

# Counting the costs of casualisation in higher education

Key findings of a survey conducted by the University and College Union

*June 2019*



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## Introduction

UCU believes that the casualisation of academic labour is a massive problem for the UK university sector.

To understand why we think this, we need to do two things. Firstly, we need to look more closely at where precarious work is concentrated and understand who the casualised staff are.

Secondly, we need to understand the impact that it has on academic and related staff and on their work. This report is the first to provide evidence, from casualised staff themselves, showing the real costs of employing staff on precarious contracts. Here you will hear the voices of casualised staff as they talk about how precarious contracts affect their lives, their wellbeing and their ability to do their jobs.

The findings in this report are taken from a UCU survey of casualised staff conducted between 16 January and 19 February 2019. 3,802 higher education staff participated in the survey with 2,662 completing every question.

## Executive summary

### **PART 1: THE CASUALISED WORKFORCE IN HIGHER EDUCATION**

- Casualisation is a massive problem for the UK higher education sector.
- Around 70% of the 49,000 researchers in the sector remain on fixed-term contracts, with many more living precariously on contracts which are nominally open-ended but which build in redundancy dates.
- There are 37,000 teaching staff on fixed-term contracts, the majority of them hourly paid.
- In addition, there are a further 71,000 teachers employed as 'atypical academics' but not counted in the main staff record. Again these are overwhelmingly hourly paid teachers, employed on the lowest contract levels and many of them employed as 'casual workers', with fewer employment rights.
- 50% of these 'atypical academics' are employed by the richest elite 'Russell Group' universities.
- UCU estimates that this 'reserve army' of academic labour is doing between 25 and 30% of the teaching in many universities.



## PART 2: PRECARIOUS WORK AND THE STRUGGLE TO GET BY

UCU conducted a survey of casualised staff between 16 January and 19 February 2019. 3,802 higher education staff participated in the survey with 2,662 completing every question. This survey showed that:

- On average, part-time and hourly paid teachers are doing 45% of their work without pay.
- 61% of the participants had held two or more jobs in total in the last 12 months, while 48% had held two or more jobs in the education sector.
- Almost 60% of those responding said they had struggled to make ends meet, while 40% said they experienced problems paying bills.
- 71% of respondents reported that they believed their mental health had been damaged by working on insecure contracts, while 43% reported that they believed their working conditions had damaged their physical health.
- 83% of respondents agreed that their contractual status made it hard to make long-term financial commitments such as buying a house.
- 83% of respondents also agreed that it made it hard to make long-term family plans.
- 85% of participants said they had considered leaving the sector in the last 12 months, with the number one reason for doing so being the lack of job security.
- 97% of respondents on a fixed-term contract said that they would rather be on a permanent contract, while 80% of hourly paid staff responding said that they would rather be on a contract that guaranteed them hours, even if it meant less flexibility.

## PART 3: THE COSTS TO QUALITY - MEASURING THE IMPACT OF CASUALISATION ON STUDENTS AND WORK

- 78% of participants reported regularly working more hours than they are paid for in order to do their jobs properly.
- 67% of teaching staff said that they did not have enough paid time to enable them to prepare adequately for their classes.
- 73% of teaching staff said that they did not have enough paid time to complete their marking.
- 75% of teaching staff said that they did not have enough paid time to undertake the scholarship necessary to stay on top of their subjects.



- 71% of casualised teachers said that they did not have enough paid time to give their students the feedback they deserved.
- 44% of teaching staff said they did not have access to adequate facilities to provide feedback and support to their students.
- 35% said their views were not taken into account in the development of courses and materials.
- 73% of researchers said that research they had been involved with had been negatively affected by employment on short-term contracts.
- 81% said that their own research activity had been negatively affected by employment on short-term contracts.
- 79% disagreed that this was an 'economical and cost-effective' way to employ research staff.
- 96% agreed that more secure employment would help foster genuinely innovative research activity.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- The government needs to enforce greater scrutiny of university workforce policies. The Office for Students should put a new duty on universities to disclose the amounts of teaching – measured in classroom hours – that are being done by hourly paid staff as a proportion of their total classroom hours.
- The Concordat Strategy Group's revised Concordat document must include the recommendations that relate to calling for greater action on fixed-term contracts and more support to help researchers develop their own research agenda. Research Councils should make it a condition of grant to employ research staff on open ended contracts and to support greater stability of employment.
- More universities need to follow the examples of the more enlightened employers in the sector. They should invest in de-casualising their workforces and engage in negotiations with UCU locally to negotiate the transition of precariously employed staff onto more secure contracts.



## PART 1: THE CASUALISED WORKFORCE IN HIGHER EDUCATION

To understand how big a problem casualisation really is, we need to look more closely at where the insecure contracts are concentrated.

The UK university sector likes to point to the international profile of its research activity. Universities UK, for example, boasts that in the Research Excellence Framework, 76% of the research submitted was ‘internationally excellent or world leading’. With 1% of the world’s population they boast, we have produced 16% of the most highly cited articles. Yet the position of those staff who are employed on research only contracts is little short of scandalous.<sup>1</sup>

Ten years after the university sector signed a much vaunted Concordat in which it pledged to improve career structures for research staff, it remains the case that just under 70% of the 49,085 research only staff in the sector are on fixed-term contracts. Even this understates the case since many universities who employ people on open-ended contracts use one that stipulates a date on which those staff are likely to become redundant because funding on which their employment is based is about to run out. Tens of thousands of researchers live with the expectation that they face dismissal by reason of redundancy at the expiry of their contracts, contracts that can be as little as a year in duration.

If we turn to look at the teaching workforce, HESA’s data from 2016/17 (the fullest data available to UCU at the time of writing) tell us that there were 156,295 academic staff who were employed with some kind of teaching function. Of these 100,166 are employed on contracts where they are expected to be engaged in teaching and research. 8,483 of these staff (8.5%) were on fixed-term contracts. However, the fastest growing part of the teaching workforce is among those employed on teaching only contracts. In 2016/17 there were 56,129 of these staff, representing 36% of the whole teaching workforce. 28,625 (51%) of these staff were on fixed-term contracts. In addition, 72% of them were part time.

The majority of these fixed-term teaching staff are hourly paid. We know this from HESA’s statistical bulletin in January this year, which was the first to reveal the numbers of hourly paid staff in the main staff record. From this bulletin, we know that among the teaching only staff, 28,450 were employed as hourly paid staff, of whom 61% were on fixed-term contracts.

The composition of the fixed-term teaching staff is unlikely to have changed radically in a year, so we can say with some level of certainty that in 2016/17 there were 37,108 teaching staff (or 24% of the staff with a teaching function) on fixed-term contracts, the majority of whom were part time and hourly paid.

And even this picture significantly under-estimates the relationship between casualisation and teaching because, in addition to the hourly paid staff who are visible in the staff record, there are tens of thousands of hourly paid staff who are only visible in the form of HESA’s ‘Atypical academic’ category. Atypical academics are defined as those which meet one or more of the following conditions:



- They are for less than four consecutive weeks - meaning that no statement of terms and conditions needs to be issued
- They are for one-off/short-term tasks - for example answering phones during clearing, staging an exhibition, organising a conference. There is no mutual obligation between the work provider and working person beyond the given period of work or project. In some cases individuals will be paid a fixed fee for the piece of work unrelated to hours/time spent.
- They involve work away from the supervision of the normal work provider - but not as part of teaching company schemes or for teaching and research supervision associated with the provision of distance learning education.
- They involve a high degree of flexibility often in a contract to work as-and-when required - for example conference catering, student ambassadors, student demonstrators.

