

Care, Career, Covid-19: The influence of the Covid-19 pandemic on the working conditions and future prospects of academics in qualification phases, especially those with care responsibilities, at the University of Göttingen

Areti-Kristin Bouras, Elena Futter-Buck, Julia Lischewski, Stephan Schlosser, Andrea D. Bührmann

Executive Summary

The study aimed to investigate the effects of the coronavirus pandemic on the working conditions and career opportunities of academic employees in qualification phases, especially those with care responsibilities. Quantitative data were collected in two waves: In winter 2020/21 (N=379) and summer 2023 (N=219), all faculty and academic staff members without a permanent professorship were invited to take part in a bilingual, diversity-sensitive online survey. Parallel to the second survey wave, qualitative interviews were conducted with five professors (in their role as leaders/managers) at the University of Göttingen to examine their experiences and perspectives during the coronavirus pandemic. A literature review was conducted before and after the surveys.

Key findings

- Academic employees with children in particular find their careers to be negatively affected by the coronavirus pandemic. Respondents with care responsibilities for children perceived the coronavirus pandemic as both a professional and a private crisis significantly more often than other respondents. Perceived stress increased significantly during the pandemic. For people with care responsibilities in particular, the proportion of teaching in their total working hours increased sharply during the pandemic, to the detriment of research and their own further qualification. In the first wave of the survey, women with care responsibilities in particular reported they were considering leaving academia.
- 90% of respondents see advantages in working from home as a measure to improve working conditions. This relates especially, but not only, to reconciling work and home life. However, they also see disadvantages of working from home, particularly in relation to communication and exchange with colleagues.
- There was a discrepancy in the perception of the coronavirus pandemic as a crisis between the employees and professors we surveyed. Professors perceived the pandemic as less of a crisis for employees than for themselves.
- Professors had to adapt their leadership behaviour during the pandemic in order to deal with the new challenges. In particular, there was a need to provide more guidance and orientation for employees. Staying in touch at a distance was a particular challenge.

Recommendations for action: towards a care-oriented University

- **Establish suitable conditions in terms of contractual conditions and infrastructure:** The University should establish framework conditions that enable the desired qualification, e.g., by utilising discretionary powers in contracts with a view to transparency and career planning, and by expanding childcare services.
- **Promote qualification:** The University should expand and systematise support services especially for academics in qualification phases with care responsibilities.

- **Develop opportunities for hybrid work:** The University should continue to provide a suitable infrastructure and appropriate tools to support hybrid collaboration. These should be further developed, e.g., by adapting the “Dienstvereinbarung mobile Arbeit” (mobile working service agreement) and establishing agreements on hybrid collaboration at department/institute level.
- **Leadership development:** The University should not only maintain the existing range of further education and training programmes for leaders, but also expand them, particularly with regard to work-life balance. This could be achieved by establishing onboarding programmes for newly appointed professors, continued professional education programmes for established professors as well as leadership training for postdocs and advanced doctoral candidates. Leadership skills should be included in the catalogue of appointment criteria. Furthermore, the compatibility of leadership positions with care responsibilities should be improved.

