

## Virtual meeting on Casualisation

2:30-3:30pm, 25 February 2020

### Papers circulated before meeting:

- UCEA Revised Proposal presented to unions on 27 January 2020
- Analysis of HESA data on fixed term contracts, 'Staff time series 2017-18'
- University of Edinburgh, Collective Agreement, Employment of Guaranteed Minimum Hours for Fixed Term Teaching and Academic Staff
- King's College London, Changing how we use fixed-term contracts at King's: briefing notes
- University of Bristol, Statement of principles for the reduction in use of 'precarious' contracts & offering fair contractual terms

NOTE: **Annex A** to this paper summarises our analysis of available HESA data on the use of fixed-term, open-ended and part-time contracts over time.

### 1. Agenda

	Suggested Item	Indicative timing
1	Defining project purpose, scope, and terminology	2:30-2:40pm
2	Discussion of drivers and consequences of casualisation	2:40-2:50pm
3	Discussion of outputs and work needed to deliver these	2:50-3:05pm
4	Revision of preliminary statement – suggestions please	3:05-3:25pm
5	Timeline for next steps	3:25-3:30pm

### 2. Defining purpose, scope, and terminology

#### Purpose

- 2.1 University staff and other stakeholders, such as funders and politicians are increasingly expressing concerns around the 'casualisation' of teaching and research contracts and a perceived lack of support for careers progression. Whilst there is likely to be variation both within and between different institutions with regard to employment practices, there is little information in the public domain explaining the need for different contract types and where and how often they are used. Within this vacuum, there is a risk that university critics could

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be left to shape this agenda, as well as the 'solutions' to it. UCU for example has begun to conflate fixed-term contracts with casualisation, pledging to improve job security in this area.<sup>1</sup>

- 2.2 Russell Group universities need to show leadership in this debate, both as part of their duties as responsible employers and in order to avoid further reputational damage with key stakeholder groups, including staff. At the same time, we recognise this work will need to respect and support the autonomy of members and will need to be sensitive to this issue.
- 2.3 To address the issues identified above, we propose initiating a short project, aimed at facilitating the following outcomes:
  - Supporting best practice sharing among members
  - Improving understanding of the issues, their drivers and the shared role Govt, funders and universities have in addressing them
  - Demonstrating our universities' openness to these issues and the different ways our universities are addressing them, whilst also defending the appropriate use of different contract types. (As an early output for this we may wish to release a public statement on our universities' commitment to address casualisation issues – see below.)

### Scope

- 2.4 The potential scope of this project is wide, as it touches on a variety of related topics including:
  - Research culture
  - Mental health
  - Workload and stress
  - Careers development
- 2.5 We also need to agree which groups of university staff should be included within the scope of this work (or at least where we might wish to prioritise), such as:
  - GTAs
  - Academics
  - Professional services
  - Technicians

### Terminology

- 2.6 How should this group define casual labour in terms of:
  - Length of contract (if fixed term, how short is too short)?
  - Kind of contract (permanent, fixed term, hourly, rolling)?
  - Career stage (GTA or post-doc vs. professor)

## 3. Drivers and consequences of casualisation

- 3.1 Casualisation hasn't just happened, but it has become an issue over time as the sector has changed and grown and because of a range of other internal and external factors, including changes in societal expectations. It will be useful for us to try and understand these drivers, how they may interact with each other, and their consequences, if we are to try and develop practical solutions – and solutions that will stick for the long-term.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.ucu.org.uk/stampout>

3.2 Some possible drivers of casualisation we have identified are listed below, but are there other key factors we need to consider?

- **Economies of scale in the curricula:** Teaching practice has not necessarily kept pace with the expanding number of students at UK universities. While increased student numbers may function well in lecture halls, increased marking burdens are more difficult to accommodate. If teaching practices don't evolve then this increases pressure on staff and the requirement for additional fixed-term/ short-term resource, which in turn may impact on teaching quality.
- **Split between teaching and research:** The increasing split between teaching and research in UK HE contributes to casual contracts based on yearly or termly calendars. Research from Newcastle university academics points to the increasing proliferation of fixed-term teaching-only jobs ('Teaching Fellowships') as a stumbling block to stability for many academics.<sup>2</sup> At Russell Group universities, there has been a 127% increase in the number of part-time, fixed-term teaching only roles since 2012/13.<sup>3</sup>
- **Research funding:** The nature of grants from the Research Councils often means that positions attached to the funding are by nature short-term and fixed.
- **Financial planning:** Uncertainty around annual financial planning can make it difficult to plan more than a few years in advance, which in turn can make it more difficult to guarantee long-term employment. Clearly issues around Brexit, USS pension contribution increases, the UCU pay and pensions disputes and now potential threats such as Covid-19 add to the challenges.

