PRECARIOUS EMPLOYMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION

IFUT RESEARCH

IFUT

Irish Federation of University Teachers

Cónaidhm Éireannach na Múinteoirí Ollscoile

Special thanks

The IFUT Precarious Employment Campaign Steering Group is made up of volunteer representatives from all the Irish HEIs in which we are organised, including TCD, UCD, DCU, MU, UG, UCC, DIAS, MIC and the RIA. All members of the group have contributed to the development of this report and the wider work of the group.

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Finally, I would like to thank my colleague Robert McNamara for his work on the survey. In IFUT Head Office, we are always humbled by the willingness of our members to take on work and contribute to projects to advance the cause on behalf of their colleagues.

In solidarity,

Miriam Hamilton
Deputy General Secretary, IFUT

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List of Acronyms

DCU	Dublin City University
DFHERIS	Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science
DPER	Department of Public Expenditure and Reform
ECF	Employment Control Framework
ECR	Early Career Researcher
FTE	Full-Time Equivalency
HEA	Higher Education Authority
HEI	Higher Education Institution
IFUT	Irish Federation of University Teachers
IRC	Irish Research Council
IUA	Irish University Association
LEEF	Labour Employer Economic Forum
MIC	Mary Immaculate College
MU	Maynooth University
NERI	Nevin Economic Research Institute
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
RCF	Research Career Framework
RIA	Royal Irish Academy
SFI	Science Foundation Ireland
TASC	Think Tank for Action on Social Change
TCD	Trinity College Dublin
TUD	Technological University of Dublin
TUI	Teachers Union of Ireland
UCC	University College Cork
UCD	University College Dublin
UCU	University and College Union
UG	University of Galway
WTE	Whole-Time Equivalent

Foreword

The Irish Federation of University Teachers is the only trade union in Ireland that exclusively organises workers in higher education. Our members include lecturers, researchers, librarians, and teaching support staff. In addition to advancing the rights of workers in the sector, IFUT advocates for quality education and research. We listen to members who detail how precarious employment and understaffing in the sector are undermining quality research, and the education and support that students receive. In our daily work, we encounter people on various precarious employment contracts who have sub-par working conditions. We regularly assist members to secure Contracts of Indefinite Duration (CID), increased hours, regrading etc. However, we are of the view that precarious employment practices are so pervasive, and the entire higher education system is so dependent on this unfair and often exploitative system that a more holistic approach is needed to tackle precarious employment beyond advancing the rights of the individual.

The rise in student numbers, the chronic underfunding of the higher education system, the failure to develop appropriate workforce plans across the sector, the stresses of teaching in a post-Covid system, and the increasing administrative burden on teaching and research staff are issues felt by, and causing issues for, all levels of academia in higher education.

However, there are a significant number of people contributing to research and teaching who are doing so in some of the most precarious employment conditions in the Irish economy, particularly in the Irish public sector: workers on fixed-term contracts for years whose only long-term realistic option is to leave the sector if they want a permanent job; workers who contribute to courses year after year but are only paid for the term time, leaving them to find alternative temporary work or get social welfare for significant periods every year; workers who have spent years delivering teaching, providing support to students, developing courses and who are regarded as casual staff for whom no commitment to regular, ongoing, transparent or reliable work is made; workers who are hourly paid who are excluded from the community to which they make such a valuable, though not valued, contribution with no pathways to better employment, no support or professional development, and quite often no access to basic statutory entitlements.

The issue of precarious employment is not only about doing the right thing for the workers impacted. Precarious employment also damages the work of the institutions themselves and the quality of the student experience. Teaching in higher education is research-informed, yet a large cohort of university teaching only positions have no provision to undertake research or develop knowledge of their subject. Researchers on fixed-term contracts engage in short-term thinking curtailed by the length of their contract.

Workers on successive fixed-term contracts might deliver more research, but is it quality research? If someone is approaching the end of their fixed-term contract, are they focused on their research or are they focused on applying for future grant funding or securing alternative employment elsewhere?

We believe that to create and sustain an environment in which our talented research and teaching professions can address the major challenges that society faces, we need quality and secure employment for the sector's staff. Too many scientists and scholars are thinking about their next grant application for funding, the pending expiry of their latest fixed-term contract or rushing after class to their second job. Too many are thinking about having to leave academia altogether to be able to afford a home, start a family, or just take better care of their mental health.

IFUT has raised concerns in relation to precarious employment and its negative impact on the quality of education and research at the institution. We have sometimes thought that the reason why precarious employment was not being tackled across higher education is because nobody, except those who directly experience it, can really accept that it is as bad as it is. However, we have been encouraged by recent public commitments to address precarious employment. The Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science, Simon Harris, announced in 2022 additional funding designed in part to "end precarious employment".

In IFUT, this bold and energetic statement was welcomed. We did, however, wonder how DFHERIS intended to end precarious employment when universities often do not even know how many precarious employees they have, there is no collective bargaining process in place to resolve this issue across the sector, and individual employers argue that they alone cannot address precarious employment due to restrictions in terms of external funding and departmental sanction.

In 2022, the Joint Committee on Education, Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science issued a report in relation to the future funding of the sector, which focused on the precarious employment in the system resulting from inadequate funding.

Similarly, the HEA reported, in its National Review of Gender Equality, that precarious employment is a key driver of gender inequality and made a series of recommendations in relation to same. Therefore, there appears to be a growing appreciation of the need to tackle precarious employment from policy makers in the sector.

However, the institutions, funding agencies, and government departments that oversaw the creation of these appalling employment practices cannot be trusted to correct them on their own. The Irish public sector is marked by strong and mature systems of collective bargaining and sectoral engagement though not so in the higher education sector. This IFUT Report details the lived experience of workers across the sector of precarious employment. The findings are stark. We hope that the report will assist us in commencing a process of engagement with all relevant stakeholders in the sector so that we can finally end precarious employment.

Miriam Hamilton,
IFUT Deputy General Secretary
2023

Executive Summary

Introduction

Higher education in Ireland serves as a cornerstone for knowledge acquisition and advancement, both through the transmission of established theories and the creation of new insights. It equips students with essential professional, technical, and soft skills, fostering personal, cognitive, and ethical growth. Higher education institutions also play a pivotal role in societal and cultural development, driving economic development, and emphasising civic engagement and global understanding. Ultimately, higher education aims to equalise opportunities, ensure social mobility, and address pressing societal challenges through research and inquiry. However, parallel to such ambitions and purpose is the issue of precarious employment, 'a state of existence in which material provision and psychological wellness are adversely affected by a lack of regular or secure income'. Reports and studies highlighting workers' rights among academic staff within the sector highlight a range of issues including casualisation of academic work, exploitation of early career academics, lack of support and career progression.

The situation was further exacerbated by employees' isolation and exclusion from institutional decision-making processes, a condition that worsened during the COVID-19 pandemic. Too often, academic staff are now employed under unstable conditions, such as temporary, fixed-term, or zero-hour contracts, often without essential benefits such as holidays or sick pay. This employment instability, with distinct gender dimensions, has led to negative outcomes, including financial strain, psychological toll, stress, burnout, and feelings of being undervalued and disrespected, and higher staff-student ratios; all of which can negatively impact collegiality and institutional morale as well as the quality of teaching. While acknowledging some previous policy initiatives intended to address these issues, this report suggests a lack of a clear sectoral pathway to eradicate precarious employment. The blight of precarity has eroded many of the liberal values on which the Irish higher education system is founded, while it is also argued that a neo-liberal approach to higher education represents a conscious business model that is undermining institutional integrity, and some might argue is predicating a race to the bottom in employment standards.

Report Aims

This report aims to inform current thinking regarding the issues of precarious employment in Irish higher education, i.e., to investigate and better understand the lived experiences of university staff who are employed on non-permanent contracts in Irish higher education institutions. **This encompassed specific objectives:**

- Outline what is already known about the extent of the problem of precarious work within Irish universities and beyond.
- Gather insights from all IFUT members regarding the prevalence and impact of precarious work within Irish universities.
- Collate first-hand accounts of the impact of precarity on those affected.
- Make recommendations for change, including those that might inform future labour union activism.

Using a mixed-methods approach, this study incorporates both quantitative and qualitative methodologies. Initial respondent data were gathered from various academic roles across multiple third-level institutions in Ireland, with diverse job titles ranging from 'Lecturer' to 'Learning Designer' (550 university employees completed the survey in early 2023). The majority (68% of respondents) were on permanent contracts, but a significant portion (32%) were fixed-term or hourly paid contracts. Most respondents identified as female (56%) and 42% identified as male. The majority of respondents were categorised as either aged 35 – 44 (32%), 45 – 54 (28%), or 55–64 (24%).

The results of the survey data are complemented by purposeful focus groups and interviews to provide deeper, personal stories.

Together, the quantitative and qualitative approaches provide a comprehensive view of the employment landscape and the impact of precarity across the higher education landscape.

Key Findings

This report serves as an urgent call to action, highlighting the alarming levels of precarious employment within Irish Higher Education Institutions (HEIs).

This study provides a comprehensive understanding of the employment landscape, focusing on the implications for areas such as staff well-being, gender inequality, and the overall quality of teaching, learning, and research.

A summary of these critical issues is presented across eight main themes below; combined, they paint a picture of precarious employment within the Irish Higher Education landscape that warrants immediate consideration, discussion, and remediation.

Employment Types and Job Security

The report highlights some significant issues of precarious employment and job security, as evidenced by the following illustrative examples:

- 36% of respondents considers themselves precariously employed.
- A significant proportion of academic roles (32%), particularly in teaching and research, are occupied by individuals who consider themselves precariously employed.
- Only 15% of researchers were on permanent contracts (including CIDs, whereas) 22% of lecturers were on fixed-term contracts.
- 8% of respondents indicated that they did not have a written contract of employment.

Career Progression and Benefits

The report also highlights the difficulties of precarity in relation to career progression and the benefits associated with more stable employment conditions, as evidenced by the following illustrative examples:

- Many respondents (55%) who identified as being precariously employed have worked on two or more successive fixed-term contracts.
- 50% of those precariously employed believe they meet the conditions for a contract of indefinite duration (CID).
- For those with permanent contracts, 72% reported spending four years or more on temporary/fixed-term contracts before becoming permanent.
- Some permanent employees reported not receiving the same benefits as their counterparts (e.g. increments, leave, research supports), affecting career progression and job satisfaction.

Psychological and Financial Strains

The report highlights the severity of psychological and financial strain arising from precarious employment. ***Indicative areas of note include:***

- Those on fixed-term contracts reported elevated levels of stress and considered leaving academia.
- Academic staff frequently work more hours than they are compensated for, raising questions about the valuation of academic labour.
- Across all contract types, the average number of unpaid hours worked was 11, which contributed to financial and psychological strain.
- In terms of casual, hourly rate employees, 61% do not get paid for periods between terms and a further 31% only work on an 'if and when' basis.
- The non-permanent nature of contracts restrict staff from making long-term life decisions, such as securing loans or starting a family.
- Some respondents indicated that employers are not adhering to public sector pay increases.
- Of the respondents, 7% indicated that they are not receiving public sector pay increases, and 15%bare uncertain about it.

Working condition and workload

Working conditions and a sustainable workload, which can contribute to financial and psychological strain, also stand out as areas of key concern:

- A significant number of respondents (60%), regardless of contract type, reported unmanageable workloads.
- Over 60% of permanent academics report an unmanageable workload that exceeds their contractual hours.
- 74% of respondents, including permanent full-time staff, work additional unpaid hours to complete tasks, raising questions about the system-wide valuation of academic labour.
- Across all contract types, the average number of unpaid hours worked was 11, whereas for those on fixed-term or hourly/casual contracts, the average number of unpaid hours worked was nine.
- 65% of precarious staff working unpaid hours are female, compared with 53% of permanent staff.

Implications for teaching, learning, and research.
The student experience

The report also highlights the cumulative impact of precarity on teaching, learning, and research, which has an associated impact on student experience.

- Some respondents lamented the loss of a community of researchers due to poor employment conditions.
- ·A significant proportion of teaching and research roles in HEIs are filled by individuals on precarious contracts.
- The quality of both student learning experiences and institutional research is compromised by poor working conditions.
- ·Over half of the permanent staff (56%) does not have enough time within their contractual hours to provide adequate pastoral care to students.

Professional Development and Employer Support

The report highlights discrepancies regarding access to professional development and support available:

- 30% of respondents indicated that they did not have access to study leave.
- 32% of respondents indicated that they did not have access to a paid sabbatical.
- 60% of respondents indicated that they were not paid for this work examination/script marking, raising questions about its valuation by higher education institutions.
- Most respondents felt that their employer treated them with dignity and respect, but there were still significant concerns (one-third of respondents disagreed).

Gender

The report highlights that precarious employment contributes to gender inequality within HEIs, as evidenced by significant gender pay gaps.

Gender pay gap reports show that there is a higher gender pay gap in the higher education sector than in the economy as a whole:

- Women were more likely to work unpaid hours (65% of precarious staff and 53% of permanent staff)
- Some respondents indicated that precarious employment is a factor in life decisions, such as pregnancy and family, and maternity leave considerations.
- Precarious employment is a driver of gender inequality, with data from Irish higher education institutions reporting a significant gender pay gap and women making up most part-time, fixed-term, low-paid workers in the sector.

Awareness and advocacy

Respondents acknowledged that the status of precarious workers can mean they are less likely to get organised in their union, and are less likely to raise a concern or make a complaint. Precarious employment therefore results in employees' having less awareness of their rights and entitlements and it undermines their ability to vindicate those rights.

- Most respondents (95%) recognised that precarious employment is pervasive.
- Many permanent employees often have little choice but to participate in a system that relies heavily on a casualised labour force.
- Only 9% of those who may be eligible for a Contract of Indefinite Duration have claimed one, indicating a need for increased awareness
- Academics have demonstrated a willingness to stand in solidarity with precariously employed staff in pursuit of a fairer system of employing workers in HEIs.
- Across all respondents, 93% supported a campaign to tackle precarious employment.

Stakeholder Responsibilities and Recommendations

The findings collectively indicate a complex landscape of employment conditions in higher education, characterised by precarious employment, financial insecurities, and difficult working conditions. The report unequivocally establishes the pervasive nature of precarious employment within Irish Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and its potential detrimental impact on both staff and students. The findings underscore the urgent need for multi-stakeholder intervention to safeguard the quality of education, staff well-being, and institutional integrity of higher education in Ireland.