These atypical academics are almost all teaching only staff and they are overwhelmingly employed on the lowest contract levels. Even the employers' national representatives admit that this is where a lot of hourly paid teachers are concealed. In 2016/17 there were 71,960 atypical academics employed in UK universities, 50% of whom were employed in the 'elite' Russell Group of universities. Many of them are PhD students, teaching during their studies, dependent on their teaching earnings to fund their studies. Many are also contracted as 'casual workers', a form of zero hours contract that means that they are paid by the assignment, like temps, and have fewer employment rights. Prominent universities that use casual worker status include UCL, Warwick, Birmingham, and Nottingham among others.

Unfortunately, we can't get a truly accurate number for hourly paid staff because HESA do not like people adding together the numbers of hourly paid staff in the main staff record and those in the atypical record because the data is collected in a slightly different way to reflect different working patterns. But what this does give us is an approximate sense of scale. 37,000 fixed-term, mostly hourly paid teaching staff plus another 60-70,000 hourly paid 'atypical academics' represents a lot of casualised teachers circulating in the higher education system.

How much teaching are these casualised workers doing? UCEA, the national employers' organization circulated a figure it derived from calculating the 'Full-Time-Equivalence' of 'Atypical workers' contracts and claimed that hourly paid workers only did 3% of the academic work in universities. This figure is so patently absurd that it barely merits proper scrutiny, but suffice to say that it was based on a deeply flawed methodology: Atypical workers represent only part of the hourly-paid population, their contracts are small because they are only paid for a portion of their activities, and unlike other academics, they are only paid for classroom delivery, meaning that their 'FTE' cannot meaningfully be compared with those of full time academic staff who are contracted to teach, research and do administration.<sup>2</sup> Such laughable spin should not detain us any longer.



A far more meaningful statistic would be to look at how many classroom hours these staff are providing out of the total being delivered in each university. In 2017/18, UCU conducted a Freedom of Information request to try to shed light on the issue of how much teaching was being delivered in an academic year in our universities and how much was being delivered by people who are paid by the hour. Most universities were unable to tell us, pleaded exemptions from the legislation or, most scandalously, simply ignored the request. Yet on the basis of data from around 40 employers, UCU estimates that most universities probably rely on hourly paid staff to deliver around 25% of their undergraduate teaching, with some pre-92 universities likely to use hourly paid staff for up to 50%.<sup>3</sup> The fact that we can't do much more than make an educated estimate is an indictment of the university sector's lack of transparency.

In spite of what universities might say to the contrary, we assert, with some confidence, that there is a reserve army of academic teaching labour doing a significant amount of undergraduate teaching in the UK university system. If you are an undergraduate entering the UK university system, it is highly likely that a good number of your classes are being taught by people who are fixed-term teachers, paid by the hour and perhaps even employed as though they are 'temps'.

How does this life affect casualised staff? What do they say about life and work employed on these contracts? In the rest of this report, we show what casualised staff themselves say about the effects of working on precarious contracts.



**PART 2: PRECARIOUS WORK AND THE STRUGGLE TO GET BY**

*Before starting teaching I worked as a shop assistant on minimum wage (whilst being a PhD student). I have decided to return to that job rather than teaching, because at least shop work frees me to manage my own time: the teaching consumes so much of my time (as a seminar tutor I am the first point of contact for students and deal with their emails every day) and is paid so badly that working in a shop was actually a better deal, even though I hated it. Also, the shop work gave me a permanent contract and lasts all year whereas the teaching give me a termly contract - even though the module runs all year - and I get no pay over summer, no guarantee of a job each year, no pension.*

*I had all of those things on minimum wage shop work. It kills me to go back to it, I hate the work, but it gives me more control over my life than teaching does.*

UCEA, the universities and colleges employers’ association, likes to tell people that the Higher Education Sector is well paid. One of its more extravagant claims is that median full time earnings for higher education teachers are £50,000 a year. This is a gross distortion of the position of full time staff but it most definitely conceals the real position of the tens of thousands of insecurely employed staff, many of them part-time or highly casual ‘atypical’ workers.

We asked staff to estimate their average monthly take home pay on average. 2,796 respondents were able to do this and 48% were earning less than £1500 a month. For the purposes of comparison, median full time monthly earnings in 2018 were £2,276 (£569 per week).<sup>4</sup>

18% of the respondents estimated that their monthly earnings were below £500, the lower earnings limit for National Insurance contributions.

**Table 1: Estimate your average monthly take home pay**

VALUE	PERCENTAGE	COUNT
Less than £500	18.3%	533
£500-£999	14.7%	428
£1000 - £1,499	14.8%	432
£1,500 - £1,999	18.1%	528
£2000 - £2,499	22.4%	654
£2,500 - £2,999	5.0%	145
More than £3000	2.6%	76
It varies too much to say	3.2%	94
Don't know	0.9%	26
<b>Totals</b>		<b>2,916</b>



### WORKING HOURS, UNPAID LABOUR AND EFFECTIVE HOURLY RATES

Part-time teaching staff are contracted in a number of ways. They can be employed on a fraction of a full-time contract (0.2 or 1 day a week, 0.5 or 2½ a week), or very commonly, they can be engaged as hourly paid teachers. These are contracted to deliver a certain number of hours teaching, often with an allowance of pay to cover preparation and marking. These ‘multipliers’ are almost invariably too low to cover the amount of work associated with preparing and delivering classes, marking work and giving students feedback on their work. As a consequence, part-time teaching staff regularly report that they work many more hours than they are paid for, lowering their effective hourly rates.

Our survey shows this unpaid labour very clearly. We asked participants to tell us how many hours in an average week they were contracted to work and to estimate how many hours they actually work in an average week (as distinct from those they are contracted to work). After taking out those staff who were contracted to work full time on fixed-term contracts, we were left with useable data for 1568 part-time teaching staff on various forms of contract.

This data showed that on average, these part-time teachers were delivering 45% of their work without being paid for it, while the median figure was 50%. This radically cuts the effective hourly rate of pay for the work they are delivering, taking it in many cases close to the minimum wage.

For example, a part-time lecturer contracted and paid for 10 hours and bringing in £187 a week, (which is the median point in the band £125-249 per week) will have an hourly rate of £18.70. However, if she is in fact working 20 hours a week (which is the median from our survey) she will be paid a real hourly rate of £9.35.

**Table 2: Contracted and actual working hours (1568 part-time teachers)**

	AVERAGE CONTRACTED HOURS PER WEEK	ESTIMATED ACTUAL HOURS WORKED PER WEEK	AMOUNT OF LABOUR THAT WAS UNPAID	% OF LABOUR THAT WAS UNPAID
Median	10	20	10	50%
Average	14.4	26.0	11.6	44.6%
Total	21040	39973	18993	47.5%

### MULTIPLE JOBS

With pay being low in these jobs, many casualised staff have to take on more than one job to make ends meet.

Our survey revealed that almost half the respondents had held two or more education jobs in the last 12 months and more than one in eight (13%) had held at least one additional job outside the education sector.



