

**Call for papers*****Career models and professionalisation of young academics***

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**To the main topic**

Transformations in the landscape of higher education and the academic profession are changing the way we conceptualise, communicate and engage with knowledge and learning. These changes are being driven by a convergence of factors, including technological advances, globalisation, demographic change, economic pressures and societal expectations (Troiani & Dutson, 2021), which are increasing the demand for accountability in academic work and leading to the widespread commodification and metrification of academia (Carvalho et al., 2016; Mau, 2019; Tomlinson & Watermeyer, 2020).

At the same time, academic career paths in the higher education landscape are also changing: the traditional linear path from pre-doc to postdoc/assistant to professor is becoming less common, and career paths are becoming more diverse and complex, spanning academia, industry, entrepreneurship, consulting, policymaking and more (Teelken et al., 2023; OECD, 2023). In German-speaking countries, the development of universities of applied sciences and qualification opportunities at and for this type of university (e.g., cooperative doctorates) also plays a role (Kneip et al., 2023; Krempkow et al., 2022). Overall, the number of people building their careers based on prior scientific training is increasing massively. Based on OECD data and other sources, Sarrico (2022) highlights the growth in doctoral training, which increased by almost 200% between 1998 and 2017 (from 140,000 to 276,800). From 2014 to 2019, growth was around 25%, while expenditure on research and development increased by only 18% between 2000 and 2020 (OECD, 2021).

However, young researchers face numerous challenges, ranging from the uncertainty of fixed-term contracts to the high demands to publish and to secure third-party funding (Acker & McGinn, 2021; Krempkow, 2021; Müller & Schneiderberg, 2020; Pasma & Shaker, 2018; Wiener et al., 2020). The performance of these tasks is measured through systematic assessment and comparison via rankings and scientific databases, including numbers of publications and citations (Chen & Chan, 2021; Lee & Naidoo, 2021). Young academics face additional pressure due to the challenges of (international) mobility (Mann, 2021), participation in university self-governance, demonstrating teaching quality (although so far, mainly at private universities or abroad) and, more recently, in some cases, achievements in the areas of innovation, knowledge and technology transfer and scientific communication. In addition, a career in science is often difficult to reconcile with family, childcare or other caring responsibilities (Höhle, 2023; Krempkow & Sembritzki, 2020). The situation is also challenging for first-time academics, i.e. young people who do not have academic parents (Stifterverband, 2021; Möller, 2018) and for young people with a migration background (Krempkow, 2022). At any rate, this is indicated by the numerical development of opportunities in recent years. Based on the available empirical results, it is clear that aspiring academics face a complex environment devoid of the predictable career paths available to earlier generations.”

For these reasons, many early-stage researchers choose not to pursue an academic career but instead opt for non-academic research or science management (Fabian et al., 2023; Krempkow et al., 2023). In response to this trend, the higher education member group of the German Rectors' Conference (HRK, 2024), together with the Junge Akademie (Young Academy), recently released the "Guidelines for Permanent University Positions other than Professorships" and created the "Academic Manager" position, alongside "Lecturer" and "Researcher". However, while the guidelines define minimum requirements for the positions of "lecturer" ("completion of further training in higher education didactics") and "researcher" (individual must have been in "a postdoc phase of at least two years"), existing empirical descriptions of competences in higher education and science management are not used to provide similar requirements for the job of "Academic Manager" (ibid.). Furthermore, the HRK does not specify any further qualification requirements or useful competences, which would be of great interest for differentiating the job profiles from each other and in relation to professorships.

For the future, it is also important to address the issue of transversal skills<sup>1</sup>, which are often overlooked in doctoral programmes, whose central task is often still to prepare students for academia (Belchior-Rocha et al., 2022; García-Álvarez et al., 2022; Laguna-Sánchez et al., 2020). At the same time, there are many opportunities for professionalisation and career development, such as career mentoring programmes or career counselling, which can open up new opportunities (Bäker et al., 2020; Cheesebrough et al., 2020; Sargent & Rienties, 2022; Seehusen et al., 2021; Shen et al., 2022). Finally, in Germany, the tenure-track professorship is becoming increasingly important for academic careers (Fritscher-Fehr & Stiegler, 2022).

Contributions to this special issue should show which career models are available for young academics, how widespread these models are, and how they relate to current developments in higher education. In addition, concepts for the reorganisation and further development of career models and policies can be presented and discussed.

In this call, we invite you to present findings in the field of career models and the professionalisation of young academics in the form of research contributions, research-led development contributions or development contributions within the framework of this special issue, in order to demonstrate their relevance for university governance as well.

In particular, contributions may address the following topics or related topics:

- **Professionalisation strategies** for early-stage researchers and/or scientific support staff (administrators/scientific management): What are successful models and programmes (mentoring programmes, career guidance, coaching and training) to support professionalisation and the differentiation of job profiles? What institutional measures and reforms are in place to support young researchers, and what strategies are in place to promote equal opportunities, diversity and inclusion?
- **Career models in higher education:** What traditional and alternative career paths have been developed for early-stage researchers and research support staff? How do these relate to interdisciplinary and international career opportunities, and what are the conditions and prerequisites for career opportunities outside academia? The

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<sup>1</sup> This refers to skills of a transversal/interdisciplinary nature, as defined by UNESCO (2014): „Transversal skills are those that are typically not considered to be specifically related to a particular job, task, academic discipline or field of knowledge“.

comparison of (inter)national models, development trends and reform approaches can also be discussed here.