Together, these findings clearly support the strong need for increased advocacy and associated systemic change.

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Policy Makers: Legislative bodies are strongly urged to enact comprehensive regulations that address not only the symptoms but also the root causes of precarious employment. Collaboration with academic institutions and labour unions is essential for devising policies that standardise compensation and mandate benefits across all employment types.

Higher Education Institutions: HEIs are advised to conduct regular, thorough assessments of current employment conditions. These assessments should aim to identify and implement clear pathways to permanent employment for staff. Institutions should also advocate for transparent and equitable employment practices, including fair workload distribution and just compensation.

Academic Professionals: Individuals employed in higher education are encouraged to actively engage in union activities and endorse campaigns aimed at mitigating precarious employment conditions. Solidarity among academic staff is crucial for promoting an equitable employment framework within HEIs.

·**Labour Unions:** Unions such as IFUT have a significant mandate to advocate for transparent and equitable employment practices. This advocacy should include targeted campaigns and initiatives that focus on issues such as employment status, equitable workload distribution, and fair compensation structures.

Action Plan for Success

To achieve impactful stakeholder outcomes, this report proposes a detailed 12-point action plan, focusing on the most urgent and impactful recommendations to assist with the successful addressing of precarity in higher education. Each action represents an important piece in an overall jigsaw to eradicate the plight of precarity across Irish institutions.

1. Adoption of the IFUT Anti-Precarity Charter: IFUT advocates for the universal adoption of its anti-precarity charter across all HEIs (All Stakeholders)
2. Pathways to Permanent Employment: IFUT urges HEIs to collaborate in identifying and implementing pathways to permanent roles for precariously employed staff (Higher Education Institutions/IFUT)
3. Negotiation of Fair Employment Conditions: Institution Level Collective bargaining is strongly recommended to improve conditions for all teaching and research staff (HEIs/IFUT)
4. Sector-Wide Collective Bargaining: IFUT calls for the establishment of sector-wide collective bargaining systems (Policy Makers/IFUT)
5. Review of Employment Practices: A comprehensive review of precarious employment practices is deemed essential (All Stakeholders)
6. Transparency in Employment Data: HEIs are encouraged to accurately report and discuss the extent of precarious employment annually (HEIs/IFUT)
7. Review of the Cush Agreement: A review is recommended to extend the scope to other staff categories (Policy Makers/IFUT)
8. Abolition of the Employment Control Framework: IFUT considers its abolishment imperative to enable permanent contracts (Policy Makers)
9. Collective Bargaining for Research Staff: IFUT calls for sector-wide collective bargaining for research staff (Policy Makers/IFUT)
10. Sectoral Employment Order for Researchers: Exploration of such an order is advised in the absence of direct collective bargaining (Policy Makers)
11. Increase in Academic Staff: A net annual increase of 650 academic staff for the next decade is recommended (Policy Makers)
12. Focus on Faculty and Academic Recruitment: IFUT urges that recruitment strategies prioritise academic roles over administrative and managerial positions (Higher Education Institutions/IFUT)

Conclusion

This report serves as a clarion call for immediate, coordinated action from all stakeholders to address the pressing issue of precarious employment in Irish HEIs. Through such collective efforts, stakeholders across the sector can aspire to create a more stable, equitable, and effective higher education system in Ireland.

Stakeholders are strongly urged to engage with the full report and the associated recommendations to enact meaningful changes that will improve employment conditions and, by extension, the quality of teaching, learning, and research experiences across higher education institutions in Ireland.

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1. Introduction

In July 2022, The Joint Committee on Education, Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science stated:

Higher Education in Ireland has been one of the cornerstones that has led to the development of a modern, progressive country with a highly educated workforce. Higher Education will continue to play a fundamentally important role in providing opportunities for all our citizens to learn and excel in education and training at different stages in their lives. In tandem, it will continue to act as a catalyst for economic and social growth.[1]

Absent from this bold assertion is any acknowledgment that the higher education sector is dependent on large numbers of workers who are on temporary, fixed-term, term-time and occasional, zero hour and if-and-when contracts. As this report will testify and as is increasingly reported in the mainstream media, many of these precariously employed staff rely on social welfare when colleges are closed and/or work multiple jobs to make ends meet. Some earn less than the minimum wage when all their work is accounted for, and many receive no holiday pay, sick pay, or entitlements to other paid leave, such as family-related leave. Many work regularly for free. In fact one study (that relates to Northern Ireland but where conditions are similar) claimed that 40% of academic staff at Queens University are precariously employed, with one-third working second jobs to make ends meet and 15% forced to use food banks.[2]

It is unsurprising that many of our members report feeling stressed out, burnt out, disrespected, and undervalued by institutions reliant on their good will for the full range of university functions, including teaching, grading, research supervision, pastoral care and mentoring.

Members report feeling stressed out, burnt out, disrespected, and undervalued by institutions reliant on their good will for the full range of university functions, including teaching, grading, research supervision, pastoral care and mentoring.

[1] Joint Committee on Education, Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science, 2020, p. 3.
[2] Bain, 2023.

Many researchers have evidenced the negative social, psychological, educational, and career impacts associated with being a non-permanent employee[3] and the pressure to say ‘yes’ to everything one is asked to do.[4] Moreover, Lopes and Dewan (2015) identified four key violations of workers’ rights for these staff precarity, exploitation, lack of support, and lack of career progression. Research highlights poor levels of communication between these employees and their employers.

Workers feel isolated and not part of the teaching and research team. Studies show that precarious employees are excluded from decision-making processes and planning about their own work. Moreover, many precarious educators are often locked out of the complaints process and have no support if they are treated badly by peers or managers. [5]Many see no option but to consider leaving academia altogether so that they can afford a home, start a family, or take better care of their mental health.

> Many see no option but to consider leaving academia altogether so that they can afford a home, start a family, or just take better care of their mental health.

The coronavirus pandemic was also found to have a particularly negative effect on people who were kept out of the loop in terms of basic and often important health-related communications, not being paid when classes were canceled and in some situations being ghosted by their employers even when they had worked in the institution for many years. [6] Some struggled to obtain appropriate social welfare support readily available to workers in other sectors.[7] As a participant in this research puts it, ‘precarious employment is not a rite of passage. It is unfair, it is exploitative, and it discriminates.’

> Precarious employment is not a rite of passage. It is unfair, it is exploitative, and it discriminates.

“University staff, like workers in many sectors of the economy, are impacted by a global increase in the casualisation of work. Such practice has been linked to the international dominance of neoliberal policies that seek to shift economic risk onto the shoulders of workers through casualisation, self-responsibility and financial insecurity,[8] and where social capital benefits are pitched as an alternative to decent work for so-called professional occupations. [9]

[3] For examples, see Lopes and Dewan 2015; Courtois and O’Keefe 2015; Pembroke 2018; Bobek, Pembroke and Wickham 2018.
[4] Lopes and Dewan, 2015.
[5] Ahmed 2021.
[6] Fitzsimons, Henry, and O’Neill 2022.
[7] Bobek, Pembroke, and Wickham 2018.
[8] Lopes and Dewan 2015.
[9] Jaffe 2021; Horgan 2021.

There is also a strong gendered dimension to precarity, something acknowledged by the Higher Education Authority (HEA) in its National Review of Gender Equality (2022) and supported by research elsewhere. For example, research by O'Keefe and Courtois (2019) found that precarious employment is a key driver of gender inequality. Universities rely on women's labour but create working conditions that increase their vulnerability to workplace harassment, repeated career disruptions and a lack of salary progression.

Precarious employment also damages the quality of students' experiences. Teaching in higher education is research-informed, yet a large cohort of teaching-only positions have no provision to undertake research to develop new subject knowledge or teaching methods. Ireland has one of the highest student-to-staff ratios in the OECD; however, the demandfor higher education places is expected to grow considerably in the coming decade, with one scenario seeing growth of higher education places of around a fifth over a ten-year period. [10] At the same time, whole-time equivalent academic posts are falling. According to the HEA statistics, the number of enrolments across third level education has increased by 14 % in the six-year period 2015-2021.[11] Yet according to figures available from the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, the number of whole-time equivalents actually decreased during the same period, falling from 21,000 in 2015 to 20,500 in 2021. [12]

For those on successive fixed-term contracts, the quality of the research that they undertake can be impacted by the urgency to find future grant funding or alternative employment elsewhere. The perceived privilege of working in a university does not alleviate the challenges faced by these staff; rather, it adds to the invisibility they often experience within the public consciousness.[13] Moreover, the Employment Control Framework, which emerged as a consequence of the post-financial crash of 2008, is a government policy that limits the number of permanent staff in higher education.

This framework, coupled with chronic underfunding of higher education, leads us to contend that the adoption of precarious employment is not merely incidental but a deliberate business model. Such a model has precipitated a decline in employment standards and prospects within Irish universities, effectively creating a race to the bottom in terms of employment standards and prospects in Irish universities.

> Precarious employment is a conscious business model, and this has resulted in a race to the bottom in terms of employment standards and prospects in Irish universities

[10] AARC in association with Indecon and LE Europe, 2020.
[11] HEA, 2023.
[12] In 2008, before public sector recruitment, the figure was 20,917.34. By 2015, this had fallen to 17, 281.41. At the end of 2021, the figure was 20,520.02 (Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, 2023)
[13] Fleming, 2021; Jaffe, 2021.

However, there have been encouraging signs in addressing the issue.

In 2022, the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science, Simon Harris, announced additional funding for the higher education sector. At an online briefing on 4th May discussing his new policy paper, Minister Harris said the additional funding would 'end precarious employment'.[14]

This was a welcome development; however, we await a clear pathway to achieving this ambition. The current national strategy for higher education also commits to promote a clear career path for researchers.

[15] The motivation behind this is to facilitate greater mobility among higher education, the public service, and the private sector. We welcome the government's acknowledgment that secure employment is a vital component in ensuring quality research and innovation in science.[16] We also acknowledge and strongly support a motion from Senator Alice Mary Higgins and the NUI Panel on Academic Precarity that was presented to the Seanad in May 2023.

This motion was passed unanimously and, importantly, without opposition or amendments from the government parties. The motion proposed several specific actions to address the issue of temporary or casual employment in universities and higher education institutions.

These include engaging in collective bargaining with representative organisations of lecturers, postdoctoral and PhD researchers to begin addressing the systemic issue and revising the Employment Control Framework.

The motion detailed how higher education institutions could allow higher education institutions to offer permanent contracts to individuals on precarious contracts, develop regulations around the use of fixed-term and part-time contracts and contracts of indefinite duration, introduce regulations or legislation to ensure that all persons employed to teach in higher education institutions earn a minimum living wage, and introduce regulations or legislation to end the widespread use of hourly contracts for teaching in universities and higher education institutions.

There have also been some welcome industrial relations and legal developments, such as the EU Directive on Adequate Minimum Wages (2022) and the High-Level Report on Collective Bargaining (2022) both of which present an opportunity to improve working conditions for employees in the sector.

[14] At an online briefing "A briefing on "Funding the Future: The Department's policy on funding Higher Education and Reducing the cost of Education." organized by the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science on May 4, 2022.
[15] Department of Education and Skills, 2011.
[16] Joint Committee on Education, Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science, 2020, p.20.

1.1 Role of trade unions

The Irish public sector is marked by strong and mature systems of collective bargaining and sectoral engagement. However, precariously employed university staff often fall outside of collective bargaining agreements , and research has shown that union membership can be low amongst this cohort,[17] something that is usual in sectors with high levels of precarity.[18] While we welcome the recent Labour Employer Economic Forum (LEEF) High Level Report on Collective Bargaining and the possibilities this presents, it is difficult to advance effective collective bargaining in the higher education sector without clarity on the numbers of workers affected, and in an environment where individual employers maintain that they cannot address precarious employment due to funding issues. Instead, new grades and wage settings for existing grades are conducted outside the collective bargaining process.

This, we argue, contributes to the problems identified in this report.

The Irish Federation of University Teachers (IFUT) is the only trade union in Ireland that exclusively organises workers in higher education. This includes lecturers, researchers, and teaching support staff. The ongoing failure of the government to address precarity within higher education is an urgent priority for IFUT. We want to create and sustain an environment where talented staff are supported in providing quality education and research. This can only be done where there is decent and secure employment instead of situations where university staff who are committed to focusing on environmental, economic, and social challenges are worrying about their next grant application for funding, the pending expiry of their latest fixed-term contract, or their challenges of rushing after class to their second job.[19]

The extent of the problem was recently highlighted through research by the UK-based University and College Union (UCU), which concluded that academics were *'highly self-motivated, generally driven by an enthusiasm for their subject, a desire to advance the common good through discoveries and research, and a commitment to education as a public good',* but *'that casualised academic labour is fundamentally dehumanising in that it renders staff invisible and vulnerable, curtails their agency and freedom, and prevents them from rendering a long-term narrative of their career that can provide meaning to their lives. They are treated as second-class academics.'*[20]

> Precarious employment is not a rite of passage. It is unfair, it is exploitative, and it discriminates.

[17] Fitzsimons, O'Neill, and Henry, 2022.
[18] Bobek, Pembroke, and Wickham 2018.
[19] Delaney, 2020; Brady 2022; Harvey & Williams 2021, Flynn 2020.
[20] Megoran and Mason, 2020.

Some advances have been made because of the work of trade unions.

Pressure from the trade union movement instigated the Department of Education to commission a report to investigate fixed-term and part-time employment in lecturing in Irish universities. This report, commonly referred to as the Cush Report, was the culmination of work by *the Expert Group on Fixed-Term and Part-Time Employment in Lecturing in Third Level Education in Ireland*. The report remarked that '*the level of fixed-term and part-time employment in third level education, and the implications thereof, has long been an issue of concern'* but noted, *'the gathering of relevant statistical data proved a difficult and time-consuming task.'* [21] The Cush Report underestimated the true level of precariousness because the data excluded research staff and tutors.