Table 3: Staff with more than one job in the last 12 months

TOTAL RECORDS OF PEOPLE EMPLOYED IN LAST 12 MONTHS	2 OR MORE JOBS IN TOTAL	% OF TOTAL EMPLOYED	2 OR MORE EDUCATION JOBS	% OF TOTAL EMPLOYED
2827	1725	61.0	1371	48.5%

**MAKING ENDS MEET**

Many casualised staff face a major struggle to make ends meet, confirming the results of earlier UCU surveys. Just over 2000 participants responded to a question asking whether they had experienced a series of problems getting by as a consequence of their contracts. Almost 60% of those responding said they had struggled to make ends meet, while 40% said they experienced problems paying bills.

Figure 1: Have you ever experienced any of the following as issues as a result of your employment on insecure contracts (tick all that apply)

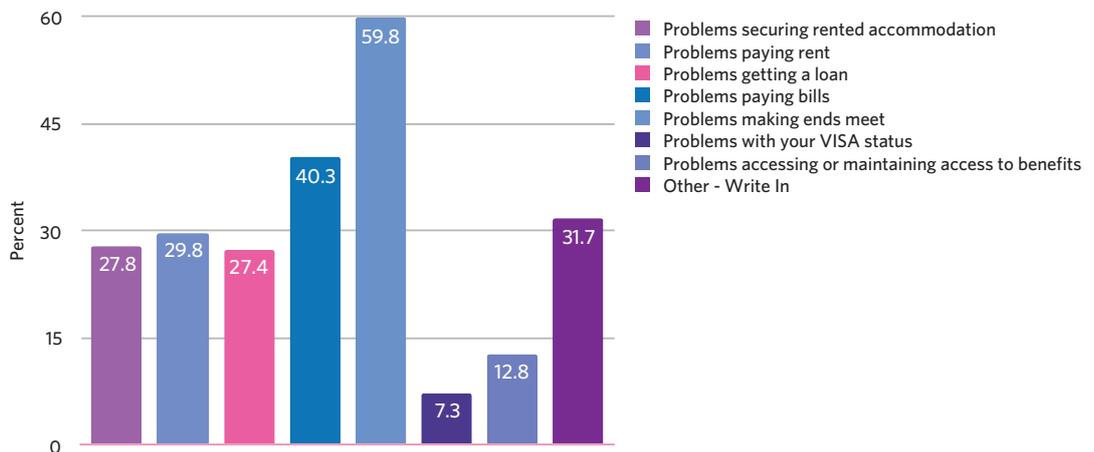


Table 4: Have you ever experienced any of the following as issues as a result of your employment on insecure contracts? (tick all that apply)

	PERCENT OF THOSE ANSWERING THE QUESTION	NUMBER ANSWERING YES
Problems securing rented accommodation	27.8%	571
Problems paying rent	29.8%	613
Problems getting a loan	27.4%	562
Problems paying bills	40.3%	828
Problems making ends meet	59.8%	1,228
Problems with your VISA status	7.3%	149
Problems accessing or maintaining access to benefits	12.8%	263
Other - write in	31.7%	651



*I have no money, my income is sufficient to pay my rent, bills, food and that's about it.*

*I struggled to secure rented accommodation, let alone think about buying a home.*

*I have been at risk of losing my house. I can no longer buy books to support my research. My ability to travel to libraries has been severely cut back. I can no longer plan decent holidays or subsidise trips to conferences.*

*I do not earn enough money to be considered for a mortgage or even a rental contract – my housemate has to rent houses in her name only. I cannot save enough money for a deposit.*

*If I don't get enough work, as over Christmas when the university was shut, I have to borrow to make ends meet, I then have to pay interest on this which means I pay out over £100 a month in charges and costs which puts me further into debt. Neither my son (who is autistic) nor my mother (who has mild dementia) have an income so I am reliant on my wages to pay for them as well as myself. I live in terror of the banks taking away the credit cards due to high borrowing.*

*I have a family with two young children to look after and bills to pay. There have been times where it literally took almost a year before I gained clarity on the total amount of pay I would receive for a long-term project. In that time I was expected to work on the project. In the meantime, my husband and I were struggling to get by on our normal salary/scholarship. I have felt that I almost needed to beg to get proper pay, which has been a very hard thing to do.*

*I live in limbo. They know we're desperate and they use us. I look like a crazy person on any financial applications. I have a minimum of three jobs at any one time and I never know what or when I'm getting paid. It's become a poverty trap because I can't book any childcare to make headway. I can't afford it.*

## **WELLBEING**

The UK higher education sector appears to want to be seen to be active on the wellbeing of students and – to a lesser extent – of staff. Yet too often initiatives in promoting 'wellbeing' place too much emphasis on helping employees to develop resilience in face of unworkable conditions than on tackling root problems.

One major cause of stress and anxiety is the experience of working on precarious and insecure contracts. It is quite clear from our survey results that staff on insecure contracts find the experience highly stressful (Figure 2).



Figure 2: On a scale of 1 to 10 where 1 = not stressful at all and 10 = extremely stressful, how stressful do you find working on an insecure contract?

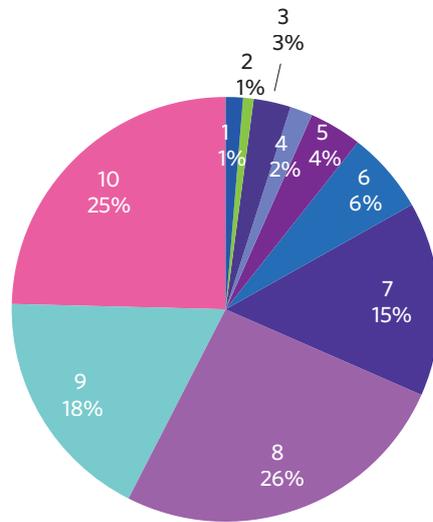


Table 5: On a scale of 1 to 10 where 1 = not stressful at all and 10 = extremely stressful, how stressful do you find working on an insecure contract?

1 = NOT STRESSFUL AT ALL and 10 = EXTREMELY STRESSFUL	PERCENTAGE	COUNT
10	24.60%	649
9	17.90%	472
8	25.90%	682
7	14.80%	391
6	6.20%	163
5	4.00%	105
4	1.70%	46
3	2.80%	75
2	0.80%	22
1	1.30%	33
<b>Total</b>		<b>2,638</b>

These stress levels have clearly affected the mental and physical health of many precariously employed staff. A shocking 71% of respondents said that their mental health had been affected by the stress and anxiety of working on an insecure contract, while 43% said that they believed that it had affected their physical health.



*I already have an anxiety disorder and depression on top of chronic illnesses and being on insecure contracts, which I often take up at institutions 2-3 hours away, means it is very difficult to get time to recover. In term time I do not have evenings or weekends to relax and recover, as I am preparing teaching materials, marking, or commuting. Outside term time, I am still expected to prepare teaching materials or answer student emails without pay. Without pay I become anxious about being able to pay bills.*

*Not having work in the summer means that I spend months worrying about money. Not getting sick leave means that I sometimes have to compromise my health in order to ensure that I get paid.*

*I am tired, depressed and struggle to cope. I worry constantly what will happen if I am sick or don't manage to find enough work. Sometimes the casual work which is offered gets taken in less than a minute so I end up constantly checking my emails and afraid to leave my computer to get a drink or go to the loo in case I miss the email.*

*My mental health has been severely affected by my insecure contract. It has exacerbated my generalised anxiety disorder. The pressure of teaching and the ever-changing workloads make it difficult to maintain an appropriate work-life balance and avoid patterns which intensify my anxiety. During an intense period of marking I was incredibly unhappy, I was emotionally distraught and regularly cried in front of my computer for about two weeks. I did not think I could get through it and I felt like a failure. Furthermore, I am constantly worried about my finances because I am not paid enough to cover my essential outgoings: do I have enough money to buy food? Can I afford to socialise? Will I have to borrow money again? It affects everything I do.*

In addition to the costs of mental and physical health, employment on insecure contracts places immense barriers to people being able to plan their lives.

