

Research staff MANIFESTO 2025

INTRODUCTION

'I am constantly searching for new jobs'

'There is an impact on my mental well-being in not knowing where I will be next month or year'

'It puts a lot of pressure on [my] whole family'

Despite the introduction of legislation in 2002 to limit the use of successive fixed-term contracts¹, 65% of us continue to be employed on fixed-term contracts¹. And despite numerous sector initiatives to improve the research environment in HEIs, little has changed in the last decade.

It is now 2025 and we still see our colleagues in pain, talking about how they can't make plans for the future, how they must delay decisions about starting a family, and how they cannot access secure housing.

Too many of us experience the harmful consequences of casualisation on a daily basis, and in all corners of our lives. We are forced to work for free, we forgo holidays, and our ability to do our jobs or develop careers is constantly frustrated. For those of us who face other and multiple forms of structural oppression, the situation is even more damaging.

Even though the negative impact of endemic casualisation is widely reported on – both for us as workers and our research itself – employers see little incentive to change the status quo. It is clear that without pressure from UCU members and, in particular, us as casualised research staff, the situation will not improve.

WE DESERVE BETTER THAN FIXED-TERM LIVES

There is a better way – one in which we have adequate space for security, plans, and joy – we will only bring about this change if we and our colleagues demand it loudly enough.

¹ HESA staff data [2021/22]





We need our employers to better the way they regard us and the way that they employ us. We need to organise and campaign.

As UCU research members, we have developed this manifesto to present an alternative vision for how we should be employed as research staff. A vision in which we and our expertise are respected as part of an academic community that is grounded in collegiality and cooperation; a vision in which we are not simply used as disposable resources by employers in search of profit and prestige.

Through this manifesto, we are calling on UCU members and branches to get involved, get active, and get things changed.

RESEARCH STAFF MANIFESTO

As part of our campaign for better research careers, we have developed this manifesto as a bargaining tool for UCU branches and activists and anyone interested in improving the working lives of research staff. Advice on using this manifesto to campaign and negotiate for more secure research career can be found at <https://www.ucu.org.uk?mediaid=14732>

We hope that enlightened employers will sign up to this policy statement and work with their research staff community and UCU branch to implement the principles set out in the manifesto.

THE CLAIM

Policy statement

The university values and celebrates its researchers as part of the academic community and their contribution to the institution's core mission and values. The university wishes to ensure that research staff are supported, trained, and enabled to fully participate in the university community.

The university supports the principle that research staff should be employed on secure employment contracts with appropriate career progression.

To that end, the university agrees to the following:

1. We will work with the UCU to implement policies that improve the security of employment of research staff with a view to breaking the link between an individual job and a specific piece of grant funding. This will include exploring a pooled resourcing model and the transfer of research staff to genuine open-ended contracts that are not linked to funding periods.
2. We will move to a situation where genuine open-ended contracts are the norm, reducing the use of fixed-term contracts and / or open-ended contracts with an identified 'at risk' date. Agreeing a target with our local UCU branch for such a move over the next 12 months. In the transitioning period we will ensure that any fixed-term contract (or the time before an 'at risk' date) is no shorter than 24 months, other than in agreed instances such as parental leave cover.





3. We will work to reach agreement with UCU on a policy on the use of fixed-term contracts that avoids use of such contracts other than in agreed, specified and time-limited circumstances e.g. for parental leave cover.
4. We will work with UCU to agree processes and put systems in place that support the continuity of employment and minimise the risk of redundancy at the end of a funded research project. E.g. proactive and meaningful redeployment, active bridge funding and extended notice periods and (as a very last resort) enhanced redundancy pay. This will include provisions for staff who are pregnant, taking maternity leave, taking adoption leave or taking shared parental leave during their redundancy protection period. These approaches should be integrated and should feed into the overall commitment to improve the security of employment with a view to breaking the link between an individual job and a specific piece of grant funding.
5. We will work with UCU to create development opportunities and secure career paths for our research staff.