3.3 Consequences of casualisation if staff aren't properly supported, or where contracts are not used appropriately, may include:

- **Staff well-being:** A 2019 HEPI report pointed to short-term contracts as a major driver of declining staff mental health.<sup>4</sup> Additionally, in a June 2019 UCU survey, 83% of respondents agreed that their contractual status made it hard to make long-term financial commitments (e.g. buying a house), and 83% of respondents also agreed that it made it hard to make long-term family plans.<sup>5</sup>
- **Attrition of talent:** The insecurity of casual work can disproportionately affect those from less advantaged backgrounds, as well as immigrants—for instance, those who cannot rely on family support between contracts, and those who require a Tier 2 visa to maintain residency. Impacts may also be felt more widely than by those directly affected: i.e. on the overall teaching and/or research environment, which, in turn can have impacts on things like REF environment assessments and on our ability to maintain academic and research excellence.
- **Impact on student learning:** The working conditions for casual staff are the learning conditions for students. Staff who have poor mental health, insecure contracts, and heavy workloads can negatively affect student experience and outcomes.

#### 4. Discussion of outputs

4.1 Outputs from our work could include:

<sup>2</sup> Nick Megoran and Olivia Maso, Second class academic citizens: The dehumanising effects of casualisation in higher education, January 2020, p.23.

<sup>3</sup> Please see **Annex A** for more data on how staff contracts at RGUs have changed over time, as well as the circulated spreadsheet, 'Staff time series 2017-18'.

<sup>4</sup> HEPI, Pressure Vessels: The epidemic of poor mental health among higher education staff, May 2019, p. 51.

<sup>5</sup> UCU, Counting the costs of casualisation in higher education, June 2019, p. 4.

- Initial statement on casualisation – approved by all members (we might try and get this signed off prior to the Board awayday in March)
- All, or as many members as possible, signing up to the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers
- Case studies of best practice – written up and circulated
- Case study examples illustrating the use of different contract types
- Discussion paper explaining certain contracts and employment practices in detail (aimed at an external audience)
- Statement of principles, which could include:
  - Parity of esteem between colleagues on different contract types and between teaching and research
  - Ensuring staff are acknowledged and paid for the work they are being asked to perform
  - Providing adequate training for marking and teaching preparation

## 5. Revision of statement

- 5.1 A slightly edited version of the initial draft statement circulated to the Board at its last meeting is as follows:

As leading universities and major employers, Russell Group universities are determined to ensure that our working practices and employment models are fit for purpose, recognising the diverse needs of staff, students and institutions themselves. We acknowledge we may not always have got this right, but it is essential we learn from this, share best practice and work harder now to change things for the better.

A particular area we are all concerned about is the use of more casual contracts. On the one hand there will always be a need for flexibility: institutions need this, and it can also create real opportunities for staff. However, we recognise that over-reliance on some forms of employment models and associated contractual arrangements may not serve the best interests of staff, for example in supporting their development and career aspirations. Ultimately, they may also impact on the wider academic mission and the staff and student experience at university.

We believe there is now an urgent need and an opportunity to address these challenges. Working collectively and individually across the Russell Group, we have all committed to collaborate on this to make real progress. We have started by establishing a small working group of senior leaders that will gather and analyse examples of best practice and ensure this is shared across all our universities. We will look to develop a set of principles we can all use and will monitor these. We will also engage with key funders – on the research side, in particular – to explore how they can improve their own funding practices to help universities deliver the best possible outcomes for their staff and students.

Some of this will take time, but we have already started sharing our expertise and experiences and we have agreed this is a priority for our universities in 2020.

**Views from members on the draft statement content and tone etc would be welcome**

## 6. Timeline for next steps

- 6.1 There was an agreement at the February Board meeting that we would provide an update on this work at the Board Away Day, 12-13<sup>th</sup> March.

## Annex A: HESA data to support the discussion

Our analysis of HESA data shows that:

- Over 50,000 (27% of the total) staff at Russell Group universities were on fixed-term contracts in 2017/18; this number has **increased by 31% since 2012/13**. The number and proportion of staff on fixed-term contracts at other universities decreased over the same time (number down 7% and proportion down by 3 percentage points to 21%).
- **Teaching-only roles** accounted for 10% (18,800) of all RGU staff in 2017/18. This number having **increased by 82% since 2012/13** (when there were just 10,335 staff in teaching only roles).
- There has been a **127% increase in the number of part-time, fixed-term other contract level, teaching only roles since 2012/13**. I.e. these are not professor or senior management roles (increase from 3065 to 6970).
- Over 24,000 were employed in **Research only roles at other contract level** (i.e. not senior management or professor level)
- Almost 15,000 were **not employed in an academic function** (2/3 full-time, 1/3 part-time). Nearly 1/3 (32%) were allocated to the **medicine, dentistry and health cost-centre**; nearly 1/4 (24%) were allocated to **central admin and services**.
- Around 8,500 were in **Teaching only roles at other contract level**, with 82% classified as part-time
- Only 2,000 (FTE) Atypical contracts are recorded at RGUs and this number has remained unchanged since 2012/13 (82% of these roles are **Teaching only** roles classified as **part-time**).
- Across the sector as a whole, zero hours contracts made up only 3% (11,500) of the staff employed in 2017/18

### The data

Please see the circulated spreadsheet entitled, 'Staff time series 2017-18' for more detailed description of staff data. The first sheet in the workbook is an overview (**Table 1**) and is split by RGU and other universities.

In 2017/18, RGUs employed 183,765 FPE staff (excluding atypicals). The numbers have increased by 23% since 2012/13, and are broken down by academic employment function (teaching, teaching and research, research only, neither teaching nor research and not applicable), contract level (senior management, professor or other contract level), terms of employment (fixed-term or open-ended/permanent) and modes of employment (full-time or part-time).

Other UK universities employed 245,795 FPE staff (excluding atypicals). Their numbers have increased by 5% since 2012/13.

### Fixed-term contracts

Looking at fixed-term contracts, RGUs employed 50,410 FPEs in 2017/18 (27% of the total FPEs employed in that year). The number of fixed-term contracts at RGUs has increased by

31% since 2012/13. In contrast other universities employed 52,335 FPEs in 2017/18 (21% of the total FPEs employed that year), but their numbers have fallen by 7% since 2012/13.

**Table 2** in the workbook includes a breakdown of fixed-term contracts in 2017/18 with an additional breakdown by cost centre.

For RGUs, 34% of fixed-term contracts are allocated to the medicine, dentistry and health cost centre, 20% to biological, mathematical and physical sciences and 12% to engineering and technology.

Broken down by academic employment function, almost half (24,310 and 48%) of all fixed-term contracts are **research only roles at other contract level** (i.e. not senior management or professor level). Of these, 20,735 are classified as full-time and 3,580 part-time. A breakdown by cost centre shows that 9,975 (41%) are allocated to the **medicine, dentistry and health**, 6,665 (27%) to **biological, mathematics and physical sciences** and 4,040 (17%) to **engineering and technology**.

30% (14,880) of all fixed-term contracts are **not in an academic function** with 9,790 classified as full-time and 5,085 part-time. Of these, 4,810 (32%) are allocated to the **medicine, dentistry and health** cost centre, and 3,550 (24%) are allocated to **central administration and services**.

17% (8,455) of all fixed-term contracts are **teaching only roles at other contract level** with only 1,480 classified as full-time and 6,970 as part-time. 1,695 (20%) are allocated to the **humanities and language-based studies** cost centre, 1,505 (18%) to **biological, mathematics and physical sciences**, 1,060 (13%) to medicine, dentistry and health and 1,045 (12%) to engineering and technology.

#### Zero hours contracts

Data about Zero hours contracts are published at sector level only and are not available on the Heidi platform. The latest published data is for 2017/18 is shown below and indicates that there were 11,435 zero hours contracts (3% of all staff employed in that year). 8,620 contracts were hourly paid and 2,760 salaried.

**Table 3: Zero hours contracts 2017//18**

	Hourly paid			Other			Salaried			Grand total
	All	Full-time	Part-time	All	Full-time	Part-time	All	Full-time	Part-time	
<b>Academic contract</b>										
Fixed-term contract	1,670	40	1,630	55	5	50	105	60	45	1,830
Open-ended/permanent	3,650	505	3,140	-	-	-	1,040	750	290	4,685
<b>Non-academic contract</b>										
Fixed-term contract	1,765	25	1,740	-	-	-	235	120	115	2,000
Open-ended/permanent	1,535	535	1,005	-	-	-	1,380	835	545	2,920
<b>Total</b>	<b>8,620</b>			<b>55</b>			<b>2,760</b>			<b>11,435</b>

#### Atypical contracts

Data about staff on atypical contracts is only published at FTE level. A breakdown is included in table 4 in the workbook. RGUs employed around 2,000 FTEs on atypical contracts at **other contract level** (i.e. not senior management or professor level) and this has remained the same since 2012/13. The majority of these roles are part-time and are **teaching only** roles (82%). A further 14% (also part-time) are research only.