83% of respondents agreed that their contractual status made it hard to make long-term financial commitments such as buying a house.

83% of respondents also agreed that it made it hard to make long-term family plans.

**Table 6: To what extent do you agree with the following statements?**

	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	UNDECIDED	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	RESPONSES
My contractual status makes it hard to make long-term family plans	60.8%	21.8%	9.2%	6.2%	1.9%	2,648
My contractual status makes it hard to make long-term financial commitments (eg buy a house)	63.6%	19.6%	8.0%	7.1%	1.7%	2,645



*I have no guaranteed income beyond this September and it is impossible to plan financially beyond that.*

*I have put off starting a family, and now in my late 40s am only now in a position that is permanent (all be it still only four days per week). While on part-time short term contracts I was not able to apply for a mortgage. I have been on part time short term (one year) contracts since 2010 until late 2018. At some points having three jobs simultaneously trying to make up a full-time equivalent; the closest I got was 0.9 for two years. In this time period I have been everything between 0.2 and 0.8 - usually 0.6.*

*I'm recently married. We would like children at some point, but I can't easily get maternity leave when on temporary contracts. We can't buy a house until I have a job with at least two-three years attached to it: my partner doesn't earn enough to qualify for a mortgage alone, and we don't want to buy and then find my next job is on the other side of the country.*

*I have no guaranteed contract, pension and holiday pay. I haven't had a decent holiday in years and I can make no financial plans. I still live with my parents and have no income over the summer (even though I save my money).*

*Living from month to month and uncertain income makes saving for pension or children university fees impossible. Having to claim universal credit during periods of not having additional jobs, as the university contract does not pay enough. To have enough income to raise a family in London means that I have to work multiple jobs.*

*Being on an insecure contract means that you always need to account for future unemployment and can never settle. You cannot plan in the long term, neither career-wise, nor family-wise, and cannot make life-relevant choices, such as starting a family. The problem is often compounded in academic couples, where both are on insecure contracts.*

Perhaps unsurprisingly, a staggeringly high number of respondents had considered leaving the sector (85%), despite the fact that 72% said they wanted to stay in higher education.

**Table 7: Have you ever considered leaving the sector?**

VALUE	PERCENTAGE	COUNT
Yes	84.6%	2,239
No	15.4%	407
Totals		2,646

Equally unsurprisingly, the single biggest factor in prompting people to consider leaving was the absence of job security. This factor predominated over all others.



Table 8: If you have considered leaving, please indicate the most important factors in making you do so. Please rank them in order of importance:

ITEM	OVERALL RANK	TOTAL RESPONDENTS
Lack of job security	1	2,039
Work-life balance issues	2	1,954
Dissatisfaction with career progression	3	1,779
Prospect of better pay	4	1,793
Lack of promotion opportunities	5	1,778
Unequal treatment	6	1,716
Other	7	1,008

**DO PEOPLE WANT 'FLEXIBILITY'?**

Employers' organisations have claimed that many people value the flexibility that comes with fixed-term and hourly paid contracts. This is not really borne out by the evidence of our survey. 97% of respondents on a fixed-term contract said that they would rather be on a permanent contract, while 80% of hourly paid staff responding said that they would rather be on a contract that guaranteed them hours, even if it meant less flexibility.

Table 9: If you are on a fixed-term contract, would you prefer to be on a permanent contract?

VALUE	PERCENTAGE	COUNT
Yes	97.3%	1,892
No	2.7%	52
Total		1,944

Table 10: Would you prefer a contract that guaranteed you more hours at the cost of less flexibility?

VALUE	PERCENTAGE	COUNT
Yes	80.4%	774
No	19.6%	189
Total		963



**PART 3: THE COSTS TO QUALITY - MEASURING THE IMPACT OF CASUALISATION ON STUDENTS AND WORK**

Higher education employers as a rule have proved themselves largely impervious to arguments about fair treatment and the plight of casualised staff. Perhaps the short-term financial incentives to employing people on casual contracts appear just too alluring? However, UCU believes that this approach is myopic in the extreme and ignores the very real costs of employing people on insecure contracts to quality of the higher education ‘product’.

For example, in the USA there is now a well-established academic literature which examines the effects of employing staff on insecure part-time contracts in terms of retention rates and graduate outcomes.<sup>5</sup> Reports and research have consistently found correlations between heavy reliance on staff employed on insecure part-time contracts, lower retention rates and poorer graduate outcomes:

- last minute hiring decisions and a lack of time to prepare for providing instruction
- a lack of access to orientation, mentoring, and professional development opportunities, including on-campus programming and funding to attend conferences and seminars off-campus
- exclusion from curriculum design and decision making
- a lack of access to office space, instructional resources, and staff support.

As we’ve seen, casualised teaching staff in UK higher education already contribute on average 45% of their work to their employer without being paid for it. Casualised staff know that they are being exploited, with more than 50% saying that they did not consider that they were paid fairly for the work they do, and only 33% broadly thinking that their pay was broadly fair. Almost 80% reported regularly working more hours than they are paid for in order to do their jobs properly.

**Table 11: Pay and hours - To what extent do you agree with the following statements?**

	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	UNDECIDED	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	RESPONSES
I am paid fairly for the work I do	6.5%	26.2%	16.2%	29.7%	21.5%	2,983
I regularly have to work beyond the hours I am paid for to do my job properly	50.8%	26.9%	9.2%	9.9%	3.3%	2,981



These staff are constantly faced with the choice of cutting corners with preparation, marking and feedback or continuing to work unpaid. As we've also seen, the majority of these staff are holding down more than one job, further squeezing their time as they travel, unpaid, between campuses. They commonly lack access to adequate teaching facilities or to places where they can meet students and talk to them about their work. They are not paid for the time it takes to answer emails.

We asked those involved in teaching to indicate the extent to which they believed their working conditions enabled or impeded them in delivering high quality teaching.

- 67 % of respondents said that they did not have enough paid time to enable them to prepare adequately for their classes.
- 73% of respondents said that they did not have enough paid time to complete their marking.
- 75% said that they did not have enough paid time to undertake the scholarship necessary to stay on top of their subjects.
- 71% said that they did not have enough paid time to give their students the feedback they deserved.
- 44% said they did not have access to adequate facilities to provide feedback and support to their students.
- 35% said their views were not taken into account in the development of courses and materials.

In summary, very large majorities of casualised teaching staff reported that they have inadequate paid time to prepare for their classes, mark students work, give students feedback or undertake the scholarship necessary to remain subject specialists. Significant minorities confirmed that they are not given adequate facilities and are not able to feed into the development of the courses they teach.

