



OTM-R Policy of the University of Potsdam

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Preamble

The University of Potsdam is committed to open, transparent, and merit-based recruitment for all personnel groups at the university, including academic staff. As an internationally competitive research university, we consider it our special responsibility to ensure transparency and equal opportunity in selection procedures for the recruitment of professors as well as postdoctoral and doctoral researchers.

Since 2016, the university has been bearing the “[HR Excellence in Research](#)” seal of the European Commission and adhering to the “[European Charter for Researchers](#)” and the “[Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers](#).” The charter and code aim to create a coherent basis of values and working conditions for researchers in Europe and beyond. They stipulate, among other things, that academic personnel selection must be carried out in accordance with the principles of open, transparent, and merit-based recruitment (abbreviated as OTM-R).

The OTM-R strategy of the University of Potsdam serves as a guideline for employees in charge of personnel selection at the University of Potsdam and provides job applicants with information on the quality standards they can expect during personnel selection procedures at the University of Potsdam.

Strategic Goals and Legal Framework of OTM-R

The goal of academic personnel recruitment is to find the most suitable and qualified applicant for the advertised position and to hire them on the basis of a fair selection process (the principle known as “selection of the best”). Adherence to OTM-R standards is to ensure high-quality selection procedures, so as to enhance the attractiveness of a career in science and academia, increase the mobility of scientists and researchers, and promote equality among underrepresented groups within the academic staff of the University of Potsdam. At the same time, the University of Potsdam benefits from the quality assurance of scholarly work in research, teaching, and science management.

In Germany, a high level of socio-political importance underscores these OTM-R principles, which are also anchored in constitutional law as well as at the federal and state levels. The German Basic Law (cf. GG Art. 3, para. 1-3) and General Equal Treatment Act (cf. AGG) govern the principles of equality and anti-discrimination in this context. The Basic Law also refers to the right to equal eligibility for positions in the public service according to aptitude, qualifications, and professional achievements (cf. GG Art. 33, para. 2-3). In terms of state law, the Brandenburg Higher Education Act (BbgHG) covers, among other things, equal opportunities for men and women (cf. BbgHG Section 7), the recognition of foreign university degrees (cf. BbgHG Section 30), and the promotion of highly qualified young academics (cf. BbgHG Section 33). There are other regulations affecting the organization of personnel selection procedures, including but not limited to the Civil Servants Act of the federal state (e.g. on the obligation to advertise vacancies, cf. Section 6, Landesbeamtengesetz Brandenburg). The selection and hiring of academic staff at the University of Potsdam is based on these regulations.

OTM-R at the University of Potsdam

This section describes the existing regulations as well as recommendations for the selection of academic staff at the University of Potsdam. The description is based on the four [career stages of researchers](#) proposed by the European Commission, which differ with regard to the scope and level of detail of the existing rules of procedure. For each case, the complete selection process will be examined, which includes the advertising phase, the application phase, the selection phase and the hiring phase. Section 3 of this document also describes existing structures that facilitate the implementation of OTM-R at the University of Potsdam for all researchers.

Appointment of Professors (W1-W3)

Professors (at career level R4 according to the European Commission) are independent researchers in leadership positions who have successfully completed an appointment procedure (with or without tenure track)¹. The appointment procedure for professors is governed by the Brandenburg Higher Education Act (BbgHG) and described in detail in the [Appointment Regulations](#) of the University of Potsdam supplemented by the [Appointment Guidelines](#). The aspects that are of essential importance for open, transparent, and merit-based personnel selection are presented below. In this way, the University of Potsdam adheres fully to the European Commission's guidance on [good OTM-R practices](#).

Vacant professorships are **advertised** publicly via national and international media, usually in German and English. The wording of the call for applications includes the subject-specific orientation of the vacant professorship, the time at which and the duration for which the appointment will be made, the tasks to be performed in teaching, research, and other areas of activity, and the hiring requirements applicants must fulfill in accordance with Section 41 or Section 45 BbgHG. Depending on the pay grade, it also describes the expected management and leadership qualifications. The call for applications explicitly refers to gender equality and – in case of equal qualifications – the preferential consideration of people with severe disabilities. Applicants can also find information on the documents to be submitted and the application deadlines in the call for applications. **Applications** may be submitted via e-mail or traditional mail. All applicants will receive a written confirmation of receipt of their application as well as information on the course of the selection procedure.