Notwithstanding these reported difficulties, Cush found that 55% of academics were employed on full-time permanent contracts (of whom 60% were men). Appendix 2 contains a further breakdown of this report. A more recent estimate puts the figure considerably lower, such that full-time permanent staff may comprise only 44% of academic staff.[22] A significant weakness of Cush is its exclusion of non-traditional lecturing roles, including those of researchers and teaching fellows. Cush recommended contracts of indefinite duration (CIDs) for those teaching for more than two years. The Cush Report also instructed that additional teaching hours should be allocated to existing part-time lecturers. As a result, IFUT has managed to improve the working conditions for many lecturers. However, in the absence of clear processes of collective bargaining and the inability or unwillingness of employers to enter sector-wide negotiations with trade unions, a range of ad hoc industry-wide occupational grades have emerged with a wider range of rates of pay and contractual terms.

A HEA report from an expert working group on gender inequality in higher education claims;

The Cush Report recommendation for a reduction in the threshold for entitlement to a contract of indefinite duration (CIDs) from three to two years was adopted. However, this has been found to have exacerbated precarity, as HEIs carefully word contracts to avoid CID entitlements and contest them in the courts.[23]

HEIs carefully word contracts to avoid CID entitlements and contest them in the courts

[21] The report's full title is Report to the Minister for Education and Skills of the Chairperson of the Expert Group on Fixed-Term and Part-Time Employment in Lecturing in Third Level Education in Ireland (Cush, 2016, p. 30)
[22] Centre of Excellence for Equality, Diversity and Inclusion, 2022.
[23] HEA, 2022, p. 23.
[24] The Irish Royal Academy, 2018, p.2.

1.2 About the research

In 2022, IFUT convened an IFUT Precarious Employment Campaign Steering Group. One of its first actions was to draft an anti-precarity charter (see Appendix 1) that aims to improve practices and conditions in each institution, with particular focus on those institutions that contribute to the recruitment and continued employment of staff involved in teaching and research on precarious contracts.

A second key task undertaken by this steering group has been to undertake this research to better understand the experiences of precariously employed university staff.

The overall aim of the research is:

To investigate and better understand the experiences of university staff who are employed on non-permanent contracts to inform a course of action to rectify this.

The specific objectives are to

- Outline what is already known about the extent of the problem of precarious work within Irish universities and beyond.
- Gather insights from all IFUT members regarding the prevalence and impact of precarious work within Irish universities.
- Collate firsthand accounts of the impact of precarity on those affected.
- Make recommendations for change, including those that might inform future labor union activism.

The research followed overlapping phases.

1. We reviewed national and international literature on the extent of precarity in Ireland and examined related government policies and recommendations.

2. We designed and circulated an anonymous in-depth mixed method survey called 'The Academic Matters Survey' containing open and closed (qualitative and quantitative) questions. Academic Matters was emailed to all IFUT members who were encouraged to circulate it within their workplace.

The survey stayed open for six weeks in early 2023, and 550 people participated.

3. We conducted a follow-up focus group conversation with six purposefully selected IFUT members currently living with precarity.

The research project was grounded in ethical practices associated with the Sociology Association of Ireland (SAI) ethical guidelines for social research[24] and in the context of the Data Protection Act (1988, 2003).

[24] The Sociological Association of Ireland, 2023.

2. Mapping the landscape of higher education in Ireland

> As a Head of Department, I am increasingly forced by the University Admin to hire hourly paid and vulnerable tutors when there is a clear need for contracted staff. This creates unequal working relationships between my staff, and I do not feel that it is fair to ask my hourly paid staff to engage in any pastoral work. This means that I have to ask my full-time staff to take on extra work, and this isn't fair on them either.

Ireland has a proud record of participation in higher education. Forty-six % of those aged between 25 and 64 years have a tertiary education, compared to an EU average of 31 %. This places Ireland first in the EU and fourth in the OECD. According to a briefing paper conducted for IFUT by TASC (2023), graduates are more likely to earn higher wages than those without a degree and typically share high satisfaction rates in terms of their employability post-graduation. The knowledge economy created benefits for the private sector both directly through the graduates produced and indirectly through joint research partnerships, with estimates of a €631 million impact from university research and development expenditures and an overall generation of €1.5 billion in capital.

2.1 Funding higher education in Ireland

Funding to the sector was comparatively stable at around 1% of national income until the 2008 financial crisis. From 2009, the Irish Government introduced a series of austerity measures, and since then, spending relative to national income has declined, falling by approximately 40% in national income terms.[25] In preparation of the report *Funding the Future of Higher Education* (2022), the Joint Oireachtas Committee took evidence from several organisations including trade unions, senior academics, members of Governing Authorities and employer bodies. The Joint Oireachtas Committee included some of their evidence in their report, including:

The European University Association (EUA) reported that public funding of third-level education in Ireland, as a percentage of GDP, fell a 'shocking' 62% between 2009 and 2019. In the same timeframe, student numbers rose by 28% and staff numbers fell by 8%. The Central Statistics Office found that between 2007 and 2016, real expenditure per student at third level education decreased by more than 34% in nine years (According to Martin Marjoram, President TUI).[26]

[25] TASC, 2023
[26] Joint Committee on Education, Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science, 2022, p. 18.

As public funding for university lags, universities must raise funds elsewhere. This includes significant efforts to make our universities appealing to international donors and students alike, something that overlaps poorly with the quality of education.[27]

As a result, there is greater emphasis on marketing and improving non-academic facilities as universities work hard to climb international rankings.

This changed landscape includes increased recruitment of administrators and managers, thereby impacting educational quality as resources are devoted elsewhere.[28] Parallel to this burgeoning of administrative and management roles, student-to-staff ratios have increased from 16:1 to 20:1 between 2007 and 2018 to 22.4:1 in 2023 – one of the highest levels in the OECD. [29]

At the same time, there are contradictory messages from the government evidenced through a 2022 commitment to increase spending on higher education to better align with other EU countries. According to the 2022 Joint Oireachtas Committee on Education, Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science, the *Funding the Future of Higher Education Report* (2022) concludes that;

While philanthropic and private funding should be supported, the State should move toward a European model where tertiary education is viewed as a State asset and funded primarily by the Exchequer. Future funding of higher education should be based on the principle that it is a right for all citizens and a key investment in the future.[30]

Basic funding has been diluted by several factors, including severe funding cuts and the dramatic increase in student numbers. In an Irish Universities Association Statement to the Oireachtas Joint Committee, Brid Horan, Chair of the DCU Governing Authority maintained;

> This increase [in student numbers] was entirely foreseen, given demographic trends and was projected in the Cassells report. This increase is projected to continue until 2030. Despite the increase in student numbers, staff numbers have been controlled throughout the study period. The staff -to-student ratio, which is a widely recognised measure of quality, has increased in Ireland, leaving us well behind other countries.

[27] TASC, 2023.
[28] Courtois and O'Keefe, 2015; TASC 2023
[29] We thank TASC for assisting with these figures, which are drawn from OECD, 2019 and OECD Data, 2022.
[30] Joint Committee on Education, Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science, 2022, p. 9.

High-skilled jobs, centred on talent and innovation, will underpin our future economic, social and cultural development. Jim Miley, CEO of the IUA maintained;

> As a nation, we face a range of challenges in the areas of climate change, housing, healthcare, social services, and balanced regional development. The higher education and research system will provide the bedrock of talent and innovation to meet these challenges. The need for a sustainable funding model for the sector, repeatedly emphasised by this committee, must now be delivered if the sector's potential is to be fully realised[31]

According to the IUA, a report by Indecon International Economic Consultants titled Delivering for Ireland - An Impact Assessment of Irish Universities showed an annual €9 billion contribution to the economy by the then seven universities represented by the IUA, which they describe as 'a huge return for the State's annual spending of €1 billion. In other words, investing in higher education is not just a public good, it also provides a long-term return on investment for the State.[32]

In their evidence to the Joint Oireachtas Committee, the Irish Congress of Trade Unions stated that the funding shortfall has contributed to a worsening of employment conditions and a rise in precarious work. According to the CSO, 'one in eight workers in the education sector were on temporary contracts in 1998, increasing to one in seven in 2017.

Research by TASC (Think Tank for Action on Social Change) and NERI (the Nevin Economic Research Institute) also strongly suggests that the problem of precarious employment is at its most acute in the higher education sector.

The Irish Congress of Trade Unions stated 'poor employment standards and working conditions will also impact negatively on longer-term research and innovation and contribute to a worsening of global rankings' [33]

Neil McDonnell, Chief Executive, Irish Small and Medium Enterprises (ISME), if funding is not addressed then universities 'will have to prioritise 'low-hanging fruit' of international students or precarious work etc. over prioritising learning.[34]

[31] Ibid, p. 20
[32] The Irish Universities Association, 2022.
[33] As quoted in the Joint Oireachtas Committee Funding the Future of Higher Education (2022) Report.
[34] Ibid, p. 20.

2.2 Types and prevalence of precarious work.

Amidst this shifting landscape, it is difficult to obtain an accurate picture of how many lecturers, teaching fellows, researchers, and tutors are employed on non-permanent contracts. According to research by journalist Maria Delaney in 2020, there were 11,200 precarious employees across 17 of the then 23 Irish Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). [35] This information was gleaned from Freedom of Information requests to HEIs, which Delaney reports as a slow and difficult process. Seventeen of nineteen HEIs who answered in full shared information on their wage bill, which collectively amounted to €67 million spread across over 10,600 staff. Delaney adjusts this figure upwards to account for institutions that failed to provide a wage figure.

Her findings conclude that the extent of the problem is twice that determined by the Cush Report.[36]

There was an attempt by the Royal Irish Academy in 2018 to gather information in relation to early career researchers (ECRs); however, the researchers reported difficulties gathering reliable information on the numbers involved, stating 'despite extensive reach out by the Working Group, the study was unable to determine with certainty the exact population size of ECRs.'[37]

In 2022, Dr Lennon Ó Náraigh sought to update the figures available to IFUT since the publication of the Cush Report in relation to the use of fixed-term contracts in the HE sector. Ó Náraigh reviewed data relating to gender available from the seven traditional universities (in other words without including previous Institutes of Technology). These data are published by the Higher Education Authority (HEA). When Ó Náraigh compared the full-time permanent, full-time contract, part-time permanent and part-time contract in the 'academic core funded' section of data (Sept 2016-Dec 2020), they showed no statistical change in the percentage of full-time equivalents (FTEs) on contracts since the publication in 2016. 3% of FTEs were on a temporary contract, and in 2020, it was 12%.

In 2016, the total FTE that was not permanent was 16.5% and in 2020 it was 17%.

Ó Náraigh concluded that 'the overall picture is one of running to stand still – the sector as a whole is expanding, with a growth in both permanent FTEs and fixed term contract FTEs, but overall, the proportion of contract FTEs has stayed nearly the same.'[38]

[35] Delaney, 2020.
[36] UCD paid €19.6 million in 2019–2022 academic year to 1,368 casual or temporary staff, including 352 staff paid through the hourly payment system, a growth of €3 million over the past three years. Trinity paid over €18.6 million to 2,268 non-permanent and casual lecturers. UCC did not provide a figure for the 2019/2020 academic year but confirmed it paid over €8 million to 2,960 casual staff in the 2018/2019 year, similar to the two previous years. DCU did not share costs but confirmed they had 666 casual or temporary staff employed in the 2019/2022 academic year. (Delaney, 2020).
[37] The Irish Royal Academy, 2018, p.2.
[38] Náraigh, 2022

Across the membership of IFUT, we encountered four distinct cohorts of precarious employees:

1. Lecturers in the traditional understanding of the term who are involved in teaching, research, leadership, and administration and who work on successive fixed-term contracts, often for many years without securing a contract of indefinite duration (CID)

Sometimes these employees work across more than one institution and/or within Further Education Colleges. The pay and conditions of this group are determined by collectively bargained contract terms built up over years with trade unions in each institution and through public sector pay agreements. Their pay is normally on an incremental pay scale with promotion and progression opportunities.

Many lecturers report that their fixed term contracts, and the objective justifications cited to justify the fixed term contract, are not based on the reality of their work or the ongoing needs of the institution. Rather many lecturers believe their contracts are designed to protect the institution from the potential claims which may arise for contracts of indefinite duration (CIDs).

2. Researchers on fixed-term contracts on mostly externally funded, time-limited research projects

It is common for this cohort to move from one fixed-term contract to the next, often for many years, and to spend much time seeking to secure their own future work. Ireland's current research and innovation strategy Impact 2030 acknowledges that only 10 % of doctoral graduates, secure academic tenure with much research in academia *'of a contract nature'*.[39] Many report significant pressure to publish frequently among a funding model that rewards quantity over quality. Without opportunities to teach, these workers often struggle to secure lecturing posts. The pay rates for this cohort may differ. This is because they are usually determined by researcher salary scales that are set outside collective bargaining by employer representatives. As a result, many workers are denied pay increases that apply to other workers in the public sector via public sector pay agreements, and they lack clear promotional opportunities. This is compounded by the fact that much grant aid is directed toward early career researchers, a term that does not match the experiences of many researchers and contributes to financial challenges in securing decent pay.[40]

[39] The Royal Irish Royal Academy, 2018.
[40] Government of Ireland, 2022, p. 43

3. Part-time teacher-only roles who are either contracted to work on a fraction of a full-time contract (0.3 FTE etc), or more commonly, are paid by the hour on occasional contracts with no guaranteed minimum number of hours

The Cush Report states;

Part-time employment in lecturing takes many forms. Some are employed on a part-time permanent basis by virtue of having CIDs. Of these, some have variable-hour or even zero-hour CID contracts. Others are part-time on pro rata, fixed-term contracts generally of one year's duration with the 31st of August specified as the usual expiry date. Others are employed on a casual part-time hourly paid basis, whereas some are employed on variable hourly paid contracts.[41]

This growing number of workers includes those on hourly pay and occasional and casual fixed-term contracts. While the use of casual lecturers is not new, today's workers are not filling a temporary need, as was often the case in the past. Universities are now building entire modules and courses around these occasional lecturers. Typically, people are employed on either short-term contracts, e.g., for nine months or less, or for a 12-week teaching term, which is more accurately 15 weeks because of grading. Without research opportunities, these workers have few career progression opportunities into lecturer roles.

Again, their pay is normally set by the employer, with only a few examples of collective bargaining agreements. Many workers, particularly hourly paid workers, are on a single pay rate with no incremental progression, and many have not received all, or any, of the increases due to them in line with public sector agreements. These hourly paid staff often have no breakdown of what is included in their hourly rate of pay; rather, their catch-all payment covers everything that arises, including class preparation, pastoral care, and grading. They often do not receive annual leave, public holiday pay, or other leave entitlements enjoyed by their peers.