*I don't have office space, office hours, or the time to deal with my students' issues when they arise.*

*Associate lecturers at my department are advised to have tutorials in the building cafe, which of course is not ideal if the students have any sensitive issues they want to discuss.*

*I am expected to write and deliver lectures and seminars but I am only paid for the actual delivery. Some semesters I can be offered 10-15 hours per week teaching, while there have been others when I have had two hours per week (over two days). Not wanting to fall out of favour with the institution, I have no choice but to accept these hours, which restricts my ability to seek and get other, better paid work.*



*I feel guilty not responding to student emails outside of office hours as I am not paid for these. Students want to meet me outside of office hours and spend more time dealing with their personal issues.*

*We are underpaid for marking and submission dates are after the term ends so we do not have additional paid time to provide advice and feedback to students during holidays etc - I choose to do this for free in order to assist my students.*

*I usually don't know what is happening with a course until the last minute because some staff expect people on temporary contracts to drop all of their other work and guess what is going on. I also don't receive any appropriate training to do my job. I am only aware of any changes to the way marking is done because I have been informed by someone else after I have already made the mistakes.*

*I have been on hourly paid contracts since 2011, I've had 11 hourly paid positions, teaching on 23 different modules at two universities... I have to meet students in the café because I don't have an office. I'm often not able to access the IT /admin systems 'til after my teaching has finished. My PhD studies have been affected because the hours needed to do the work are considerably more than the hours paid eg assignments are paid at a rate of three per hour, however each essay takes on average an hour to read, grade and write up individual feedback as required. I love teaching and have gained lots of great experience working with some fab students and colleagues, but the institutions are not supportive and will ask for more and more, without the resources to pay or support extra work....The time required especially for new modules, is hugely underestimated, and the support and time that students ask for/need, is also basically unpaid.*

*I work on casualised contracts at two institutions. I do not have enough paid time to adequately prepare for my class or for marking and feedback. The amount I am paid for preparation does not even cover the time I spend doing the core reading for the seminar. I am forced to work beyond the hours I am paid every week to adequately prepare for seminars. In regards to marking... it takes me 40 minutes to an hour to mark a 2000 word essay or an exam paper, but I am paid to mark three scripts in one hour... I therefore work two-three times longer than I am paid for.*

*I was asked to take on a new two-term course, with no prepared lecture notes, at one week's notice. This is standard practice in the department I teach in, and it infuriates PhD students and Early Careers Researchers. The head of department claims that it is impossible to project teaching needs until the beginning of term and then is shocked when PhDs refuse to teach at such short notice, placing further burden on recently-recruited ECR staff. The budget in my department does not permit adequate student feedback time from hourly paid staff and it is a battle to get an office to carry out student feedback hours.*



*It is very difficult to limit preparation time without ending up below minimum wage but I believe in being professional so I spend more time than I should preparing. It is also impossible to mark student's work within the time frame we are given as marking is almost always included in our hourly seminar pay but it is unprofessional not to complete marking to a good standard. In some schools we are also expected to pay attention to student attendance and to chase students up. Some schools also require attendance at meetings which are not paid. Again, it seems unprofessional not to cooperate. I am always concerned that my students need more of my time than I am paid for... My own research ie publishing always takes second place to the needs of students. It is impossible to move away from hourly paid work without publications and that is extremely demoralising. I know how much the students are paying for their education and I am concerned that any dissatisfaction will reflect badly on my professionalism rather than the university's arrangement for staffing.*

It is clear that, from the perspective of the people teaching our students, the employment of people on casual, insecure and hourly paid contracts entails significant educational costs. Employing people on 'flexible' contracts might seem like the cheap and easy option, but it's making the working lives of teaching staff impossible and, in the process, it's short-changing students.

Given that hourly paid and casual staff are likely to be delivering anywhere between a quarter and a half of all undergraduate teaching, this, as much as the appalling effects of precariousness on staff home lives and wellbeing, should be a source of shame and embarrassment for the sector.

**Table 12: The cost to quality teaching - Please indicate to what extent you agree or disagree with the following statements**

	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	UNDECIDED	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	RESPONSES
I have enough paid time to enable me to prepare adequately for my classes	2.9%	18.5%	11.5%	36.3%	30.8%	1,786
I have enough paid time to allow me to complete my marking	2.0%	15.6%	9.8%	33.5%	39.1%	1,782
I have enough time left over after my teaching related work to keep up to date with the latest scholarship in my subject	1.6%	11.0%	12.1%	33.7%	41.6%	1,772
The time I am paid for enables me to give students the attention and feedback they deserve	1.7%	13.8%	13.5%	40.8%	30.2%	1,780



Table 12 continued

	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	UNDECIDED	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	RESPONSES
I am provided with the facilities I need to provide adequate feedback and support to my students (desk space, meeting rooms etc)	11.8%	35.9%	8.8%	22.2%	21.4%	1,782
My views as a teacher are taken into account in the development of courses and materials	10.3%	37.0%	18.0%	19.9%	14.7%	1,775

Similarly, academic literature on innovation and research has pointed to the costs of employing people on short-term contracts and short-term projects. For example, analysis of long-established firms (like universities) has stressed the importance of stable employment for effective innovation: ‘continuous accumulation of (often tacit) knowledge is important in creating optimal conditions for innovation...The historically cumulative nature of knowledge produces path dependencies which give incentives to firms employing protected insiders with long job tenures’. In other words, innovation is cumulative, building on the accumulated knowledge and experience that comes with security of employment. For universities, this means that researchers who have been with an employer for a long time, develop experience of the employer, of their colleagues’ work and their research centres. This helps them to develop collaborative working, gives them experience of winning funding within these centres and of developing innovative new projects. These researchers are part of a university’s ‘stock of tacit knowledge’ which is constantly being added to by accumulated learning and eroded by loss of staff, (‘forgetting’).<sup>6</sup>

If the findings of the academic literature on innovation point toward the benefits of employment security, the results of our survey clearly point to the costs of flexibility:

- 73% of researchers said that research they had been involved with had been negatively affected by employment on short-term contracts.
- 81% said that their own research activity had been negatively affected by employment on short-term contracts.
- 79% disagreed that this was an ‘economical and cost-effective’ way to employ research staff.
- 96% agreed that more secure employment would help foster genuinely innovative research activity.



*I know I need to deliver short-term results, so there is no possibility of focusing on research that has long-term goals.*

*I will spend a considerable amount of the time (anything between 10% and 30%) doing activities to increase my employability: from actually applying for jobs (a full-time job in itself when one is a researcher), applying for grants, taking side tasks which are not part of my job to decorate my CV, etc. Technically I am not paid for this, but I do it anyway and my research suffers as a consequence.*

*A portion of my time is spent trying to secure funding to extend my contract, instead of the research I would far rather be doing. Family planning is greatly impacted - it is difficult to decide to have children knowing your job is unlikely to exist in three months.*

*There's not enough time to conduct experiments and publish work. Having to move often disrupts research continuity.*

*As an early-career researcher, it is usually not possible to find a research job in exactly the same field you were working in before, meaning that creating an 'identity' as a researcher is impossible. Every new contract involves many months spent learning a new field, rather than building on previous knowledge, and involves creating an entirely new network of contacts and collaborations. This considerably slows the pace of generating knowledge, and means that early-career researchers are often not as familiar as they could be with the existing research in their field. It also reduces scope for innovation, trial-and-error, or genuinely novel research, instead promoting a 'public or perish' culture which ultimately leads to sub-standard science.*

*The concern about the approaching end of contract detracts from current work not only in terms of the distraction of having to find and secure future funding/employment but also in terms of worrying about whether the current work can be fulfilled appropriately.*

*It corrodes any collaborative/team work because you are in direct short-term competition with your colleagues - not for a pay rise, or a bonus, but for an actual job and a payslip. Frankly, it's absurd, and it makes a mockery of the suggestion that we are doing top quality research. I have worked collaboratively in industrial research, and it is pretty powerful.*

*I spend more time applying for grants than doing research. The fear of having to publish something and get money incentivises doing crappy incremental but fast research rather than important but slow work.*



Table 13: the cost to quality research - To what extent to you agree with the following statements?

