

Raj Jethwa  
UCEA  
Via e-mail

31 January 2024

Dear Raj,

I'm writing to you on behalf of university staff across the UK to draw your attention to problems regarding the way that the vast majority of research staff are employed by your members.

UCU has today published a [report](#) which highlights that around two-thirds of research staff are employed on fixed-term contracts, some less than a year in length.

As you will be aware university researchers deliver important work but, at many institutions, they are subject to gig-economy style working conditions. We sent freedom of information requests to your members across the UK and used Higher Education Statistics Agency data to look at the employment conditions of research staff. The results are a damning indictment of the sector's broken employment practices.

Key findings include:

- Around two in three research staff are employed on fixed term contracts, including 80% of research staff at the University of Manchester, 96% at King's College London and 96% at London School of Economics
- Nearly a third of universities (30%) were unable to say whether research staff were redeployed at the end of their contract.
- Only one employer offered enhanced paid notice periods to research only staff on fixed-term contracts

Critically, the worst practices are not confined to the least financially secure institutions. We found that five Russell Group universities had high numbers of staff on fixed term contracts, showing that well-off institutions are actively choosing to employ staff under gig economy conditions. At Oxford for example, a staggering 88% of research staff are employed on a fixed-term contract.

Better workload management from employers coupled with improved use of redeployment would help move staff to more sustainable employment. Worryingly, nearly a third of respondents were not able to tell us how successful they had been in maintaining their research staff in employment.

UCEA must do more and I'm asking you to echo our calls for universities to work with us to develop a more sustainable model for the employment of research staff. Employers must commit to reducing the use of fixed term contracts and move their research staff to genuinely secure contracts. Systems must also be put in place that support continuity of employment and minimise the risk of redundancy at the end of funded research projects.

I hope you will study our report in detail and encourage your members to do likewise and commit to improvements in the working live of researchers.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jo Grady". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized initial "J".

Dr Jo Grady  
General Secretary