[41] Cush, 2016, p. 14.

4. PhD students who undertake work traditionally done by faculty, but with fewer chances to enter their ranks

Part of the government's plans for university expansion include increasing the number of PhD students, as confirmed in the current national strategy for higher education. [42] This is despite the fact that the number of PhD graduates now exceeds the number of academic openings. This means that only a fraction will end up working in academia, with most working in other, often private sector work. [43] Instead of successfully finding academic work after graduation, many take on precarious teaching roles with no guarantee of work at the end of this period.

This highly unstable employment landscape likely contributes to a decline in the number of enrolled PhD students who are graduating. In 2016, almost one in five enrolled students graduated. This may be due to the lack of employment options available to them and/or because they have been unable to sustain themselves due to cost of living and housing pressures.[44]

2.3 Precarious Employment and Gender Inequality

According to available research, women more often occupy precarious positions, either working part-time or in conditions that lack stability or opportunities for career advancement.[45] One New Zealand study reported *'women are typically over-represented in the tenuous periphery whilst men are typically over-represented in the tenured core.'*

> The Higher Education Authority has described precarious employment as "the negative consequences of the inappropriate use of fixed-term, insecure contracts to fulfil core HE functions.

[42] Currently, approximately 1% of those aged 25–64 years hold a PhD compared to an OECD average of 1.1%, meaning Ireland must increase its number of PhDs by 10% in per capita terms to achieve convergence (TASC, 2023).
[43] Indecon International Economic Consultants, 2019.
[44] This is consistent with the fact that a PhD takes around four years working full time, and that a certain share of PhDs is part-time. The decline in graduation rates is most apparent for ICT, natural science and math/stats, and humanities PhDs. Other causes may be due to natural fluctuation, due to more part-time students (TASC, 2023).
[45] Murgia & Poggio 2019; De Groot 1997; Gill 2009.

According to the HEA's Gender Equality in Irish Higher Education 2016–2021, the number of women on precarious contracts has increased in the last 10 years, with 66% of all precarious contracts held by women.

In November 2022, the HEA's second national review of gender equality in Irish universities described precarious working conditions as 'the negative consequences of the inappropriate use of fixed-term, insecure contracts to fulfil core HE functions'.

It further reported that precarious employment was a 'key driver of gender inequality' and recommended 'that a strategy be developed under the aegis of "Funding the Future" to stabilise the funding of HEIs and eliminate reliance on precarious forms of employment within HEIs.'[46] The HEA report acknowledged that precarious employment leaves women more open to workplace harassment, creates additional vulnerability for women in the workforce, impacts their salary progression, disrupts and stagnates their career and contributes to poor mental health, unemployment in work poverty and financial dependency.[47]

Moreover, the report draws connections between the heavy care burden many women carry and their likelihood of being employed on a non-permanent contract and maintains that the 'flexibility' precarious work imposes is not flexibility by choice but further evidence of gender-based disparity.

[46] HEA, 2022, p. 21
[47] HEA, 2022, p. 23.

> Precarious employment leaves women more vulnerable to workplace harassment, creates additional vulnerability for women in the workforce, impacts their salary progression, disrupts and stagnates their career, and contributes to poor mental health, unemployment in work poverty, and financial dependency.

A number of Gender Pay Gap reports are now available from University College Dublin (UCD), Trinity College (TCD), Dublin City University (DCU), Maynooth University (MU), Mary Immaculate College, Limerick (MIC), the Royal College of Surgeons Ireland (RCSI), and the University of Galway (UG). Each one provides a snapshot of the state of play as of June 2022. Given the absence of accurate figures on precarity and the fact that many term-time staff are not working in June, these reports provide only a partial account of the state of play.

> The 'flexibility' precarious work imposes are not flexibility by choice but further evidence of gender-based disparity

Table 1 below provides detailed institution-specific findings of the respective Gender Pay Gap reports.

DCU

- The mean gender pay gap (GPG) is 10.45% and the median gap is 12.45%.
- The workforce is 55.49% female.
- 54% of senior management positions are filled by women.
- The report states 'The Gender Pay Gap... appears to be driven by the greater number of female earners in the lower quartile earning groups when looking at total staff and the higher number of salaried staff who are male.'

- The mean GPG is 14.36% and the median gap is 28.43%.
- 71 % of MIC staff are female, but only 54% of employees in the upper pay quartile are female.
- The report highlights the role of Athena SWAN in addressing the gender pay gap.

- The mean GPG is 16.99% and the median gap is 24.14 %.
- Women make up 58% of the overall staff but 67.2% of those in the lower quartile and 45.1% workers in the upper pay quartile.
- Just 39% of professors are female.
- The report states 'MU recognises the importance of addressing the gender pay gap to ensure we continue to attract, develop and retain talented people.'

- The mean GPG is 6.3%, and the median gap is 10.7%, but it rises to 37% for part-time staff.
- 66 % of staff are women, which includes 59% of academics, 66% of research staff, and 72% of professional services staff.
- Just 34% of professors are female, compared to 71% of lecturers.[48]

- The mean GPG is 11%, rising to 15% for part-time staff. The median gap is also 11% and rises to 22 for part-time staff. 48% in the upper pay quartile are female, while 64% in the lower quartile are female.
- Addressing the reasons why the gap exists, the TCD report states that 'women's ability to participate in the workforce is constrained by societal expectations that family-related duties will be carried out by females…' while acknowledging not all reasons relate to societal expectations for women. The TCD data suggests 'ambiguity around pay scales can lead to female staff being paid less than male staff.'

[48] The RCSI is not a part of the public sector. Accordingly, its salary structures differ, and many employes are not on an incremental salary scale and receive performance-related bonuses. In terms of bonuses, 22% of male employes in the RCSI received bonuses and 23% of women received bonuses. However, the mean bonus pay gap is 37.6% and the median gap is 30.3%.

UCC	• The mean GPG is 16.06%. • The median gap is 17.37%. • The workforce is 56.5% female, with women making up 62.47% of those in the lower pay quartile, compared to 44 % in the upper pay quartile. • ·They stated, 'the gender pay gap in UCC stems from the fact that proportionately more women are engaged in part-time and temporary work than their male counterparts… there is a legacy of under representation of women at senior level.'
UCD	• The mean gender pay gap in the UCD is 10.77%. • The median is 10.14%. These figures are for core-funded employees excluding hourly paid workers. • 60% of 4,248 hourly-paid employees are women. The report notes 'hourly pay for workers in this category tends to be either equal or more favourable toward women' and confirms, • UCD does not retain hourly payment data with respect to all hourly paid workers. Part-time employees have the highest gender pay gap, and there are more women than men on part-time contracts. In relation to temporary contracts, "there are more females on temporary contracts in the upper quartile" in research roles, however "men in the upper quartile have a higher mean and median hourly rate of pay.'
UG	• The mean GPG is 18.6% and the median is 15.5%. Their report notes 'when we compare median hourly pay, a woman earns 84c for every €1 a man earns.' • The mean 2022 GPG is most pronounced in academic staff grades (mean gap of 21.3%). Females make up 50.1% of academics and 51.6% of researchers are female; however, in the upper pay quartile of academic employees, only 27.7% are female. • The University of Galway has calculated its Gender Pay Gap since 2019, and their 2022 report states that there has not been 'a substantive improvement in the gender pay gap in our university since then', describing 'this is a matter of profound disappointment and distress' to the University Leadership Team.

Table 1 Summary of key points from Gender Pay Gap Reports

The findings of these reports are an important step in addressing precarious employment because the correlations are undeniable. Additional information from the reports highlighted in Table 1 detail each institution's actions, or the actions they intend to take. Each one places significant emphasis on the role of the Athena SWAN. For example, respective UCD and UCC reports each mention Athena SWAN ten times. Yet the UCD report fails to mention unions. Meanwhile, UCC mentions representative organisations once. Only Trinity College's action plan specifically outlines the role of trade unions.

The absence of trade union involvement in many of these structures and discussions is concerning given that many action plans outlined refer to the need to examine current workload allocation models, employment conditions for hourly paid staff, promotions, staff development, part-time working, and other family-friendly policies. These issues are typically negotiated with representative bodies of workers. While the Equality, Diversity, Inclusion and Athena SWAN processes can play an important role in tackling inequality, this cannot be done at the expense of trade union involvement.

At the IFUT Annual Delegate Conference in May 2023, delegates voted to support a motion that called for the union to gather information on how the concerns of precarious workers, including teaching and research staff, are addressed by the Athena SWAN process. Speaking to delegates after the vote, IFUT Deputy General Secretary Miriam Hamilton stated;

> *Precarious employment, casual work, zero-hour contracts, workers spending years, decades even, on fixed-term contracts, and now gender pay gap reports showing that there is a higher gender pay gap in our sector than the economy as a whole – these are all problems occurring right now and experienced by workers in this sector. This is their reality. At the same time, their employing institutions are being awarded medal after medal as part of the Athena SWAN. These committees often lack trade union involvement and fail to address issues related to the gender dimension of precarity and career progression. While we welcome the increased effort universities are making to address precarious employment and inequality in the workplace, the role of the trade union movement is to ensure that we negotiate fair and decent standards of employment, not awards. For this reason, we believe that the only way precarious employment, gender pay gaps, and other incidents of inequality in the workplace can and will be addressed is through collective bargaining with strong and inclusive representative unions.*

2.4 Casualisation and Student Experience

Academic working conditions are students' learning conditions. Among other issues, these working conditions have been significantly impacted by the growth in the reliance of the Irish higher education system on academics employed on insecure, part-time, or hourly paid contracts.[49]

> Academics' working conditions are students' learning conditions

The campaign against precarious employment in the third-level institutions in Ireland is not only for the benefit of lecturers but also for students. While more research is needed in an Irish context, a recent study in the UK has shown that the increased proportion of casual teaching in universities has led to lower student satisfaction.[50] Other studies, based on interviews with academics employed in the UK, have highlighted concerns about student perceptions of precariously employed academics and their potential negative impacts on pedagogical practice, despite efforts to minimise this.[51] It is not often obvious to students whether the teaching they receive is carried out by a permanent or casual academic, nor the impact this has on teaching and learning. Some of this insecure employment may be necessary to cover certain types of leave, work on short-term projects, or provide external expertise in a subject area Fixed-term, part-time, and hourly contracts, however, are not only being used for these purposes but have also become an increasingly prominent part of core teaching in departments and schools in Irish universities.

It is not the case that this increased reliance on insecure contracts has meant that students are being taught by inexperienced lecturers or teaching assistants.[52] Rather, a long-term cycle of insecure contracts has become normalised in Irish academia – as reflected in the data collected by IFUT – and this has meant that experienced and accomplished academics are teaching in precarious conditions. A survey of ninety-five academics with PhDs in History and cognate disciplines similarly found that only twelve had secured a permanent position in a third-level institution within five years of the award of their PhD; about a fifth had spent more than five years in precarious academic employment.[53] Students are thus being taught by experienced and accomplished academics but do not gain the full benefit of this experience as precarity forces academics to move institutions (and cities and countries) regularly or to work across multiple institutions.

[49] Coughlan, 2015.
[50] Williams, 2022.
[51] Lopes and Dewan, 2015.
[52] Coughlan, 2015.
[53] The irish Association of Professional Historians, 2021.

Where a series of fixed-term contracts required substantially different teaching in consecutive academic years or terms, academics were unable to develop modules or classes in line with student feedback. They are also often denied access to opportunities for career progression, resources, including workspace, and professional development available to permanent colleagues.[54]

Hourly rates of pay for academics on insecure contracts usually offer inadequate payment for the hours of preparation required for lectures or other modes of teaching and supervision. This means that academics on these contracts often work for less than the minimum wage. They are also often paid substantially less per hour for the same work, with the same experience and qualifications as colleagues on permanent contracts. Pay might be offered to hourly paid faculty for office hours, where they meet with students in a one-on-one setting to discuss their work, provide feedback, or deal with academic issues, but this is often not the case. Students are thus denied or given limited opportunities for important interaction with those who teach them. Rates of pay for marking, cut significantly since 2011, similarly require academics to either work for well below minimum wage or spend less time assessing student work than they would like to do.

This has an inevitably negative impact on both the working conditions for academics and the quality and depth of feedback that students receive. The increasing willingness of institutions to rely on insecure and hourly-paid work is, in essence, a reflection of an attitude that places limited value on the care and attention required to provide students with high quality teaching and fair and meaningful feedback on their work. Failure to address this issue and to ensure that most third-level teaching is carried out by academics on secure contracts will result in further decline.

2.5 Academic Freedom

The links between the security of employment and academic freedom are well documented by policy experts.[55] This link is also made clear in various national laws and international agreements to which Ireland is a party. At its 1997 Paris meeting, the UNESCO General Conference declared academic freedom essential to education, teaching, and research, and accordingly adopted the Recommendation concerning the Status of Higher-Education Teaching Personnel. Paragraphs 45-46 of the recommendation recognise tenure and secure employment as necessary conditions for academic freedom when it states;

Tenure or its functional equivalent, where applicable, constitutes one of the major procedural safeguards of academic freedom against arbitrary decisions. Security of employment in the profession, including tenure or its functional equivalent, where applicable, should be safeguarded because it is essential to the interests of higher education as well as those of higher-education teaching personnel.

[54] Lopes & Dewan, 2015, p. 35.
[55] Karran, 2007.

As a UNESCO member state, Ireland is subject to the 1997 recommendation.

Ireland's Universities Act 1997 further places a responsibility on individual universities to promote academic freedom. Indeed, it was as a result of IFUT's campaigning and lobbying that Academic Freedom was enshrined in Irish legislation. Given the pervasive nature of precarious academic employment demonstrated in this report, with over one quarter of academic staff surveyed employed on insecure contracts or no contract at all, it is our contention that the Irish Government is failing to maintain its legal and treaty commitments to uphold academic freedom for a significant cohort of academic staff.

This section of the report mapped the landscape of higher education in Ireland as pertinent to the issue of job security/insecurity and terms of conditions of employment more broadly and in the context of rising student numbers, chronic underfunding of higher education, and failure to develop appropriate workforce plans across the sector. There are also stresses of teaching in a post-Covid system to consider, as well as the increasing administrative burden on teaching and research staff at all levels of academia.

These are important factors when interpreting the findings from our online survey 'Academic Matters' which will be presented in the next section.