	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	UNDECIDED	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	RESPONSES
Research I have been involved with has been negatively affected by employment on short-term contracts	38.6%	34.1%	14.6%	10.1%	2.6%	1,090
My own research has been negatively affected by employment on short-term contracts	48.6%	32.3%	8.6%	7.7%	2.8%	1,090
Employing people on short-term contracts is economical and cost-effective	1.6%	4.4%	14.8%	31.2%	48.1%	1,090
More secure employment would help foster genuinely innovative research activity	78.3%	17.6%	3.0%	0.2%	0.8%	1,094

**WHAT CAN BE DONE?**

The government needs to take a new approach to the higher education workforce. The highly controversial and deeply disliked metrics that have been introduced, for example, make no effort to measure the degree to which employers invest in employment stability, or conversely, the extent to which they impose ‘flexibility’ and all its costs on hard-working staff.

The Office for Students could help to change this, by putting a new duty on universities to disclose the amounts of teaching – measured in classroom hours – that are being done by hourly paid staff as a proportion of their total classroom hours.

For researchers, it’s vital that the Concordat Strategy Group’s revised Concordat document preserves and embeds the recommendations that relate to calling for greater action on fixed-term contracts and more support to help researchers develop their own research agenda. Research councils should make it a condition of grant to employ research staff on open ended contracts and to support greater stability of employment.

Most fundamentally, higher education employers need to change tack. In the short term at least is unlikely to happen at national level. The national employers’ body UCEA has a track record of abject failure in relation to the issue of casualisation. For the last few years, UCU has included calls for national action on casualisation in our national pay and equality claims. Each year, we have been told the same thing: that the employers’ national negotiators have no mandate from their subscribers to negotiate anything meaningful. The most they will offer is a joint working group to investigate and highlight practices in the sector. The sector does not need more working groups to ‘deep dive’



issues. It needs action now. For the time being, nothing can be expected from the increasingly irrelevant UCEA.

This is why UCU has begun to put pressure on employers locally to engage with the union. This approach has had some notable successes, with significant agreements being made at a number of universities in recent years. These examples show that it is possible to improve conditions for casualised staff through serious negotiation with UCU at local level by employers who recognize the benefits of investing in their staff.

But many more universities need to wake up and recognize that their flexible workforce strategy is failing staff and students. If they continue to bury their heads in the sand, they will be effectively serving notice on their own reputations.



## NOTES

<sup>1</sup><https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/policy-and-analysis/research-policy>

<sup>2</sup>The methodological problems with UCEA's calculation are dealt with in more detail here: <https://wonkhe.com/blogs/analysis-atypical-academics-and-precarious-work/>

<sup>3</sup>See How much university teaching is being done by hourly paid staff? UCU, February 2018: [https://www.ucu.org.uk/media/9258/Precarious-education-how-much-university-teaching-is-being-delivered-by-hourly-paid-academics-Feb-18/pdf/HP\\_uni\\_teaching\\_March\\_2018.pdf](https://www.ucu.org.uk/media/9258/Precarious-education-how-much-university-teaching-is-being-delivered-by-hourly-paid-academics-Feb-18/pdf/HP_uni_teaching_March_2018.pdf)

<sup>4</sup>Office of National Statistics

<sup>5</sup>See, for example the summaries of US literature: [https://pullias.usc.edu/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/CHEA\\_Examination\\_Changing\\_Faculty\\_2013.pdf](https://pullias.usc.edu/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/CHEA_Examination_Changing_Faculty_2013.pdf)

<sup>6</sup>See for example, A. Kleinknecht, 'Is flexible labour good for innovation? Evidence from firm-level data', *Cambridge Journal of Economics*, 2014, 38, 1207-1219; Kleinknecht, Alfred & Naastepad, C.W.M. & Storm, S & Vergeer, R. (2013), 'Labour market rigidities can be useful: A Schumpeterian view' *Financial Crisis, Labour Markets and Institutions*. 175-191; Jeremy Howells, 'Tacit Knowledge, Innovation and Technology Transfer', 1996; Michie, Jonathan & Sheehan, Maura. (2003). Labour market deregulation, 'flexibility' and innovation. *Cambridge Journal of Economics*. 27.



## Appendix: Who responded to the survey?

The survey was open between 16 January and 19 February 2019. 3,802 higher education staff participated in the survey with 2,662 completing every question.

	COUNT	PERCENTAGE
Complete	2,662	70.0%
Partial	1,137	30.0%
Disqualified	3	
<b>Totals</b>	<b>3,802</b>	

### Membership of UCU

The survey was chiefly distributed among UCU's own membership but almost 13% of the respondents were not UCU members.

#### Are you a UCU member?

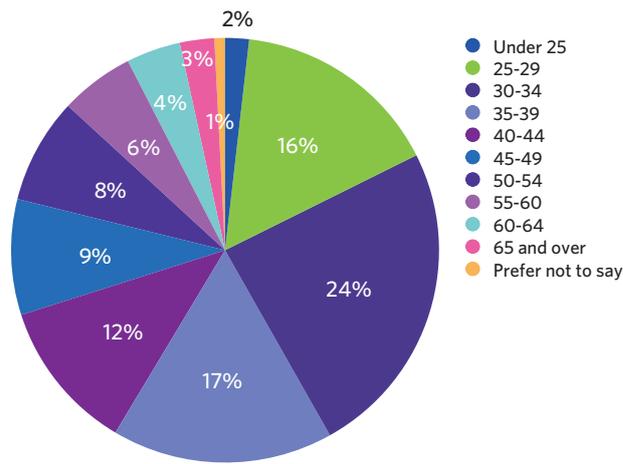
	PERCENTAGE	COUNT
Yes	87.1%	3,280
No	12.9%	486
<b>Totals</b>		<b>3,766</b>

### Age

40% of respondents were aged 35 or under and 57% aged 39 or under, in line with the preponderance of casualised staff among early to mid-careers stages.

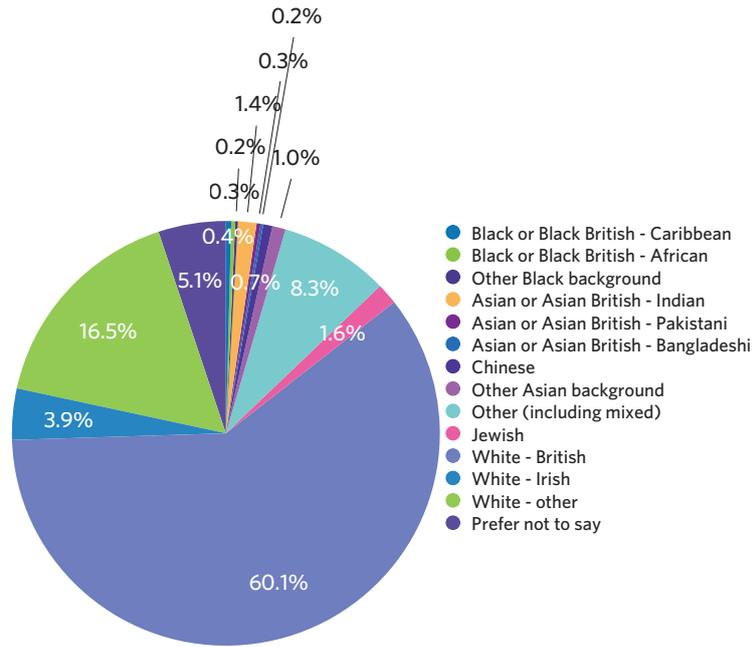
#### Your age

	PERCENTAGE	COUNT
Under 25	1.8%	67
25-29	15.8%	596
30-34	24.2%	911
35-39	16.7%	628
40-44	11.5%	433
45-49	8.8%	332
50-54	8.0%	303
55-60	5.6%	212
60-64	4.1%	153
65 and over	2.6%	99
Prefer not to say	0.8%	31
<b>Totals</b>		<b>3,765</b>