In the **selection phase**, a Search Committee will decide which applicants are to be invited to interviews (including a presentation that is open to all members of the university and an assessment of teaching competence) on the basis of an evaluation of the applicants' suitability and achievements. Following the presentations and interviews, the Search Committee will decide which applicants are best suited for the position. External referees, some of them international, who are experts in the field of the advertised position, will then evaluate these applicants in writing and compare them with regard to their scholarly performance and subject-specific suitability for the position. On the basis of these reports, didactic qualifications, and other parameters, the Search Committee will draw up a shortlist of applicants who, after involvement of other university bodies, will be offered the vacant position in the specified order.

¹ In legal terms, junior professors (pay grade W1) are not fully equal to tenured professors until they have proved themselves in an evaluation process, which is why they may also be assigned to career level R3. However, the appointment procedure for junior professors and tenured professors is identical at the University of Potsdam; the same OTM-R standards will therefore apply to both junior professors and tenured professors.

The quality of the selection process in accordance with the OTM-R standards is ensured by the deployment of an independent Search Committee including external members, the involvement of external referees, the use of predefined suitability and performance criteria, a process documentation without any gaps, and the principle of having multiple people confirm the final selection decision. As a rule, the Search Committee consists of five or six professors, two academic staff members, and two representatives of the student body with equal voting powers. The Appointments Officer of the relevant faculty, the Equal Opportunity Commissioner and, if applicable, the Representative for Employees with a Severe Disability will also be members of the Search Committee in an advisory capacity. The Appointments Officer will accompany the appointment process at the faculty level and support the Chair of the Search Committee in terms of both content and logistics. Throughout the selection process, potential conflicts of interest among committee members or referees with regard to the applicants must be investigated and ruled out. In order to pre-select applicants, their academic performance (e.g., quality of publications, third-party funding), pedagogical aptitude (e.g., teaching qualification and teaching quality), and other competencies (e.g., science management, transfer into practice) are assessed on the basis of the application documents. An interview guide and evaluation criteria will be drawn up in advance for the presentation (open to all members of the university) and for the interview process between the applicants and the committee. The whole selection process must be documented in written form. A resolution by the Faculty Council and the Senate is required to approve the candidate shortlist drawn up at the end of the selection process. As a last step, the President of the University approves the candidate shortlist and makes the offer of an appointment as professor.

The **hiring phase** is characterized by appointment negotiations between the applicant and the university management, dealing with financial resources and, if applicable, resources for equipment, the number of staff members, and the professor's remuneration. Once the candidate accepts the call on the terms that have been negotiated, he or she will be hired. Applicants who are not selected will receive a written rejection letter upon conclusion of the process, but before the offer is accepted. Questions or complaints about the selection process are taken seriously and will be examined and answered by experts in the Division of Human Resources and Legal Affairs.

Selection of Established Researchers

Established researchers (career stage R3) have earned a post-doctoral qualification (habilitation) or a doctoral degree with additional research experience. They mainly work independently on their research, i.e. they do not have a functional/scientific supervisor or can carry out and publish research work independently of him or her (e.g. as a research director in a research association). The majority of researchers at this career stage have acquired their own funding (e.g., project funding from the German Research Foundation including or not including funding for their "own position") and in some cases supervise staff, including doctoral students (e.g., as junior research group leaders). Whether or not they have an obligation to teach depends on the type of funding for the position.

As a rule, the responsibility for selection procedures regarding positions for established scientists lies with the functional or disciplinary supervisors, i.e. the professors with whose department the position is affiliated. Unless the funding of a position relates to a specific individual, it is common practice at the University of Potsdam to **advertise** positions for established researchers, with justified exceptions. The call for applications is issued nationally and, depending on the subject, also internationally in German and/or English. The job advertisement provides applicants with information on the department in which the position is to be filled, the starting date of the position (and, if applicable, the

fixed term of the contract), the work duties to be fulfilled, the pay grade to which the position is assigned, the required or desirable qualifications and skills that applicants should possess, and whom to contact if they have any questions about the position. The call for applications explicitly refers to gender equality and – in case of equal qualifications – the preferential consideration of people with severe disabilities. **Applications** may be submitted via e-mail or traditional mail. All applicants will receive a written confirmation of receipt of their application as well as information on the course of the selection procedure.