3. ‘Academic Matters’: Survey findings

This chapter reports findings from a mixed-methods survey completed by 550 university employes in early 2023.[1] Most respondents (56%) were women, while 42% were men and 2% were non-binary.

[56] The survey was circulated between January 4th and February 17th, 2023. Convenience sampling was used, meaning that this is not a representative sample.

3.1 Demographics of the respondents

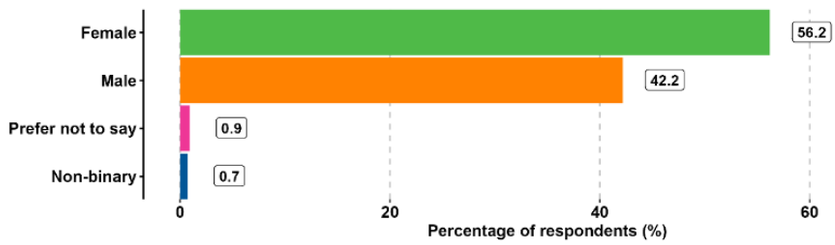

Figure 1 breakdown of survey respondents.

Most respondents fell within the age range of 35-44, comprising 32% of the total responses, with the full breakdown of age ranges provided below.

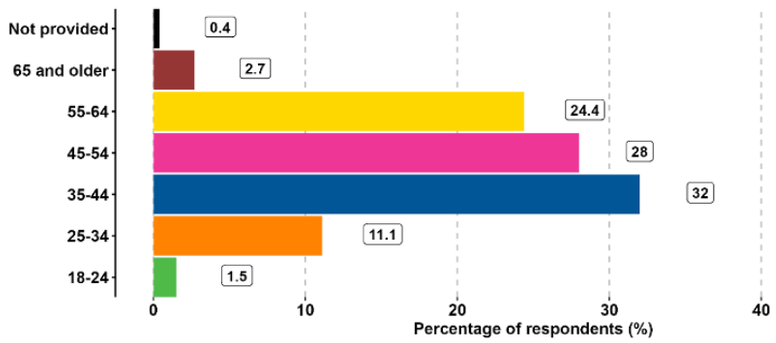

Figure 2 range of survey respondents

One finding of note is that 3 % are 65 years or older.

[56] The survey was circulated between January 4th and February 17th, 2023. Convenience sampling was used, meaning that this is not a representative sample.

As figure 3 illustrates, the respondents were from various third-level institutions across Ireland.

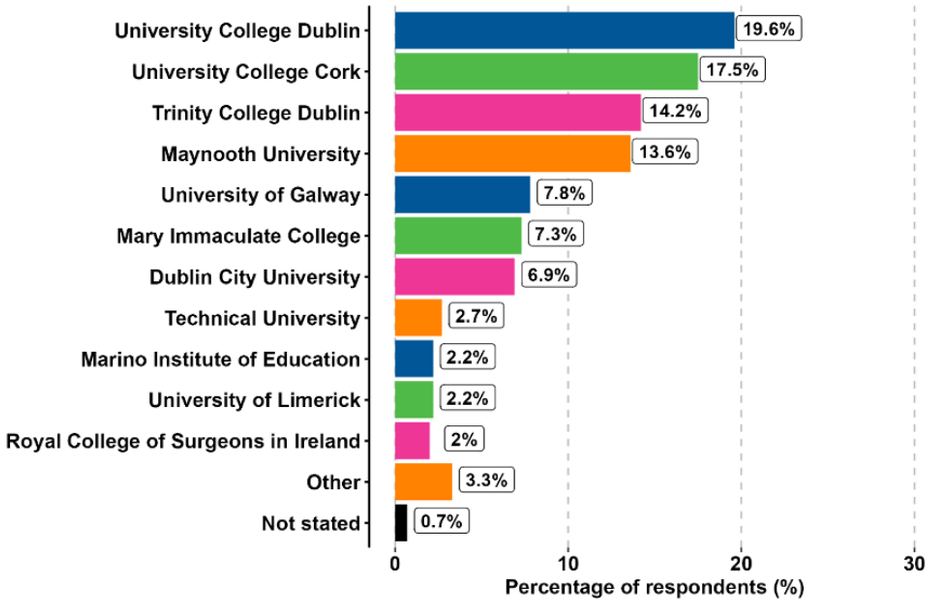

Figure 3 Host institutions of the respondents

One quarter of respondents have been with their current employer for less than four years, whereas three quarters are with their institution for less than 18 years.

3.1.1. Role descriptions

Respondents were asked to name their 'contractual job role.' There were 149 unique entries. These included 'Lecturer,' 'Assistant Professor,' 'Researcher' but also such titles as 'Learning Designer', 'University Language Teacher' and 'Special Contract Lecturer'. Appendix 2 details the length of service across different roles.[57]

There are several reasons for such variations, including, in some institutions, the deliberate adoption of the US-style nomenclature model. At other times, varying job titles may be part of attempts to circumvent the provisions of Collective Agreements and the Cush Agreement.

[57] Appendix 3 provides further information on role titles, including the list of 'Other' job roles/titles Some of these titles were captured in a drop-down menu provided, others were captured through and open 'other' question.

3.1.2 Contract Type

IFUT asked respondents about the type of contract they hold, the results of which are illustrated below.

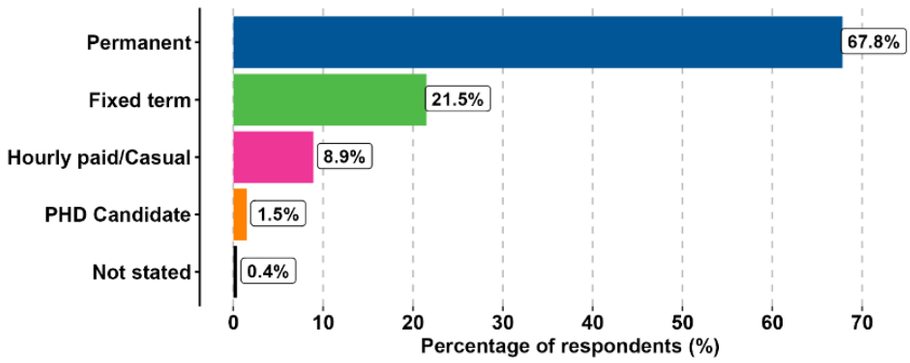

Figure 4 Type of contract respondents were employed on.

As figure 4 reveals, the majority (68 %), are employed on permanent contracts. Four % of respondents hold a part-time contract, and for some, aspects of their employment are more precarious. For example, one respondent reported, 'I have two roles - one permanent (part time), the other fixed term (part time).' From another, 'full contract of indefinite duration 0.7 and temporary 0.3.'

Almost one third (32%) were employed on fixed-term or hourly-paid, casual contracts or were PhD students with teaching responsibility. Eight % of respondents reported having no written contract of employment.

When we asked respondents if they consider themselves precariously employed, over one-third (36%) answered 'yes'.

"Over 36% of survey respondents consider themselves to be precariously employed"

3.2. Permanent employment

Most respondents with a permanent contract (86 %) had spent some time on a temporary contract before securing permanency. Of this number, 14 % were precariously employed for more than ten years.

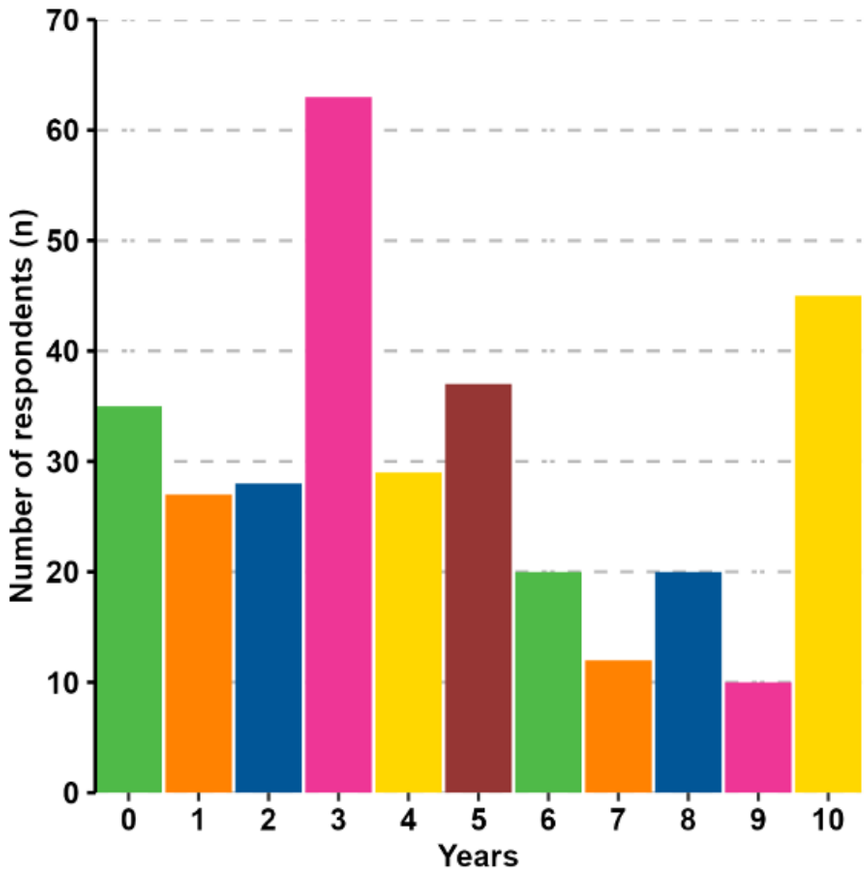

Figure 5 - Number of years respondents spent on temporary/fixed-term contracts before becoming permanent.

IFUT also asked how respondents attained their permanent contract, which revealed that 17 % attained permanency by claiming a Contract of Indefinite (CID). There are implications of attaining permanency via CID. Some of these employees do not receive the same incremental pay rises as their counterparts, and some are denied other benefits often presumed as part of a permanent academic contract. The survey response below illustrates these discrepancies.

> I am in a better position than most on precarious contracts, given that I am in a salaried position with a CID. However, while I am doing the same job as a lecturer, I do not have the same conditions/benefits. My position is non-scale, so I don't get any increments. I cannot be promoted. I cannot supervise PhD students. I don't have access to research leave/sabbaticals, unless the school makes this possible informally. I've been in my current position for fourteen years doing the same job as my colleagues, many of whom have now progressed up the scale and are earning twice as much for the same work. It is quite demoralising and demotivating.

3.2.1 Engagement with colleagues on fixed-term and casual contracts

Several survey respondents with permanent contracts referenced the wider precarity they see around them and were acutely aware of their experiences. Many respondents made similarly themed references to what one respondent described as ‘increasing numbers of casual teaching staff with poor terms and conditions.’ Another theme to emerge is how many permanent employees often have little choice but to participate in a system so reliant on a casualised labour force. One respondent captured this broader theme when they described ‘pressures to comply with decisions I don’t see as helpful to others,’ continuing,

> I believe the treatment of young academics particularly hourly paid academics is utterly disrespectful. They are marking and teaching without contracts and having to negotiate daily what they do for a pittance. The career structure is an ego competitive system that is deeply flawed, and the university has become a factory with the worst aspects of old-world hierarchical managerialism.

3.2.2. Working conditions for permanent staff

In response to the statement 'I have a manageable workload and I can complete my work within my normal/contractual hours,' 39 % of those on a permanent contract agreed while 61 % disagreed.[58]

Many of those who left qualitative comments focused on bottlenecks to promotions and pension shortfalls because of previous time spent on precarious contracts. Others shared more about their own experiences of feeling overworked and overstretched, with concerns raised that this was impacting the quality of pedagogy and student-centred care. For example, this permanent member of staff shares

> It is impossible to deliver good pedagogy with the poor resources (outdated classroom infrastructure, burgeoning class sizes, zero teaching assistance) the institution supplies, so I just deliver adequate pedagogy rather than work extra hours. I have a chronic illness, so I'm not overextending to save the university money it should be spending on teaching.

Others describe their workload as *'unmanageable and steadily increasing,'* highlight *'pressures to grow students year on year'* and of *'challenges in maintaining a work-life balance.'*

Another respondent laments how things that were once considered basic standards for decent work, i.e. a permanent contract, is now seen as something people are lucky to have.

> I am very fortunate to have a permanent contract. I appreciate that all the more having tried to regularise employment over the years for fixed term colleagues in my school. That this is still the case across 3rd level education in Ireland is unacceptable. As is the culture of working excessive hours to do the job well and to serve students well.

54% agreed with the hypothesis 'my employer treats me with dignity and respect in the workplace'. 33% disagree, and the remaining 13% neither agree nor disagree.

This comment captures some of the discontent shared.

[58] This question has a response rate of 91%

> My employer does not respect our work at all. Teaching loads are too high, and funding for research is too low to have any semblance of a balanced workload. I end up fighting fires most of the time and getting no recognition for it.

When asked to respond to the statement *'I feel that I have enough time within my contractual hours to provide adequate pastoral care to my students,'* 58% of all permanent staff disagreed.

One final finding is that 8% of those on a permanent contract reported taking on additional work to supplement their wages. This is an important reminder that permanency does not imply sufficient hours, particularly when these contracts result from successful struggles for contracts of indefinite duration.

3.3 Fixed-term/temporary contracts

Over one in five of all respondents were employed on a fixed-term contract. Again, some respondents held more than one type of contract. For example, 'I have two half-time fixed-term contracts, one for research and another for teaching.'

The majority (59%) held a fixed-term contract for at least four years. A significant proportion (19%) have been on a fixed-term contract for 10 years or more. One individual shared their experience of eight years of precarious postdocs and fixed-term contracts, describing it as 'extremely stressful,' causing them to feel 'constantly on the edge of being discarded.'

As many as 72% of respondents were given successive fixed-term contracts, with three respondents reporting having six separate contracts. Nearly one in four (19%) have either held two or three contracts, and 20% of those on fixed-term contracts have held four or more successive contracts. One respondent reported holding eight successive fixed-term contracts. This contribution, from a respondent who reported being non-permanent for 14 years, details the depth to which precarity can impact a person and the anger many feel because of their circumstances,

> This employment situation should change, and I back IFUT fully. I am currently seeing a psychiatrist because of the stresses caused by job insecurity and the lack of respect shown by management, which has destroyed my self-esteem and damaged that of many of my colleagues. Unless this is dealt with now, the damage caused to people will be incalculable, even though university management benefits immeasurably by this cheaper system of working. Management needs to be held publicly accountable via an Oireachtas hearing, as this is the only industry in the public sector where this is allowed.