- **Challenges and opportunities:** How do young graduates themselves describe work-life balance, gender and diversity issues in career development, as well as the impact of fixed-term contracts, precarious working conditions and mobility requirements on their career aspirations within and beyond the higher education landscape? What are the implications of these developments for the strategic positioning of funding programmes and university governance?
- **Communication strategies:** How can successful professionalisation strategies and other policies be communicated in a way that most effectively reaches the target group(s)? For example, how can early-career researchers be made aware of the measures offered by their university or inter-university institutions? How can institutions target academically qualified people outside the university (e.g., those who have gone into business) - for example, employees with a doctorate who do not even realise that they are almost 'professorial' with some teaching experience? Some visiting lecturers could easily apply for professorships, but in some cases do not even consider this option. How can examples of good practice be documented within a university and, where appropriate, disseminated across universities?
- **Policy and institutional frameworks:** What is the impact of higher education policy and administration on career paths, and how are career decisions and professionalisation trends influenced by metrics (e.g., external funding, publication output)? What are the possibilities for further development and alternative metrics to those that have been used so far?

This special issue aims to answer the above questions and to provide a comprehensive overview of the topic of "Career models and professionalisation of early career researchers", highlighting recent research, innovative approaches and best practices. With this call, we invite you to present the current state of development and discussion in research, research-led development or development contributions, both at universities and equivalent higher education institutions, but also at universities of applied sciences and possibly at non-university research institutions as well.

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## Guidelines regarding the journal

The ZFHE is a peer-reviewed online journal that publishes scientific contributions of practical relevance concerning current higher education development issues. The focus is on didactical, structural, and cultural developments in teaching and learning. Topics that are innovative and still regarded as open in respect of their design options are preferred.

The ZFHE is published by a consortium of European researchers and funded by the Austrian Ministry for Science, Research and Economics. For more information, see <https://www.zfhe.at>.

## Submission information

German or English contributions may be submitted in two possible formats:

**Research contributions** should meet the following criteria. The paper:

- addresses a systemic question in transdisciplinary, interdisciplinary or subject-specific contexts;
- has a research gap as its starting point;
- is extensively embedded in current scholarly discourse;
- has a robust methodological approach;
- includes reflection on the author's own work;
- explains the research methodology;
- employs a method that is suitable for answering the research question;
- presents the scientific discourse in a reflective manner;
- makes a clearly recognizable contribution to answering the research question or to the research discussion;
- consistently follows relevant citation rules (APA style, current edition);
- comprises between 20,000 and 33,000 characters (with spaces, including cover page, bibliography and author information).

**Research-driven development contributions** should meet the following criteria. The paper:

- features a higher education development perspective with a sound research base;
- discusses and differentiates a systemic problem in teaching development;
- is an academically grounded "institutional research" contribution;
- is supported by a literature review;
- meaningfully addresses the interaction between science and praxis and/or the link between the two poles of "research and development"
- consistently follows pertinent citation rules (APA style, current edition);
- comprises between 20,000 and 33,000 characters (with spaces, including cover page, bibliography and author information).

**Development contributions** should meet the following criteria. The paper:

- deals with a concrete problem in higher education development in the (author's) higher education institution;
- addresses a practical need;
- is embedded in the scientific discussion and literature (without claiming to provide an overview of the literature);
- offers suggestions for teaching and university development, with recommendations for action (if applicable);
- offers a systematic and transparent discussion (e.g. no incomprehensible references to specifics or details in a field of practice);
- elaborates on generalisable aspects relevant to theoretical development;
- addresses considerations related to the transfer to practice;
- mentions possibilities for further research;
- consistently follows relevant citation rules (APA style, current edition);
- comprises between 20,000 and 33,000 characters (with spaces, including cover page, bibliography and author information).

### **Submission and review schedule**

**January 13, 2025 – Submission deadline for complete articles:** Please upload your contribution(s) to the ZFHE journal system (<https://www.zfhe.at>) in the corresponding section (research contributions, research-driven development contributions, development contributions) of ZFHE 20/2 issue in anonymous format. To do so, you must first register as an author in the system.

**March 31, 2025 – Feedback/Reviews:** Scientific contributions and workshop reports are evaluated in a double-blind process (see below).

**May 1, 2025 – Revision deadline:** Where necessary, contributions may be revised according to feedback and recommendations from the reviews.

**June 2025 – Online publication:** In June 2025, the finalized contributions are published under <https://www.zfhe.at> and also made available in print.

### **Review Process**

All submitted contributions will be examined in a double-blind peer review process to guarantee scientific quality. The editors of the current issue propose the reviewers for the respective theme and allocate individual contributions to the reviewers; they also determine which contributions will be accepted. The selection of reviewers and the review process for each thematic issue are always supervised by a member of the editorial board.

**Formatting and submission**

In order to save valuable time with the formatting of the contributions, we kindly ask that all authors work with the template from the beginning. The template can be downloaded from the ZFHE website under the following links:

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Since we must be able to edit the texts, they must be submitted unlocked/unprotected in in Microsoft Word (.doc), Office Open XML (.docx), Open Document Text (.odt) or Plain Text (.txt) format. Please do not submit any PDF files! Submissions in the “Scientific Contribution” and “Workshop Report” categories must first be made in anonymous format in order to guarantee the double-blind review process. Please remove all references to the author(s) of the document (including in the document properties!). Upon a positive review result, this information will be re-inserted.

**Questions?**

If you have any questions regarding the content of the issue, please contact René Krempkow ([rene.krempkow@HTW-Berlin.de](mailto:rene.krempkow@HTW-Berlin.de)), Corinna Geppert ([corinna.geppert@donau-uni.ac.at](mailto:corinna.geppert@donau-uni.ac.at)), Elena Wilhelm ([wilm@zhaw.ch](mailto:wilm@zhaw.ch)).

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**We look forward to your submissions!**

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