The **selection phase** is divided into a pre-selection process based on the application documents and the selection interviews to be held. The evaluation of the applicants must be based on predefined suitability and performance criteria both with regard to the pre-selection process as well as the selection interviews. The main consideration for the pre-selection process is to determine which applicants have the qualifications and competencies required for the position. Structured selection interviews, identical for all invited applicants, must include specific questions or practical tasks to assess applicants' suitability for the position. In addition, all applicants receive detailed information about the position and are given the opportunity to ask questions. Interviews are usually conducted in person and on site, but may also be held via video conference if necessary. Apart from other representatives from the same field, there are cases where the Equal Opportunity Commissioner and, if applicable, the Representative for Employees with a Severe Disability participate in the selection interviews as members of the Selection Committee. At the applicant's request, it is also possible to involve the Staff Council. Once the interviews have been conducted, the person in charge of the procedure makes a selection, informs applicants of the result of the selection, and sees to it that the Division of Human Resources and Legal Affairs completes the **hiring** process. Questions or complaints may be directed to the person in charge of the procedure and to the Division of Human Resources and Legal Affairs.

Selection of Researchers for Qualifying Positions

Qualifying positions are reserved for researchers seeking to complete a personal academic qualification in the form of a habilitation or doctorate. As a rule, such positions are filled using fixed-term contracts. According to Section 49 BbgHG, the minimum term limit for initial fixed-term contracts for researchers is two years, or three years in case of a doctorate. After a [Senate resolution \(S9 /2119\)](#) in 2014, the University of Potsdam decided to align the term limits of its contracts with the duration of the desired qualification, while trying to avoid the use of term limits of less than three years. Qualifying positions are funded using either the university's own budget or third-party funds.

Habilitation candidates (career stage R2, in exceptional cases R3) possess a systematic understanding of a research field and the associated research methodology as evidenced by their doctorate. In the course of their habilitation, they seek to expand their research expertise and achieve academic autonomy with the goal of becoming eligible for appointment to a professorship. The habilitation is a formal examination that only exists in its current form in Germany and could be compared to the transition from the so-called "assistant professor" to "associate professor" in other academic systems. As a rule, those seeking a habilitation are also employed as academic staff members at the University of Potsdam or at an extra-mural research institution. The amount of teaching duties that the candidate is obligated to fulfill depends on the type of funding and the scope of the position.

Doctoral candidates (career stage R1) have a higher education degree (German diploma or master's degree from a university or university of applied sciences, rarely only a bachelor's degree). During their

studies, they have acquired fundamental knowledge in their field, which they intend to expand in the course of their doctoral studies. In contrast to other countries, only 19% of researchers pursuing a doctorate in Germany are part of a structured doctoral program². The remaining researchers complete individual doctorates under the supervision and guidance of one or more professors. In addition, doctoral candidates in Germany often have a dual status: They can enroll as students and take advantage of the perks that come with that status. At the same time, 61% of doctoral candidates in Germany are also employed at the university³ and are therefore part of the academic staff that takes on tasks in research and teaching in the associated department. The amount of teaching duties that the candidate is obligated to fulfill, if any, depends on the type of funding and the scope of the position. If the position offers the opportunity to obtain a doctorate, the teaching load is limited to 4x45 minutes of courses per semester for a full-time position financed from the university budget (adjusted proportionally for part-time positions).

As a rule, the responsibility for **selection procedures** for qualification positions lies with the functional/scientific supervisor, i.e. the professor with whose department the qualification position is affiliated and who also supervises the doctoral project as the main supervisor. If a position is financed through third-party funding (e.g. from the German Research Foundation or the European Union), guidelines of the external provider of funding must usually be observed in the personnel selection process. In this context, the European Union refers to the above-mentioned good [OTM-R practices](#), which the University of Potsdam is also seeking to implement when filling qualification positions. The German Research Foundation expects academic institutions to establish, among other things, written procedures and principles for personnel selection as a framework condition for good research practice⁴. The OTM-R strategy at hand is intended to support these efforts. In addition, the personnel selection process must take into account both equal opportunity issues and the diversity of applicants. Selection procedures for qualifying positions will ideally proceed as described in the section “Selection of Established Researchers.” It is not always compulsory to advertise qualification positions because students or doctoral candidates employed as graduate assistants, for example, may seamlessly transition to a doctoral or post-doctoral position after completing their studies or doctorate.

