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Research Counting for Nothing

How Competition, Quantification and Key Performance Indicators

Affect #IchBinHanna and the Quality of Research





Topics of #IchBinHanna:

Precarious working conditions in German academia

- short fixed-term contracts
- uncompensated overtime work
- very few permanent positions
 - extensive job insecurity
 - exclusion of those who cannot afford to work under these conditions
 - **damaging effects for the quality of research**



Impact of #IchBinHanna:

- Constant attention in the media (see www.ichbinhanna.wordpress.com) since June 2021
- Constant political attention:
 - Discussion in the German Bundestag
 - Discussion in the context of the new Higher Education Act of Berlin (BerLHG)
 - Coalition agreement of the new German Federal Government includes core claims of #IchBinHanna



Disincentives for #IchBinHanna:

- “Publish or perish”
 - Reach for high impact journals
- Attract third-party funding
 - Choose trending research topics



Disincentives for universities:

- Hire researchers who secure third-party funding
- Make their staff attract third-party funding
- Score high in rankings

Negative effects of current disincentives on research:



- Grant applications for potential research become more important than actual research; most are denied, so instead of doing the actual research, researchers spend time on inventing research projects that will never be realised.



- Truly innovative topics outside the scope of funding schemes are likely to be neglected, which prevents researchers from choosing them in the first place.



- Focus on quantity instead of quality.



- The power of commercial academic publishers is stabilised.

Negative effects of current disincentives on researchers:



- Future employment depends on successful grant applications – once funding is secured, the next application needs to be written to secure future funding, which creates a race you cannot win.



- Artificial competition forces researchers out even though they are as excellent as the successful candidate, just because there are too few positions for too many excellent researchers.



- Creativity in choosing and pursuing original research topics outside the scope of funding schemes is obstructed.

What can policymakers do to inhibit this undesirable development?

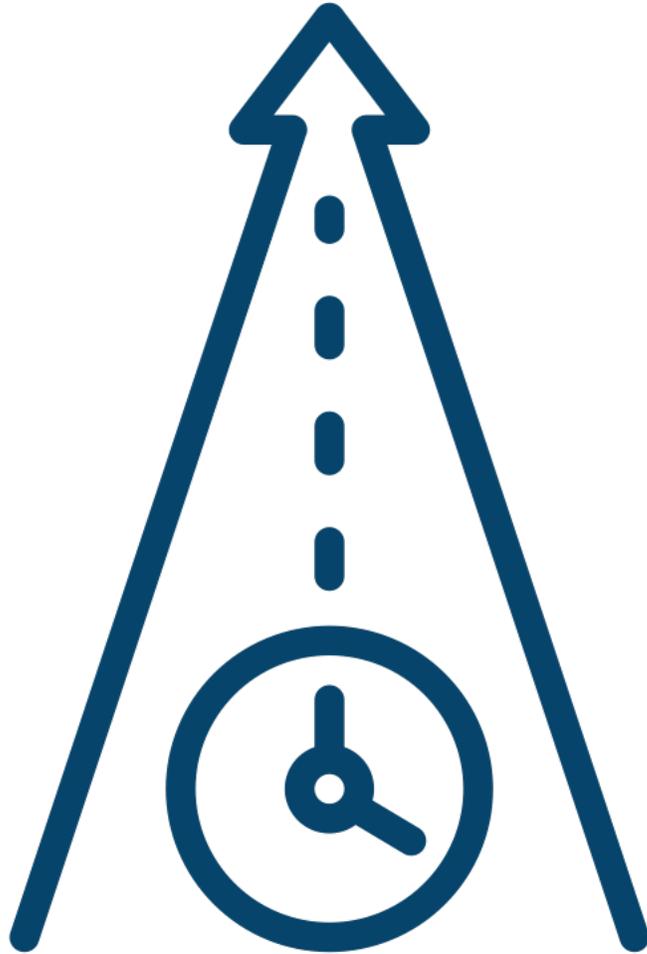


- Provide universities with substantial core funding.
 - Stop tendency to provide money on a fixed-term basis and focus on long-term funding instead (e.g. equivalent of the Zukunftsvertrag for research).
- Less political governance in terms of topics.
 - Substantial core funding as a basis.
 - Open calls for grant applications as an add-on.



- Create a legal and financial basis to secure long-term perspectives for #IchBinHanna
 - Substantial core funding
 - Contracts for the entire duration of the PhD
 - More permanent positions after the PhD
 - reform of the WissZeitVG
 - create financial incentives for universities to secure fair and accessible working conditions and compensate for disadvantages

Reimagining German academia after #IchBinHanna



- Instead of a systematic loss of expertise, the German academic system would profit from keeping their excellent researchers in the system.
- German academia would become more accessible to those who cannot afford precarious working conditions. ➡ Diversity benefits research!
- Researchers could focus on doing high quality research instead of needing to engage with excessive publishing and application writing.
- Promising research topics would be pursued even though they do not fit existing funding schemes.
- There would be room for the development of individual strengths of both researchers and universities.
- With less publications, people will once again be able to actually READ papers instead of focusing on the publishing place – hence, commercial publishers could lose their powerful position.