It is surprising that many people report how they have often considered leaving academia to secure more stable employment. One respondent recently turned down a second fixed-term contract because they 'can earn more on social welfare alongside my teaching hours.'

They conclude;

> I am currently assessing options to leave the sector to find a more stable and secure position that offers actual financial stability. I am in my early 30s. I live at home with my parents, I can't afford rent because my pay is too low, I can't get a mortgage, I don't have kids because I can't afford them, I can't get engaged to my partner because I can't afford a ring. Unless I get a permanent, secure, and decently paid position by the next academic year 2023, I strongly intend to leave the sector because of the major imposition that working this job has on my life and those around me.

Sometimes respondents indicate that their pay is much the same as those on permanent contracts; however, the hidden cost of non-permanency is that academics are often locked out of opportunities to apply for loans and/or securely make decisions about starting a family.

This respondent captures some of these difficulties when they write:

> I think there are different levels of precarious employment. In my current position, I do not struggle with money, but I do not have the security of a permanent contract. This has substantial consequences in terms of planning your personal life because you do not qualify for a mortgage or may not want to start a family due to the uncertainty.

In total, 14% of these contracts were part-time. Separate research on employment precarity indicates that such part-time arrangements are not always the preference of the employees; many, in fact, would rather work full-time.[59]

One respondent remarked, *'The pay has not changed since I began working for the University 8 years ago.'* Another noted, *'Salary does not update with current IUA or SFI pay scales'* . A different individual relayed information from their employer, stating, *'I have told the adjunct status prohibits me from accruing any increase. My pay has been frozen for 6 years.'* In a final illustrative comment, one respondent mentioned, *'I'm on a fixed stipend from a funding body, so there has been no increase in my stipend since September 2021.'*

3.3.1. Working conditions for those on fixed-term contracts

In response to the statement 'I have a manageable workload and I can complete my work within my normal/contractual hours,' only 31% of those on a fixed-term contract agreed with 69% disagreeing.

Many respondents describe the negative impacts of multiple years on fixed-term contracts including having to rely on social welfare payments for portions of the year, not being paid for particular tasks including emails, attending meetings, conducting research, and often extensive work that goes into publishing academic papers. This respondent summarises this situation:

> Hourly paid contracts are a disaster. I've often earned 120 euro for a week 's work which consists of 40 hours. I earn just a little over 10,000 euro per year and regularly rely on social welfare payments to supplement my income. I am paid for my time in the lecture hall/tutorial only - I do not get paid for emails, meeting students, preparing lectures / tutorials, research, publishing research, funding applications, I have been expected to work outside my contract.

[59] O'Neill and Fitzsimons, 2020

While nearly one quarter (23 %) of those on fixed-term contracts reported taking on additional work to supplement their income, there was also an awareness despite the starkness of previous examples above, fixed-term employees were often in a better situation than some of their paid-by-the-hour colleagues, as evidenced below.

> While I would class myself as precariously employed (early thirties, no permanent job), I am aware that others are in much worse employment situations (not paid through the summer, subsisting on hourly rates), so in the larger scheme of things, I would consider myself quite lucky.

Again, from someone working on a fixed-term contract.

> I am quite fortunate in the current position I am in, having been employed since I completed my PhD. However, it is uncertain if there will be a position for me once my current contract ends, and it is that current element of precarity that worries me. I am also deeply saddened by the loss of the community of researchers that I built up during my PhD who are no longer in academia as a result of employment conditions.

3.4 Hourly paid/casual employees

Overall, 89% of respondents (49 respondents) held hourly paid/casual contracts of employment. People had different ways of describing this working arrangement.

For example;

> Employed to teach specific modules (two at the moment). Pay is based solely on contact hours and supposedly includes prep time and admin in the hourly rate. Limited extra pay for marking etc.

Some respondents provided specific details about their contracts. One mentioned they work *'92 hours per year from October to May,'* while another is on a *'0-hour contract for 10 months.'*

A particularly illustrative comment highlighted the unpredictability and lack of compensation for preparatory work; *‘Paid per hour of teaching. Not paid for the prep. Hours per week change depending on classes being on campus or out on placement etc.’*

Of those employed on hourly contracts:

- A majority (61%) work every week throughout the term but do not get paid outside term time.
- As many as 31% work on a casual, if-and-when ad hoc basis.
- 2% work every week throughout the year and are paid outside term time.[60]

When asked 'has your employer provided information on how your hourly, modular, or semester rate of pay is calculated?' 46% of those paid by the hour had not been provided with any information from their employer on how their pay is calculated.

3.4.1. Working conditions for those on hourly/casual contracts

Hourly-paid employees were typically employed in teaching roles. However, many reported undertaking other roles, namely class preparation (45%), exam marking (37%), administration (26 %), and student engagement (26%).

From an hourly paid, casual lecturer;

> "If I worked only the hours contracted, I could not deliver good quality teaching. The university assumes that the intensive preparation required and the time devoted to student engagement does not need to be paid. The prevalence of precarious lecturing work indicates a lack of respect for contract staff."

[60] O'Neill and Fitzsimons, 2020

3.5 Other findings across all employees

The IFUT survey shows that many university employees across all contract types are working more hours than they were paid for. The survey asked, 'On average, how many unpaid hours per week (if any) would you work in addition to your contractual hours to complete your work?.' [61]

The following were uncovered:

- 74% of all respondents, including permanent full-time staff, are working additional unpaid hours to complete their tasks.
- Women were more likely to work unpaid hours (65% of precarious staff and 53% of permanent staff).
- Across all respondents, the average number of unpaid hours worked was 11.

Among those on fixed-term or hourly/casual contracts, the average number of unpaid hours worked was nine.

- One respondent reported working 40 hours unpaid to complete their duties.

Figure 6 - Unpaid hours needed to complete the work.

[61] This question had the lowest response rate of 81%

3.5.1 Examination/script marking

Because of ongoing concern and unevenness about payment for exam marking, the survey asked respondents if they were currently paid for exam/script marking. Overall, 39% answered 'yes', they are paid for exam/script marking and 60% answered 'no' they are not paid for exam/script marking.

The following results were obtained:

Staff Category	Percentage
Fixed-term	35
Hourly paid/Casual	74
Permanent	35
PHD Candidate	62

Table 2 Those paid for exam marking by the staff category

3.5.1 Public Sector pay increases

Staff Category	Percentage
Fixed-term	64.4
Hourly paid/Casual	20.4
Permanent	89.8

Table 3 - Those receiving public sector pay increases by the staff category

Another 15% are uncertain if they will receive these increases, as broken down in table 4.

Staff Category	Percentage
Fixed-term	22.9
Hourly paid/Casual	59.2
Permanent	6.2
PHD Candidate	37.5

Table 4 - Uncertainty about public sector pay increases by the staff category

Finally, seven % do not receive public sector pay increases.

Staff Category	Percentage
Fixed-term	7.6
Hourly paid/Casual	20.4
Permanent	3.5
PHD Candidate	62.5

Table 5 of staff not receiving public sector pay increases by the staff category

3.5.2 Access to workplace support

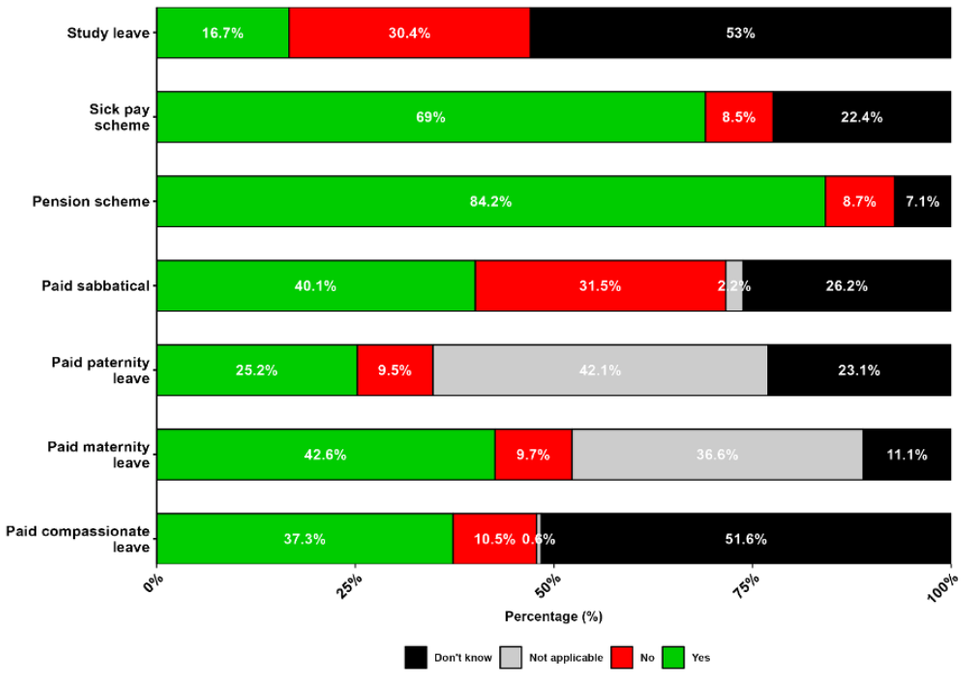

Figure 7 – Access to workplace support across all respondents.

3.5.3 Supporting students

When asked to respond to the statement ‘I feel that I have enough time within my contractual hours to provide adequate pastoral care to my students’, as many as 58% of total respondents disagreed (21% of who somewhat disagreed). 32% indicated that they had enough time, although a further 22% ‘somewhat agreed’ only.[62] 10% answered that the question did not apply to their situation.

3.5.4 Relationship with their employer

When asked to respond to the statement 'My employer treats me with dignity and respect in the workplace' [63] the following emerges,

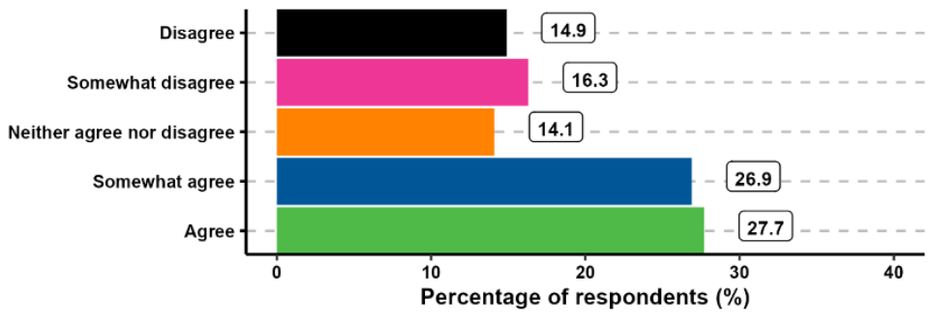

Figure 8 employer treats me with dignity and respect in the workplace.

A summary overview of the hypotheses relating to workload and environment is included in Appendix 4.

3.6 Support for IFUT's campaign to tackle precarious employment

Across all respondents, 94% consider precarious employment to be pervasive within higher education in Ireland. There was overwhelming support for IFUT's campaign with 93 % answering 'yes' to the question 'would you support colleagues in a campaign to tackle precarious employment?'

There were suggestions for continued research to track the pervasiveness of precarity, while for others, there was a sense that it was now time for concrete actions to address the issue, some of which is captured in the indicative comment below,

> Please use this information and bring about actions. I have lost count of the number of surveys I have completed on this in recent years, and the only thing that has changed is my number of years in employment. It keeps going up and my conditions and pay remain the same - dreadful.

Another respondent suggested 'a meeting open to all members about these issues and how to move forward.' Concerns have been raised that the level of precarity "undermines the mission of the university in terms of both teaching and research" and that;

> "it's a real issue, if it's not addressed, it will have a seriously negative impact on higher education in Ireland and our ability to produce high-quality research.

[63] This question had a response rate of 91%

3.7 Overview of key findings

Another respondent suggested ‘a meeting open to all members about these issues and how to move forward.’ Concerns have been raised that the level of precarity “undermines the mission of the university in terms of both teaching and research” and that;

The research shows

- As many as 36 % of respondents consider themselves precariously employed.
- As many as 94% of respondents consider precarious employment pervasive within the higher education sector.
- Across all respondents, 93% support a campaign to tackle precarious employment.
- 8% of respondents did not have a written contract of employment.
- Only 15% of researchers were on permanent contracts (including CIDs), whereas 22% of lecturers were on fixed-term contracts.
- For those with permanent contracts, 72% reported spending four years or more on temporary/fixed-term contracts before becoming permanent.
- Most (55%) respondents who identified as being precariously employed have worked on two or more successive fixed-term contracts.
- 50% of those precariously employed believe they meet the conditions for a contract of indefinite duration (CID).
- Only 9 % of respondents claimed a CID, indicating the need for increased awareness of workers ’ rights among fixed-term employees in the higher education sector.
- In terms of casual, hourly rate employees, 61 % do not get paid for periods between terms and a further 31% only work on an ‘if and when’ basis.

In relation to pay and terms and conditions the survey demonstrates:

- 7% of all respondents are not receiving public sector pay increases and a further 15% are uncertain whether they will receive these increments.
- As many as 30% reported not having access to study leave, whereas almost one-third (32 %) reported not having access to a paid sabbatical.
- A majority of respondents (60%) are not paid for exam/script marking. Respondents raised questions about the value placed on this important aspect of academic work by HEIs

In terms of workload and environment the survey finds:

- 60% of respondents feel they have an unmanageable workload that cannot be completed within their normal/contractual hours.
- A majority of permanent academics, i.e. 56% of permanent academic staff, does not have enough time within their contractual hours to provide adequate pastoral care to their students. [A1]
- One third of the participating academic staff either 'disagreed' or 'somewhat disagreed' with the statement 'My employer treats me with dignity and respect in the workplace.'
- Most (74%) of all respondents (including permanent full-time staff) are working additional unpaid hours to complete their tasks.
- As many as 69% of precarious employees work additional unpaid hours to complete their work.
- Almost two-thirds (65%) of precarious staff who indicated that they worked unpaid hours were female. This contrasts with the fact that 53% of permanent staff who indicated that they worked unpaid hours were female.
- Overall, 69% of non-permanent respondents (fixed-term, hourly/casual and PhD students) work additional unpaid hours to complete their work.