**Ethnicity**

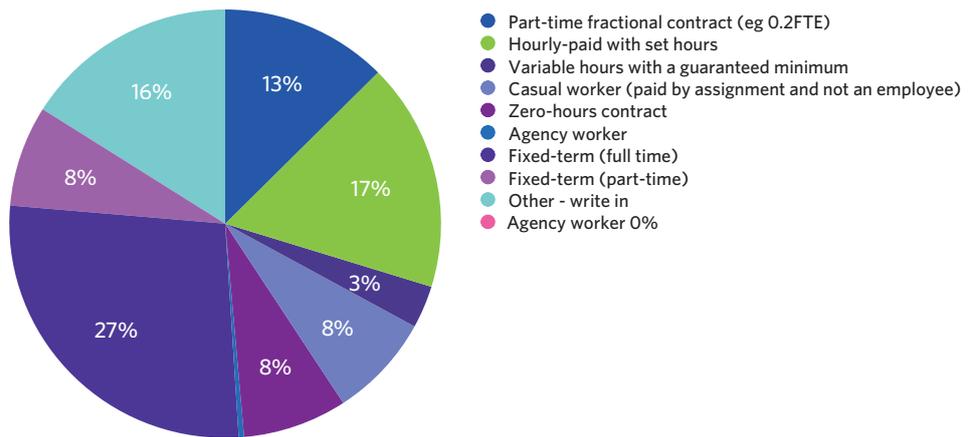
	PERCENTAGE	COUNT
Black or Black British – Caribbean	0.4%	16
Black or Black British – African	0.3%	12
Other Black background	0.2%	6
Asian or Asian British – Indian	1.4%	51
Asian or Asian British – Pakistani	0.3%	11
Asian or Asian British – Bangladeshi	0.2%	6
Chinese	0.7%	26
Other Asian background	1.0%	37
Other (including mixed)	8.3%	308
Jewish	1.6%	60
White - British	60.1%	2,238
White - Irish	3.9%	147
White- Other	16.5%	616
Prefer not to say	5.1%	189
<b>Totals</b>		<b>3,723</b>



**Gender**

Please select your gender

	PERCENTAGE	COUNT
Female	60.1%	2,258
Male	38.4%	1,444
Other - please specify	1.5%	57
<b>Totals</b>		<b>3,759</b>



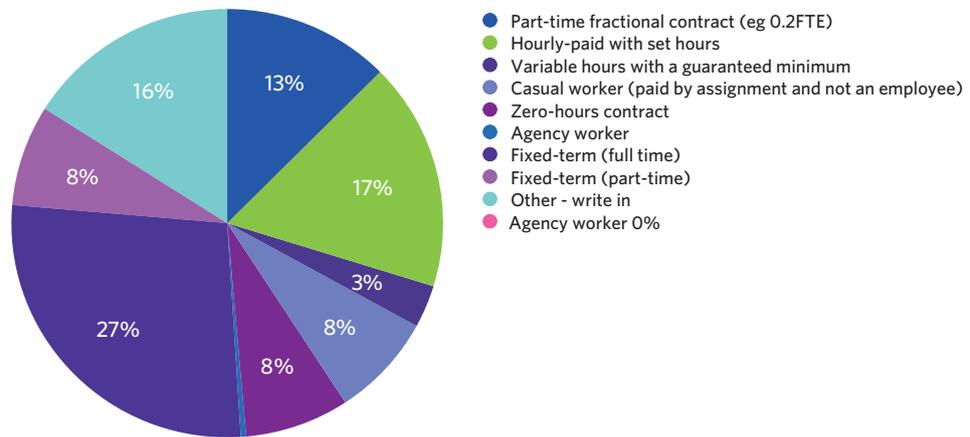
**Type of Contract**

Participants in the survey reported a representative spread of the multiplicity of contract types being used in the sector. The single biggest category was fixed-term full time, but this was split broadly evenly between researchers and teaching staff. Only 13% were on fractional part-time contracts, with 36% on a variety of hourly-paid contracts. The majority of these contracts (73%) of whatever type, were fixed-term.



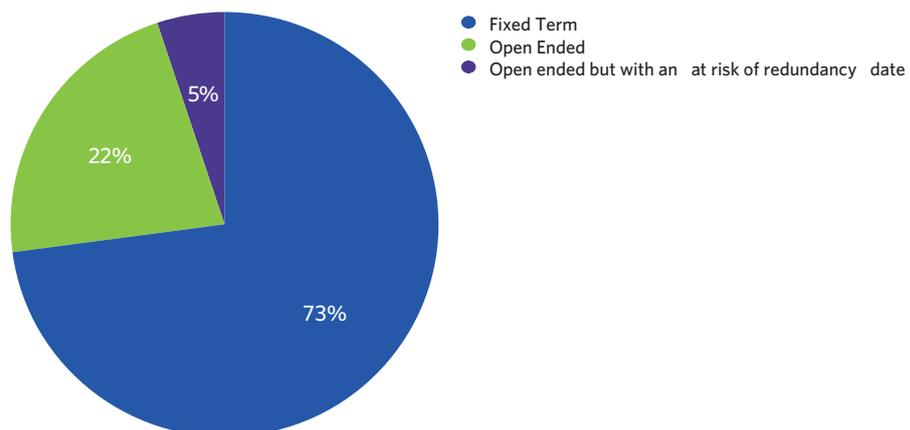
Please select the term that best describes your contract

	PERCENTAGE	COUNT
Part-time fractional contract (e.g. 0.2FTE)	12.5%	434
Hourly paid with set hours	17.2%	596
Variable hours with a guaranteed minimum	3.2%	112
Casual Worker (paid by assignment and not an employee)	7.8%	270
Zero hours contract	7.8%	271
Agency Worker	0.4%	15
Fixed-term (full time)	27.3%	946
Fixed-term (part-time)	7.6%	264
Other - Write In	16.0%	553
<b>Totals</b>		<b>3,461</b>



Is your contract fixed-term or open-ended?

