

SEANAD ÉIREANN

Fógra Tairisceana:

Notice of Motion:

“That Seanad Éireann:

recognises:

- the important contribution of lecturers, postdoctoral researchers and PhD researchers to teaching and research in our universities and higher education institutions;
- that without such a contribution our universities and higher education institutions would not function;
- education is a public good and should be treated as such;
- education and research have a vital role in addressing the most pressing environmental and social challenges in our society and must be supported to do so;
- opportunities to engage in teaching or research should be supported by the State in order to develop research and knowledge in the arts, humanities and social sciences as well as in science, engineering, mathematics and technology;

notes with concern that:

- in recent years over 11,200 lecturers have been employed by universities and higher education institutions on a temporary or casual basis;
- many staff are employed on fixed-term contracts leaving them in highly precarious financial situations;
- many contracts are often only offered for the duration of an academic year and staff are left with uncertainty as to whether they will be renewed;
- staff employed on Contracts of Indefinite Duration often lack a clear pathway for career progression and, depending on the exact contract, can also face regular periods of unemployment;
- individuals who are on such contracts may be required to seek alternative employment or utilise social welfare for the summer months;
- PhD and postdoctoral researchers are often paid hourly rates for teaching, often not taking into account the extensive preparatory work needed to teach;
- staff on hourly contracts are not entitled to maternity benefit, parental leave, sick leave or other employment rights and protections under employment legislation;
- PhD researchers are not recognised as employees and thus are not entitled to employment rights and protections under relevant legislation and furthermore are

disadvantaged in respect of pensions as they do not make pay-related social insurance (PRSI) contributions;

- staff on such contracts are not within public sector pay agreements and thus do not receive the salary increases applied to other public sector workers;
- many staff spend a long number of years on such contracts and are not offered opportunities for career progression;
- due to the high levels of precarity within academia:
 - many staff are, or are considering, leaving the sector altogether;
 - our higher education institutions national and international reputations for excellence in teaching and research are being undermined;
 - students' education is being negatively affected;
 - academic freedom, critical thinking, innovation and the ability of researchers to engage in long-term or frontier research is being undermined;
- the low-pay experienced across the sector is intersecting with the cost-of-living crisis and the housing crisis, in particular, is impacting on lecturers, postdoctoral researchers and PhD researchers' ability to stay and work in Ireland;
- there is overreliance on private funding of research and public-private partnerships to fund and develop research;

notes:

- that the Employment Control Framework introduced by the Government has capped the number of permanent staff that higher education institutions can employ;
- the 2018 TASC Report entitled 'Living with Uncertainty: The Social implications of Precarious Work';
- the 2016 Report of the Expert Group on the Future Funding for Higher Education;
- the 2016 Report of the Expert Group on Fixed-Term and Part-Time Employment in Lecturing in Third-Level Education in Ireland;

calls on the Government to:

- urgently engage with representative organisations of lecturers, postdoctoral and PhD researchers in order to begin to address this systemic issue;

- revise the Employment Control Framework in order to allow higher education institutions to offer permanent contracts to the large numbers of individuals on precarious contracts;
- engage with the Higher Education Authority, universities and higher education institutions, trade unions and other worker representative organisations to develop regulations around the use of fixed-term and part-time contracts and contracts of indefinite duration;
- introduce regulations or legislate to ensure that all persons employed to teach in higher education institutions earn a living wage at a minimum;
- in the medium-term, introduce regulations or legislate to end the widespread use of hourly contracts for teaching in universities and higher education institutions;
- recognise PhD researchers as employees so that they are entitled to relevant legislative employment rights and protections, including maternity benefit, parental leave and sick leave and PRSI contributions;
- work with relevant stakeholders to develop a tangible plan to end precarity in higher education;
- invest in public research and public-public partnerships for research, including frontier research.”

– *Senators Alice-Mary Higgins, Michael McDowell, Rónán Mullen.*

[27th April, 2023]