[A1]Not sure of the intended meaning here - is it most of the 56% of permanent academics' or 'a majority of permanent academics i.e. 56% of the permanent academics'

4. Digging deeper, personal stories on the impact of precarity

This section reports on findings from a focus group discussion with six purposefully selected IFUT members [64], as well as three e-interviews. These participants all had significant experience of being on fixed-term and/or casual contracts. They work at different universities across the country.

Three focus group employees currently hold permanent contracts, one secured this because of a successful application for a Contract of Indefinite Duration (CID), which they secured with the support of IFUT. The remaining focus group participants were on either short-term or hourly rate contracts. To protect anonymity, all participants were allocated a pseudonym.

Findings are thematically organised.

4.1 Financial impacts of precarious work

As highlighted in the findings from IFUT's mixed-methods survey reported in the preceding section, there are many financial implications to being employed on precarious contracts. For these participants, the challenges shared included difficulties getting a mortgage, with one person having never been successful in their application, and problems paying rent and bills among a situation where they were unclear about their future earnings Mary, who took part in the focus group discussion, described *'real anxieties about bills'* and contextualised this among an environment where the perception that families, friends and even others working in the university sector hold is *'that you are a university lecturer, you must earn a fortune.'* She believes that many of her university colleagues *'haven't got a clue'* just how low her wages can be. This is because people are deceived by what looks like a high hourly lecture rate, which typically translates to less than the minimum wage for the amount of work required when preparation, examination marking, administration, and student support are considered.

The implications of this financial uncertainty are stark. One focus group participant, Tony, shared times when he was extremely grateful for an understanding landlord who demonstrated flexibility in responding to the unpredictability of his situation. For two female participants, decisions on when to have children, if at all, were directly linked to the precarious nature of their employment and for one, the need to financially depend on their spouse in the absence of any family leave payment. There are also implications when precariously employed staff take time off for family leave.

[64] The focus group was conducted in May 2023 and was facilitated by Dr. Camilla Fitzsimons, an Associate Professor at Maynooth University.

To illustrate, Sonia (who took part in an e-interview) almost lost her hourly rate job coordinating a year-long Level 8 certificate program with a university following a period of unpaid maternity leave away from the role.

This was because the academic who had oversight of the work offered the post to another employee without checking with Sonia if she was ready to come back. She had clearly communicated her intention to return, but this information had not been institutionally retained. Because the (also precarious) employee who was offered the role was aware of Sonia's circumstances, they turned down the work and advised the academic lead to contact Sonia directly so she could be re-instated in her role. It was therefore by pure chance that she held onto her work and that it was not picked up by someone new.

Shirley, who describes herself as 'an immigrant to Ireland', adds another dimension to the research in terms of how citizenship status intersects with precarious employment. She shares the uncertainties of not knowing from semester-to-semester if she would have future work and how 'that has a huge impact'; practically in terms of her chances of securing residency, emotionally in terms of the personal impact and administratively in terms of additional paperwork to correspond with changes in her pay and conditions. 'As an immigrant not from the EU you are not allowed to get social welfare payments or anything like that' she shares.

Continuing, Shirley expands her point;

> I know academics who have been deported or who have voluntarily left because they did not meet the income threshold or were between jobs when their permission expired. So I know for every one of me there are 10, 20, 50 people who will have left the country. And the government likes to go on about the "knowledge economy" and attracting foreign PhDs and highly skilled workers and everything but they are not doing anything to let us stay. It is also impactful on the job market because when you apply for a job, the first thing they ask is "do you need a work permit?". And sometimes if the answer is yes, then you aren't going to get to the interview stage.

Another e-interviewee, Paul, is concerned about the lack of pay for holidays including bank holidays. He explains, 'to be paid for a legal holiday you must have worked 40 hours in the preceding five weeks', continuing,

> Most of the part-time, precariously employed teaching staff would barely get 40 hours of paid work in the term – and the idea that you'd get forty in five weeks is laughable (or would be if it were any kind of laughing matter). Between reading weeks and bank holidays, to get four consecutive weeks would be lucky, and 40 hours! Most full-time workers absolutely have no idea of the constraints, the small humiliations that precariously employed staff endure all the time.

"Most full-time workers absolutely have no idea of the constraints, the small humiliations that precariously employed staff endure all the time"

4.2 Working Conditions

In addition to these clear impacts outside work, particularities are shared relating to the day-to-day reality of being employed on a non-permanent basis. These include what participants experience as mistreatment by senior academic colleagues, which one person clearly describes as *'bullying.'* In particular, there is a sense that those in precarious employment are sometimes taken for granted by more senior staff reliant on them to teach classes, mark assignments and examinations, and deliver tutorials so that they can devote time to research.

Sometimes, these precariously employed academics are not paid for this stand-in work, as is captured by Maria's story - a first-generation college-goer herself who believes a lack of cultural capital (or not knowing *'the rules of the game'*) contributed to her own mistreatment. '*Throughout my precarity I was constantly asked to work for free,'* she explains. In one particular situation, Maria was asked by a senior academic to do their tutorials *'because it would be good for my CV and that I would eventually be paid.'* Over the next two years, Maria spent four hours each week delivering tutorials on the promise of future payment, which never arrived. This wasn't an isolated incident for her as a second senior academic asked her to co-teach a module so they could focus on research.

The work grew and grew to include more and more solo classes and marking exam papers and supporting students. Maria felt she had no choice but to undertake this additional work, something made patently clear by the module leader on many occasions.

She shares how;

> At exam times, at tutorials, it would be, 'oh I know I am supposed to do these 50 scripts but actually Maria, I have a research project on, and I am a really busy person so can you take them?'. Once they rang me five minutes before a lecture that was on, because they had slept out, and they said, you are going to need to go in, it is too late to call off this lecture, so you are going to have to put it on. And they said to me, I will pay you for it, I will get you paid for it, and I will have to do it out of my own pocket because I don't want them to know that I slept out. So I said, fine. Never got paid for it. This kind of cycle happened over and over. I knew that this person was much more senior than me, they were permanent, and I didn't know who to talk to because the idea of saying to somebody, the head of department, or this particular staff member are doing these things to me, asking me to do these things and I am not getting paid for it. I couldn't pay my rent. And what do you do when somebody says, here is another hour? You say, yes, I will take it. But when they are taking advantage of you and exploiting you constantly repeatedly, you can't say it.

Maria is not the only person to talk about the pressure to say yes for fear of losing future work, or, as another focus group participant, Alannah, puts it 'when that particular individual might be interviewing you in the future.' Alannah is employed on a part-time, adjunct (non-pensionable contract) for a limited number of hours each week. She works many more hours on top of this, which are paid at an hourly rate. Because her discipline is heavily practice-oriented, there is a particular emphasis on what she describes as 'small essays or exercises every week.' She tells us, 'I could be working more than 40 to 50 hours a week.

I would only be paid for twelve. And that was the norm, it was absolutely the norm for years and years and years.'

There are other examples of no pay or low pay. Another focus group participant, Janet, talked about a recent situation where she was asked to set up 'a course which was compulsory for second year students', continuing 'I was to choose everything that it covered, co-ordinate it and give most of the lectures and at least one group of tutorials.'

> I am still shocked by this. How can anyone be asked to do that much work for that little money? Even if I hadn't got three degrees and years of experience, it would be a miserly payment – at best. What this kind of treatment does is to make the sap (me) feel a whole range of emotions that range from insulted, through to worthless.

For Noah, who works as a researcher and also took part in the focus group, a particular concern relates to the work that is put into trying to secure research contracts. By his own estimate, there is about one in three chances of getting a research grant. Meanwhile,

> You are giving up essentially a lot of financial incentives that are outside academia, certainly on my side of the house, I could be making a multiple of what I earn in terms of that area that I work in. So what incentive is there to stay in academia? I am finding that is a big issue now in my area in that a lot of the most skilled people are just not seeing a future in academia, and they are moving outside of it, and it is to the detriment of things in the longer term.

4.3 Impact on students

In addition to these effects for those on non-permanent contracts, there are also impacts for students. Research participants relay difficulties students report in getting academic references from people who know them well, being deprived of additional support from the staff who teach them outside of lecture hours and, where precariously employed staff have no dedicated workstation, the absence of privacy to discuss their progress.

There are also reports of no access to proper equipment (something that was particularly evident during the Covid19 pandemic) and no dedicated physical space to meet with other lecturers.

One focus group participant used to lose access to her university's online platform and sometimes even email during the summer months, meaning she failed to communicate with students until a colleague thought to add her to the relevant platforms each September.

There is also an impact on students' progression pathways. As Olive explains,

> If you are precarious, there is no guarantee that you will be there in the future. Therefore, it definitely impacts a pastoral care perspective. I mean, there have been many times where students will ask me 'which modules are you teaching next year?' They are interested in continuing their studies and specialising in a particular area. And I would have said to them, 'I am not 100% sure I will be here next year.' Or likewise, I might have students in the final year of their degree who would ask, 'I am interested in doing a Master's thesis next year on a certain topic, would you be available to supervise?' Likewise I would kind of say, 'I actually don't know.'

In another example, Alannah details how, although she teaches a module, she does not get to set the exam questions, which she believes puts her students at a disadvantage and creates a lot of anxiety for them. Despite the above issues, it is worth noting that there is broad agreement that, by and large, students are not aware that many of their lecturers are on non-permanent contracts.

4.4 Support from colleagues

Although there were earlier reports of particular challenges with some senior academics, there were also examples of significant support from permanent colleagues. For example, Olive shares how her Head of Department was 'very supportive' and 'very adamant about trying to get another contract for me.'

Olive also received support from IFUT but explained how accessing this support typically depends on a person's knowledge of their rights. She explains,

> Because I am, and I was, a member of IFUT at the time and because I had worked quite a bit around the issue of precarity with IFUT, I was able to go to the union and show them the contracts that I had. They very much supported me in getting a CID. So I was very, very lucky in terms of having the support of the union and having the support of my colleagues in the department where I work

This reference to being ‘lucky’ is picked up by Mary who supposes the ‘lucky ones’ are those with permanent contracts. She is keen to dispel false presumptions that she sometimes experiences when those with and without permanent contracts are dichotomised explaining;

> They didn't get it because they are better than me or spectacularly brilliant or work harder. They got it because on that day, luck was on their side. Now, many colleagues I think are spectacularly brilliant and do work incredibly hard, but I think it behoves all permanent staff to be very, very mindful of their good fortune and treat precarious staff with, you know, a great deal more respect and sensibilities toward it. They are not the people who failed, which is what we sometimes think we are … It wasn't because I was stupid, it wasn't because I was lazy. Everybody who gets a permanent job is lucky and they should be mindful of that. It behoves them to treat other colleagues well because we are just as good.

Among this differentiation, Tony, an e-interviewee who eventually secured a CID with the support of IFUT observes how;

> Colleagues fortunate enough to have permanent, salaried, pensionable jobs should be mindful that many privileges of their work, such as teaching buy-outs and sabbaticals, can only be sustained through the use of part-time/temporary/hourly paid staff: and any institution asking anyone they judge to be suitably qualified to undertake professional responsibilities should both pay and treat their staff fairly.

This chapter details a deeper understanding of some of the personal stories attached to earlier survey findings in relation to issues such as financial impact, working conditions, collegial engagements and/or student impact. Both sets of findings are further considered in the fifth and final section of this report, whereby IFUT proposes a clear pathway for addressing the blight of precarity in higher education in Ireland.

5. Conclusions and recommendations

The findings presented in this research clearly indicate that a substantial proportion of teaching and research in our universities is undertaken by workers in precarious employment arrangements. Academic staff perform a greater number of hours of work than they are paid for. This raises concerns about the value placed on academic labour and the potential personal impacts on staff.

Several important considerations emerge from this study, including high levels of concern about precarity from staff on all types of contracts and a willingness for this issue to be tackled with trade union support. IFUT understands that while workers on precarious employment contracts deserve to enjoy decent working conditions and to be treated with respect, their status as precarious workers can mean they are less likely to get organised, less likely to raise a concern or make a complaint. We need the fight against precarious employment to be developed by, and for, the staff impacted, while also being supported in practical ways by their fellow IFUT members. The IFUT survey shows that most people recognise that precarious employment is pervasive, and most importantly, they would support their colleagues in a campaign to tackle precarious employment.

This solidarity is what gives us strength as trade unionists and is most welcome.

This research strengthens our fight for decent work for our members in higher education. It is clear that poor working conditions for researchers and teaching staff negatively impact the quality of students' learning experiences and the quality of the research produced by our institutions.

As evidenced from the summary of gender pay gap reports presented in Table 1, it is contended that precarious employment is a driver of gender inequality, with every Irish higher education institution reporting a significant gender pay gap, with women making up the majority of part-time, fixed-term, low-paid workers in the sector. This report endeavours to present reliable data to support our claims while also demonstrating how accessing reliable data is part of the problem faced.

As section 2.3 has evidenced, the issue of precarious employment is increasingly being examined and discussed in gender gap reports, government promises and reports, including *The Future Funding of Higher Education*, which made specific recommendations in relation to precarious employment. Within this context, IFUT makes the following key recommendations.

5.1. Summary of the Recommendations

1. Adopt the IFUT Anti-Precarity Charter

IFUT has developed an anti-precarity charter. We assert that every IFUT Branch should adopt and implement the charter and to prioritise engagement with their employer to tackle precarious employment in all its forms. Precarious employment is a scourge on the entire HE sector, including those employments in which IFUT is not present. We call on all unions to adopt the principles outlined in the IFUT charter and to pursue the end of exploitative and inappropriate precarious employment practices in their employment.

2. Identify Pathways to Permanency for Precariously Employed Staff

IFUT earnestly urges each HEI to engage with union representatives to identify and negotiate pathways to permanency for precariously employed staff to maximise job security. We need to work together to agree pathways to permanency and to end the culture of employment insecurity.

3. Negotiate Decent Employment Conditions for All Teaching and Research Staff

IFUT strongly urges employers to collectively bargain with IFUT to improve the conditions of precariously employed staff, including, but not limited to, agreeing a framework for the proper use of fixed-term contracts and the terms and conditions and contracts of employment for hourly paid, casual, or temporary teaching staff. In particular, IFUT proposes that HEIs engage with us to ensure that precarious staff have adequate access to maternity, paternity, and parental leave, as well as annual leave, public holiday entitlements, training and skilling, and a framework for workers to enhance their contracted hours.