	PERCENTAGE	COUNT
Fixed Term	72.9%	2,514
Open Ended	22.0%	759
Open ended but with an 'at risk of redundancy' date	5.1%	175
<b>Totals</b>		<b>3,448</b>



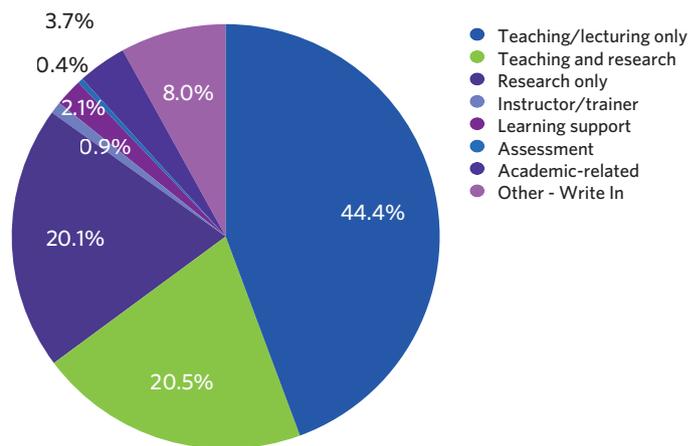


**Role**

Of the respondents, 44% identified themselves as teaching only staff, with 20% research only and only 21% teaching and research.

Please select the term that best describes your role

	PERCENTAGE	COUNT
Teaching/lecturing only	44.4%	1,541
Teaching and research	20.5%	713
Research only	20.1%	696
Instructor/trainer	0.9%	30
Learning support	2.1%	72
Assessment	0.4%	14
Academic-related	3.7%	127
Other - write in	8.0%	278





## Employer

Which higher education institution is your primary contract with?

	PERCENTAGE	COUNT
The University of Aberdeen	0.5%	19
Aberystwyth University	0.5%	18
Anglia Ruskin University	0.4%	15
Arden University	0.0%	1
Arts University Bournemouth	0.1%	4
Aston University (VC change end of Sept 2016)	0.3%	11
Bangor University	0.5%	17
Bath Spa University	0.4%	15
The University of Bath	0.9%	33
University of Bedfordshire	0.1%	4
The Queen's University of Belfast	1.4%	50
Birkbeck, University of London	1.1%	42
The University of Birmingham	2.0%	72
Birmingham City University	0.2%	9
Bishop Grosseteste University	0.1%	3
The University of Bolton	0.1%	5
Bournemouth University	0.2%	7
The University of Bradford	0.2%	6
The University of Brighton	0.7%	24
The University of Bristol	2.8%	103
Brunel University London	0.2%	8
Buckinghamshire New University	0.0%	1
The University of Buckingham	0.0%	1
The University of Cambridge	2.4%	89
Canterbury Christ Church University	0.1%	5
Cardiff University	1.7%	62
Cardiff Metropolitan University	0.1%	5
The University of Central Lancashire	0.5%	19
The Royal Central School of Speech and Drama (RCSSD)	0.2%	7
University of Chester	0.5%	17
The University of Chichester	0.1%	5
City, University of London	1.0%	37
Courtauld Institute of Art	0.5%	18
CU Group (Coventry University College)	0.2%	7
Coventry University	0.5%	20
Cranfield University	0.0%	1



	PERCENTAGE	COUNT
University of Cumbria	0.1%	5
De Montfort University	0.7%	27
University of Derby	0.3%	11
The University of Dundee	0.1%	5
University of Durham	2.2%	82
The University of East Anglia	1.0%	38
The University of East London	0.1%	5
Edge Hill University	0.2%	7
Edinburgh College of Art	0.1%	5
Edinburgh Napier University	0.1%	2
The University of Edinburgh	3.7%	137
The University of Essex	0.4%	15
The University of Exeter	1.5%	55
Glasgow Caledonian University	0.4%	14
The University of Glasgow	3.0%	111
University of Gloucestershire	0.1%	4
Glyndwr University	0.1%	2
Goldsmiths University, London	1.1%	41
The University of Greenwich	0.3%	11
Guildhall School of Music and Drama	0.1%	4
Harper Adams University	0.1%	2
Heriot-Watt University	0.5%	17
University of Hertfordshire	0.5%	19
The University of Huddersfield	0.5%	20
The University of Hull	0.3%	12
Imperial College of Science, Technology and Medicine	0.7%	27
Institute of Education	0.1%	4
The University of Keele	0.5%	18
The University of Kent	1.2%	46
King's College London	2.5%	93
Kingston University	0.4%	13
The University of Lancaster	1.2%	46
Leeds Beckett University	0.5%	18
Leeds Trinity University College	0.0%	1
The University of Leeds	2.6%	97
The University of Leicester	0.9%	33
The University of Lincoln	0.5%	17
Liverpool Hope University	0.1%	4



	PERCENTAGE	COUNT
Liverpool John Moores University	0.5%	17
Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine	0.3%	12
The University of Liverpool	2.1%	76
London Metropolitan University	0.7%	25
London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine	0.9%	34
London School of Economics and Political Science	0.9%	32
London South Bank University	0.2%	6
Loughborough University	0.4%	14
The Manchester Metropolitan University	0.9%	34
The University of Manchester	3.0%	112
Middlesex University	0.6%	21
Navitas	0.0%	1
Newcastle University	2.5%	94
The University of Northampton	0.2%	9
Northumbria University, Newcastle	0.2%	9
Norwich University of the Arts	0.1%	4
The Nottingham Trent University	0.6%	22
The University of Nottingham	2.3%	86
The Open University	1.9%	69
Oxford Brookes University	0.4%	14
The University of Oxford	3.1%	114
The University of Plymouth	0.5%	19
The University of Portsmouth	0.4%	16
Queen Margaret University, Edinburgh	0.1%	3
Queen Mary University of London	0.8%	29
Ravensbourne (College of Design and Communication)	0.1%	3
The University of Reading	0.8%	28
The Robert Gordon University	0.1%	2
Roehampton University	0.2%	9
Rose Bruford College	0.0%	1
Royal College of Art	0.3%	10
Royal Holloway, University of London	0.6%	23
The Royal Conservatoire of Scotland	0.0%	1
The Royal Veterinary College	0.0%	1
Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama	0.2%	6
Ruskin College	0.1%	2
The School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS)	1.2%	46
The University of Salford	0.5%	18



	PERCENTAGE	COUNT
Scottish Association for Marine Science	0.1%	3
University of London, Senate House	0.4%	15
Sheffield Hallam University	0.8%	28
The University of Sheffield	2.7%	98
Solent University (Southampton Solent University)	0.2%	9
The University of Southampton	1.8%	67
The University of St Andrews	0.8%	30
St George's University of London	0.1%	4
St Mary's University	0.1%	3
Staffordshire University	0.1%	2
The University of Stirling	0.8%	29
The University of Strathclyde	0.6%	22
Study Group International	0.1%	2
The University of Sunderland	0.1%	5
The University of Surrey	0.3%	12
The University of Sussex	1.7%	64
Swansea University	0.7%	26
The University of Teesside	0.4%	13
University of West London	0.2%	7
Trinity Laban	0.0%	1
University of Wales Trinity St David's	0.2%	9
University for the Creative Arts	0.2%	7
University of Ulster	0.3%	10
Univeristy of the Highlands and Islands	0.1%	5
University of Suffolk	0.0%	1
Falmouth University	0.1%	2
University College London	3.0%	112
University of St Mark and St John	0.0%	1
University of the Arts, London	1.0%	38
University of South Wales	0.1%	4
University of Wales	0.0%	1
The University of Warwick	1.5%	54
University of the West of England, Bristol	0.4%	16
University of the West of Scotland	0.1%	5
The University of Westminster	0.4%	16
The University of Winchester	0.2%	9
The University of Wolverhampton	0.3%	12
The University of Worcester	0.2%	8



	PERCENTAGE	COUNT
Writtle College	0.0%	1
York St John University	0.2%	9
The University of York	2.0%	73
Kaplan International College	0.2%	6
Totals		3,689

