

Annex 1

Further Information on the Junior Research Groups within the Graduate Program in Vocational Education and Training Research and the Call for Proposals

To foster highly qualified researchers at early stages of their academic careers, the Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training (BIBB), with the support of the (former) Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF), has established the Graduate Program in Vocational Education and Training Research; one central pillar of this program establishes Junior Research Groups. Research in vocational education and training conducted at BIBB provides an essential evidence base for policy advice and the development of practice-oriented solutions. An accompanying structured qualification program aims to equip early-career researchers (during and following their doctoral phase) with advanced theoretical, methodological, and interdisciplinary skills. The program thus prepares participants for academic and research careers both within and beyond departmental research institutions.

Responsibilities of the Junior Research Group Leader

The Junior Research Group Leader will:

- Conceptualize, establish, and lead a Junior Research Group;
- Independently design and implement the research program;
- Supervise two doctoral researchers working on topics within the research program;
- Publish independently and in strategic co-authorship in high-ranking, peer-reviewed academic journals, following a coherent publication strategy;
- Prepare and disseminate research findings in formats tailored to specific target audiences and facilitate knowledge transfer into policy and practice;
- Engage in networking activities with relevant stakeholders as well as with thematic clusters and departments within BIBB;
- Monitor project progress and report regularly to BIBB governing bodies (e.g., the Scientific Advisory Board) and to the responsible Federal Ministry (BMBFSFJ).

Eligibility Criteria

Applicants must demonstrate:

- A completed university degree and a successfully completed doctorate (minimum grade: magna cum laude or equivalent), preferably in the social and economic sciences, vocational and business education, computational social science, data science, or related disciplines;
- A clearly defined research profile at the intersection of artificial intelligence and vocational education and training;
- A strong and field-relevant publication record, including publications in high-impact, peer-reviewed journals (e.g., SSCI-indexed or comparably ranked journals);
- Proven experience in interdisciplinary research teams; experience in leading research projects is desirable;
- Demonstrated ability to communicate research findings effectively across disciplines and to diverse target audiences;
- Strong analytical, conceptual, and interdisciplinary research skills;
- Extensive expertise in empirical research design and advanced analytical methods relevant to the proposed research program; programming skills and experience in methodological innovation are considered an asset;
- German language proficiency at a minimum of B2 level (CEFR);
- Well-developed personal and leadership competencies, including a structured and goal-oriented working style, the ability to work independently, solution-oriented thinking, negotiation skills, and assertiveness.

Selection Procedure and Timeline

The selection procedure consists of three stages:

Stage 1)

Submission of **Project Outline** (Deadline: March 31, 2026)

Review and pre-selection by BIBB;

Selected candidates will be invited to submit a full proposal (notification by April 30, 2026).

Stage 2)

Submission of **Full Proposal** (Deadline: July 15, 2026)

External peer review (including members of the BIBB Scientific Advisory Board);

Invitation of shortlisted candidates to present their proposed project.

Stage 3)

Project Presentation (End of September 2026)

Final funding decision.

Application Requirements

1. Project Outline

The project outline must include (if any of the following is not submitted, the application cannot be considered):

- I. A letter of motivation;
- II. An academic proposal (maximum three pages) outlining: the relevance and objectives of the project; a concise description of the research design and methodology; a dissemination and impact strategy;
- III. A short curriculum vitae
- IV. A list of up to five key publications (including a brief justification for their selection);
- V. A list of at least two independent reviewers.
Reviewer nominations must be submitted on a separate sheet, including full contact details and email addresses. Applicants must confirm in writing that no conflicts of interest are known or disclose any potential conflicts.
Conflicts of interest include:
 - Current or planned close scientific collaboration;
 - Family relationships;
 - Direct supervisory or employment relationships within the past five years;
 - Joint publications within the past five years
- VI. A proposal for a partner university
Applicants must indicate a university with which the Junior Research Group could establish a formal academic affiliation.

2. Full Proposal

The full proposal must include:

- I. Table of contents;
- II. Academic proposal (maximum 15 pages; exceeding this limit constitutes grounds for exclusion).
The proposal must: present a coherent research program with a detailed timeline, clearly defined work packages, and milestones; outline planned collaborations and describe the cooperation framework, particularly with the proposed partner university; include a comprehensive publication strategy and knowledge transfer concept.
- III. Curriculum vitae;
- IV. Complete list of publications;
- V. Budget plan, including justified estimates of anticipated costs (e.g., third-party services, travel expenses);
- VI. Letter of Intent from the partner university.
The Letter of Intent must specify:
The form of institutional affiliation (e.g., junior professorship or equivalent status);
Involvement in teaching (ideally two hours per week per semester);
Thematic and departmental integration;

Formal confirmation of the right of the Junior Research Group Leader to supervise doctoral candidates.

Evaluation Criteria

Proposals will be assessed according to the following criteria:

- Expected contribution to scientific knowledge;
- Relevance for vocational education and training research, policy-making, and professional practice;
- Clarity, coherence, structure, and feasibility of the research program;
- Appropriateness and rigor of the methodological approach;
- Degree of innovation, originality, and relevance, particularly regarding the potential to open new avenues of research;
- Synergies arising from collaboration with the partner university;
- National and international collaborations and networking.

Evaluation After Four Years

After four years, the Junior Research Group will undergo a formal evaluation. Interim results will be presented and discussed within BIBB's governing bodies, including the Scientific Advisory Board.

Given a positive evaluation, BIBB (where applicable in cooperation with the partner university following a formal academic appointment) will decide, on a possible extension of the Junior Research Group Leader's position for a maximum of two additional years.

As of February 12, 2026