities, for support mechanisms for researchers during the tenure-track phase and for the tenure evaluation based on transparent evaluation criteria.

The large majority (81%) of the funded tenure-track professors surveyed in this evaluation and other experts see the tenure-track professorship as a positive element in the structure of staff categories at German universities. In particular, it is considered as an instrument for making scientific careers in Germany more predictable and transparent. In this context, the career stage at which a tenured position can be obtained in the German science system plays an important role: through the tenure-track programme, the federal and Länder governments intended to reach an earlier decision-making about a permanent position **of researchers in the science system**. The evaluation shows that the **average age** of programme-funded tenure-track professors appointed between 2018-2023 was 35.9 years. Based on the data of the GWK Monitoring Report 2023, the decision on a predictable career in the German science system was thus made on average 7.3 years earlier than for first-time appointments to a permanent professorship outside the programme between 2016 and 2021.

The programme also had the objective of initiating a **cultural change** at German universities towards using tenure-track formats. This cultural change is particularly evident in the widespread acceptance of the tenure-track professorship at universities in Germany. The evaluation shows that the tenure-track programme initiated a process at universities to develop other tenure-track approaches besides the tenure-track professorship. In this respect, the evaluation identifies important impulses for a cultural change in the sense of greater use of the "tenure-track approach" in the German science system.

A further goal of the tenure-track programme is to make improvements in the areas of **equal opportunities between male and female researchers and the possibilities for researchers to reconcile family and work life**. The contribution of the programme to creating equal opportunities in the German science system is generally positive: the share of women and men among the newly appointed W1 tenure-track professors and W2 tenure-track professors is almost the same. However, it should be noted that female tenure-track professors are significantly more likely than male tenure-track professors to reach W2 professorships instead of W3 professorships after a successful tenure evaluation. When asked directly, around half of the tenure-track professors expect a positive influence of the tenure-track professorship on improving equal opportunities in the German science system.

Also the option of extending the period before the tenure evaluation in all 16 Länder can improve ways to reconcile **family and work life**. It can help to improve the work-life balance for young researchers that might plan to start a family and want pursue their academic career at the same time. About half of the tenure-track professors and half of the participating universities each rate the contribution of the tenure-track professorship and the tenure-track programme to the reconciliation of family and work life positively. However, compared to its contribution to the creation of equal opportunities, the contribution of the programme to improving the reconciliation of family and work life is rated lower, especially by the funded female professors. The female tenure-track professors also express significantly lower satisfaction levels with the reconciliation of family and work life compared to their male colleagues. In the opinion of the evaluation, there is a need for further actions in this area: only a minority of the universities say that they have - in addition to the already existing structures - significantly expanded or newly established support structures or services through the tenure-track programme for improved ways to reconcile family and work life (i.e. childcare services).

Overall, the evaluation shows contributions of the programme to **increasing the attractiveness and competitiveness of the German science system**. Slightly more than a third of the applicants for programme-funded tenure-track professorships are German citizens working abroad. This group in particular rates the positive influence of the tenure-track professorship on the overall competitiveness of the German science system positively. Experts justify this, for example, with the international compatibility of the tenure-track professorship as a scientific job category. Nevertheless, experts do not expect this to have a particular "pull effect" on foreign scientists towards the German science system per se. Rather, expert interviews tend to suggest that the instrument of the tenure-track is an internationally widespread format which has now also been established more strongly in Germany through the tenure-track programme.

Further long term **systemic effects** of the tenure-track programme cannot be validly assessed at the time of this first evaluation. However, in general there is a high willingness among universities to create additional tenure-track professorships besides the tenure-track professorships funded by the programme. In some cases, universities have also set themselves specific quantitative targets for this. At the same time, hardly any additional tenure-track professors in Germany were appointed outside the programme. Among other reasons, this is due to the fact that universities' capacities were fully used for the appointment procedures of programme-funded professorships as well as other ongoing procedures. The question, whether the tenure-track programme has achieved its goal of **expanding the career prospects for early career researchers** by creating more permanent professorships requires follow-up analyses in future evaluations. For this, the situation of the available financial resources of the public sector need to be taken into consideration as a context factor.

Based on these findings on the implementation and the effects of the tenure-track program the evaluation derives the following recommendations:

General recommendations

- The **concept of the tenure-track professorship** should be further promoted in Germany within and outside the programme for the support of early career researchers. Tenure-track should continue to be used by universities wherever appropriate.
- The federal and Länder governments should consistently work towards the dissemination of the tenure-track professorship by considering it in **target agreements between the state and universities and by using it in funding programmes**.
- The **use of tenure-track approaches for staff categories below the professorship** should be considered as an instrument for a wider cultural change towards making careers in science in Germany more predictable.

Promotion of the development and management of the academic workforce

- Traditionally, German universities appoint professors at more experienced career stages. To strengthen universities capabilities in how to **assess the potential** of candidates in earlier career stages, the exchange of best practices for this among universities should be expanded.
- A broader exchange of experience between the universities is also needed on the **design of the tenure evaluation**.

Improving equal opportunities and balancing family and work life in science

- Universities and funding agencies should continue to address the **framework conditions for reconciling family and work life** in the science system through a focused and needs-oriented approach.
- In concrete terms, various **funding** mechanics of the programme can be geared more consistently towards the reconciliation of family and work life.
- The evaluation found almost equal shares **of female and male persons among the programme-funded tenure-track positions**. However, this parity does not seem to be completely given in all seniority levels (W1, W2, W3) of a professorship in Germany (especially at W3 level after tenure). This development should be observed based on the statistics on future tenure decisions.
- In addition, action is required towards a broader awareness for the challenges of balancing family and work life for early career researchers in Germany.