Selection of Researchers for Permanent and Functional Positions

Another group of academic employees at the University of Potsdam consists of researchers who are permanently employed at the University of Potsdam as they perform continuous tasks in teaching or research, e.g., to meet a high demand for instructors or to provide research-related services (e.g., highly qualified supervision of large-scale equipment, laboratory operations, field work). Such scholars usually hold a doctorate or habilitation (career stage R2 or R3).

The **selection procedure** for filling permanent and functional positions is governed by the [Works Agreement on Job Advertisements](#), as these positions are filled on a permanent basis. As a rule, it is mandatory to advertise permanent and functional positions and, at the very least, these calls for applications are published on the university's website and, if necessary, in other media. In certain exceptional cases, a call for applications may not be required, subject to the approval of the Staff Council. The works agreement also regulates the contents of the job advertisement, the recruitment procedure, and the participation of central committees and bodies (Staff Council, Equal Opportunity

²Federal Statistical Office of Germany (2020): [Statistics on doctoral candidates 2019](#), Wiesbaden.

³Consortium for the federal report on junior academics (2021): [Federal report on junior academics 2021](#)

⁴ German Research Foundation (2019): [Guidelines for Safeguarding Good Research Practice](#), Kodex, Bonn.

Commissioner and Representative for Employees with Severe Disabilities) in the selection committees. The dean of the faculty with which the permanent or functional position is affiliated is usually in charge of the selection process.

Structures Accompanying OTM-R at the University of Potsdam

The central university administration offers professional support for personnel selection procedures for positions at all career stages of researchers. The **Division of Human Resources and Legal Affairs** provides administrative support for selection procedures and is available to provide assistance at any stage of the selection process as needed. The division's employees ensure professional communication with all applicants and respond to all queries from applicants and from those in charge of personnel selection in a competent and reliable manner. The division also provides individuals in charge of personnel selection with [Guidelines for the Organization of a Structured Selection Process](#) that meets the quality standards of open, transparent, and merit-based recruitment. Professional guidance for the appointment of professors is provided by the **Appointment Management** team at the University of Potsdam. The Appointment Management team offers extensive support in all phases of the appointment process and is available to all parties involved as a central point of contact.

The University of Potsdam also offers support to potential applicants by providing a wide range of **information and services**. The employer portal "[Working at the UP](#)" provides applicants of all career levels with general as well as target group-specific information about the University of Potsdam as a research institution with an international profile and as a family-friendly institution that is committed to addressing the needs of its employees. International applicants will find additional information and advisory services at the [Welcome Center](#) of the University of Potsdam.

If necessary, selection procedures may also be conducted **in English**. In order to reinforce the welcoming culture of the University of Potsdam, continuing education courses to improve English language proficiency as well as intercultural awareness take place continuously for the university and faculty administration.

The **quality of selection procedures** is monitored continuously. The scope of this supervision differs, depending on the career level and the duration of the contract for the position to be filled. In selection procedures for permanent positions, independent monitoring of the procedures in the selection interviews is carried out by observers from the Division of Human Resources and Legal Affairs, the Equal Opportunity Commissioner, the Staff Council and, if necessary, the Representative for Employees with Severe Disabilities. In selection procedures for fixed-term positions for researchers, the Division of Human Resources and Legal Affairs will review the reasons for the selection of a particular applicant prior to hiring.

The University of Potsdam supports the career development of its academic staff with numerous offers for **continuing education and training**. These [offers](#) include programs for continuing education in higher education didactics, discipline-specific and cross-disciplinary competencies, and individual coaching.

Conclusion and Outlook

Overall, there is a high standard of open, transparent, and merit-based recruitment at the University of Potsdam. It must be our goal to implement these standards in the best possible way in all faculties and research institutions of the University of Potsdam, especially with regard to filling fixed-term positions for researchers. Employees in charge of personnel selection will be informed and their awareness for such matters will be raised in a continuous manner.

The University of Potsdam aims to further expand the existing OTM-R standards. An online application management system is currently being developed to optimize applicant management and to simplify the application process for applicants. The further development of the diversity and inclusion concept of the University of Potsdam will be reflected even more prominently in the standards for personnel selection in the future. As part of the internationalization strategy of the University of Potsdam, hurdles in the application procedure for international applicants are to be reduced even further.