4. Establish Sector-Wide Collective Bargaining Systems

IFUT accepts that certain issues are more appropriate to discuss on behalf of the sector rather than with individual employers. We advocate for employers and their representatives to develop their structures to enable this long-overdue dialogue.

5. Review of Precarious Employment Practices and Information in the Sector

IFUT asserts the importance of DFHERIS conducting a review of precarious employment practices across the sector, as recommended in the Future of Funding of Higher Education report by the Education Joint Oireachtas Committee. Once complete, we call on DFHERIS to engage with IFUT to explore ways to tackle the precarious employment practices in place in the sector, including, but not limited to, a review of the Protection of Employees (Fixed-Term Work) Act 2003 and the many ways employers are endeavouring to circumvent its provisions. The sector is reliant on short -term, fixed-term, casual and hourly paid workers. This should end.

6. Need for Accurate Information

IFUT calls on all Higher Education Institutions to accurately report on the extent of precarious employment in their institutions each year and to share and discuss this information with IFUT.

7. Review of the Cush Agreement

IFUT strongly recommends that DFHERIS and the IUA engage with IFUT on a review of the Cush Report and Recommendations to explore if and how we can extend the scope of the review to other categories of staff involved in teaching and research.

8. Abolish the Employment Control Framework

IFUT deems it imperative to abolish the Employment Control Framework, which limits the potential for workers to be recruited on permanent contracts.

9. Need for Sectoral Collective Bargaining for Research Staff

IFUT calls for DFHERIS and employers in the sector to engage in collective bargaining with IFUT on behalf of researchers and for salary scales, grading, and career progression to be reviewed in this process.

10. Explore SEO for Researchers

IFUT will explore the possibility of establishing a Sectoral Employment Order for Researchers in the absence of collective bargaining directly with employers in the sector to ensure researcher salaries, conditions, and career progression opportunities are in place.

11. Increase the number of academic teaching staff in the sector

IFUT beseeches a net increase in 650 academic staff in the sector each year for the next decade to keep pace with the rise in student numbers and address the student-to ratio.

12. Focus employment on faculty and academics, not administrators and managers

IFUT calls on employers to ensure that they develop workforce plans and recruitment strategies that prioritise the recruitment of those grades directly involved in teaching, research, and teaching support.

5.2 Report recommendations

5.2.1 Adopt the IFUT Anti-Precarity Charter

IFUT has developed an anti-precarity charter. We assert that all HEIs should adopt the IFUT charter for anti-precarity, as detailed in Section 1.7 and included in Appendix 2. As each higher education institution initiates an ethical hiring code as instructed by the Higher Education Association, to 'mirror good practice', we recommend that each institution engage with IFUT and adopt the principles outlined in IFUT's charter to end exploitative and inappropriate precarious employment practices.

5.2.2 Identifying Pathways to Permanency for Precariously Employed Staff

IFUT earnestly urges each HEI to engage with IFUT to identify and negotiate pathways to permanency for precariously employed staff. While the ECF and government policy have undoubtedly fuelled the use of precarious contracts, it would be incorrect to conclude that employers have not contributed to the casualisation of the HE workforce. The HEA's 2nd National Review of Gender Equality in Higher Education Institutions considers the role of the ECF in driving precarious employment in HEIs and clearly states that employers in the sector need to shoulder the blame for this policy approach.

This approach was increasingly adopted by HEIs even before the ECF was imposed. The use of short-term contracts, particularly when there is no objective rationale for the same, is a powerful option for those who make employment decisions as it maximises flexibility in terms of who gets employed, creates dependencies and minimises the economic consequences of employment. The limited policy measures attempted to this point have appeared to at best not achieve the desired impact and, at worst, exacerbate the problem of precarity.

The HEA's Gender Equality Review (2022) recommended that institutions 'make hourly paid contracts the exception rather than the norm.' The report recommended the establishment of 'institutional and disciplinary targets for the progressive elimination of inappropriate hourly paid contracts for core and non-core funded teaching, research and professional services roles in all HEIs.'[65] Further, the HEA report recommended that HEIs remove the designation of postdoctoral researchers as trainees where such practices exist, thereby affording them the full protections of labour law and that temporary academic roles to cover maternity and sabbatical leave cover the role in its entirety, not simply teaching.

In IFUT, we are concerned that employers in the sector and their sector representatives fail to recognise the importance of tackling precarious employment in all its forms. All too often, we see employers drafting fixed-term contracts and engaging staff in such a way as to protect the institution from their employees successfully attaining a CID. We believe that the sector should shift its priorities from avoiding CIDs to maximising permanency and security of employment.

[65] HEA, 2022, p. 46

5.2.3 Negotiating Decent Conditions of Employment for All Teaching and Research Staff

Where employers succumb to pressure to act, for instance, to comply with Athena SWAN commitments, Gender Pay Gap reporting, etc, there is an obvious attempt to address issues of sub-par employment outside of collective bargaining processes. Increasingly, traditional issues that should be discussed with the trade unions representing the workforce are being delegated to EDI offices, Athena SWAN committees etc. It is not acceptable that issues of contractual terms and conditions of employment and rates of pay are considered outside collective bargaining processes. We therefore insist that all employers should work with IFUT to address the issue of precarious employment in their institution with a view to improving the conditions of employment and job security of their teaching, research, and teaching support staff.

IFUT proposes that each HEI engage with us to agree decent conditions of employment for precariously employed staff, including but not limited to agreeing a framework for the use of fixed-term contracts and contracts of employment for hourly paid, casual, or temporary teaching staff. In particular, institutions should collectively bargain with IFUT to ensure precarious staff have adequate access to maternity, paternity, and parental leave, as well as annual leave, public holiday entitlements, training, and upskilling, and a framework for workers to enhance their contractual hours. Further hourly paid, part-time, and casual staff should have an agreed breakdown of their hours of work and time required, including professional development, administration, preparation, marking, student engagement, staff meetings, committee work and more.

IFUT calls on each HEI to engage with us to identify pathways to permanency and decent conditions of employment for precariously employed staff

5.2.4 Establishing Sector-wide Collective Bargaining Systems

Where issues require a sector-wide response and solution, IFUT advocates for employers and their sector representatives to demonstrate leadership and engage with us in structured sector dialog to ensure a consistent approach and to gain the benefit of a collaborative approach to problem solving. At present, there are issues in this sector that require a sector-wide response. There is currently no structure in place for IFUT to engage with employers across the sector. IFUT accepts that certain issues are more appropriate to discuss on behalf of the sector rather than with individual employers. We call on employers and their representatives to develop their structures to enable this long-overdue dialog.

[66] Joint Committee on Education, Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science, 2022

5.2.5 Review of Precarious Employment Practices and Information in the Sector

In July 2022, the Joint Committee on Education, Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science published its report on the Future Funding of Higher Education, which made a series of recommendations. It recommended that staffing and precarious employment should be 'reviewed urgently or by the end of 2022 at the latest'[1] by the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science, with particular focus on hourly-paid academic contracts, researchers, postgraduate workers and outsourcing of support staff roles. If this exercise is underway or has been completed, we are not aware of it.

We call on DFHERIS to conduct this review without delay. Once complete, we call on DFHERIS to engage with IFUT in relation to the review and its findings so that we can ensure that the experience and understanding of precarious employment practices is given full consideration. In particular, we must insist that DFHERIS engage with IFUT to review the Protection of Employees (Fixed-Term Work) Act 2003 and the ways employers are endeavouring to circumvent its provisions .

5.2.6 Need for Accurate Information

Employers in the sector currently report information on their staffing numbers annually, particularly relating to gender, for example, in their Gender Pay Gap reports or in figures they supply to the HEA. Quite often, these reports exclude hourly paid staff altogether, and for other staff, the figures are based on full-time equivalents, not the actual numbers of people. Efforts to establish the true number of workers on precarious employment contracts have repeatedly failed because of the lack of forthcoming and accurate information by employers in the sector. IFUT calls on DFHERIS to insist that HEIs honestly and accurately report the extent of precarious employment in their institution each year. Such an exercise must include engagement with trade unions representing precariously employed workers.

5.2.7 Review of the Cush Agreement

Efforts have been made by IFUT to tackle precarious employment, the most notable of which resulted in the Cush Report. The scope of the Cush Report is limited to traditional lecturers engaged in teaching, research, and contribution. The report's recommendations do not therefore apply to many precariously employed staff including researchers, teaching-only staff, tutors, demonstrators, and more. The Cush Report needs to be reviewed, and IFUT strongly recommends that the IUA develop its capacity and sectoral leadership to engage in such a review. We need to identify how to reduce the time workers spend on fixed-term contracts in the higher education sector without valid objective grounds and how to incrementally increase the contracted hours of part-time lecturers to include hourly paid lecturers.

5.2.8 Abolish the Employment Control Framework (ECF)

As a result of the implementation of austerity measures during the last financial crisis, the publicly funded higher education sector has been subject to the Employment Control Framework (ECF). This ECF restricts the number of staff that can be appointed to permanent positions in HEIs. The ECF has directly resulted in an increase in precarious employment in HEIs – workers are employed on fixed-term, casual, hourly contracts to provide teaching, teaching support, or research projects instead of being recruited in permanent roles. This is a policy decision and is not a reflection of the needs of the university for that member of staff on an ongoing basis.

In 2022, the Joint Oireachtas Committee called for abolishing the Employment Control Framework. Furthermore, the HEA Gender Equality National Review recommended in 2022 that the ECF should be replaced by appropriate budgetary /staffingontrol mechanisms that take into account developing needs within institutions. Despite these recommendations, the ECF remains in place in our sector. We insist as imperative the need for DPER and DFHERIS to lift the ECF immediately so that positions are filled based on the staffing needs of the university.

5.2.9 Need for Sectoral Collective Bargaining for Research Staff

The Joint Committee report called for ring-fenced funding to be provided through the HEA for independent research, including doctoral and postdoctoral research, to 'avoid reliance' on short-term commercial research project funding.[67] The HEA's 2nd National Review of Gender Equality recommended that research funding bodies work with the government, the HEA , and HEIs to increase the number of permanent research positions in the system and that research funding bodies make institutional and departmental action on eliminating precarious work a mandatory requirement of research funding eligibility. Therefore, there is acceptance that the current method of funding and employing researchers is unacceptable and that change is needed.

In recent years, the Irish University Association, an employer organisation for the university sector, has developed a Research Career Framework and an accompanying recommended researcher pay scale for use across the HEI sector. These pay scales have been adopted by most funding agencies and employers in the sector. In effect, this means that an employer organisation has established the rate of pay for a group of employees and a career development framework for these workers without engaging in collective bargaining with the trade unions operating in HEIs. The difficulties are immediately clear; researchers are spending decades on successive fixed-term contracts with no prospect of securing long-term employment in academia, many are remaining at an entry-level Postdoc level 1 grade for many years with no real progression routes, and many workers are denied pay increases negotiated by IFUT and the ICTU Public Services Committee.

[67] Joint Committee on Education, Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science, 2022, p. 98

IFUT calls on DFHERIS and sector employers to engage with IFUT in collective bargaining on behalf of researchers. We need to agree and regularly review salary scales and grading to develop a fit for purpose Research Career Framework. Additionally, research funding agencies, including SFI and IRC, need to engage with IFUT to discuss how they can fund research projects that employ research staff to the greatest extent possible on long-term, stable contracts. We note the intention to replace SFI and IRC with a new Research and Innovation entity. Therefore, we call on DFHERIS to engage with IFUT to examine ways to ensure that the new legislation includes provisions for collective bargaining processes to be established for researchers across the HE sector.

5.2.10 Explore the Possibility of Establishing an SEO for Researchers

In IFUT, there is a prevailing sense that researchers are treated with disrespect as employees. They are denied collective representation and collective bargaining, their terms and conditions are set across the sector without their input, and this has a devastating impact on their career progression and day-to-day employment conditions.

While IFUT would like to engage directly in negotiations with employers in the sector, we believe they have a history of letting researchers down. IFUT will explore the possibility of establishing a Sectoral Employment Order for researchers in the absence of collective bargaining directly with employers in the sector to improve researcher salaries, conditions, and career progression opportunities.

5.2.11 Increase teaching academic staff numbers

On behalf of IFUT, the TASC examined the issue of student -to-staff ratios and the demographic increases in the third-level students expected in the years ahead. Based on their findings, they recommended that the state should increase the number of teaching academic staff by around 650 net per annum over the next decade. IFUT supports this recommendation. Adding these additional posts will not only reduce the student-to-staff ratio but will also allow for quality research-informed teaching posts to be created in the sector and a move away from teaching only hourly paid teaching positions.

The latest OECD figures indicate that the staff–student ratio is 22.4:1. To bring that ratio down to 15:1, the OECD average, teaching staff numbers would need to increase by 49.3%.

We estimate that there were 13,138 academic teaching staff in 2022. This would constitute an increase of 6482. Note that these figures assume no change in student numbers and no fall in teaching staff due to retirement or other life events. As mentioned earlier, the government presents a range of scenarios in terms of projected increases in student numbers between 2021/22 and 2031/32. The lower bound increase is 5.6% and the upper bound increase is 18.8%. An increase of 50% or around 650 each year is therefore a conservative estimate to bring Ireland to a staff student ratio of 15:1[68].

If the Irish HE sector works toward a lower staff -to-student ratio, the increased staff numbers and staff hours required will enable a greater proportion of jobs to be filled on a long-term, full-time basis thereby reducing precarious employment.

5.2.12 Focus employment on faculty and academics, not administrators and managers

According to TASC research for IFUT;

We know that at least since 2012, non-faculty staff have outnumbered faculty staff. Part of this is due to a reduction in public funding, which affects the composition of remaining funding. This is contrary to the spirit and effectiveness of higher education. Greater public funding would enable focus on core competencies, research, and teaching, and less on marketing and fundraising.[69]

IFUT calls on employers to ensure that they develop workforce plans and recruitment strategies that prioritise recruitment of those grades directly involved in teaching, research, and teaching support.

[68] TASC, 2023
[69] Ibid..

5.3 Conclusion

The IFUT survey results clearly show the reality of precarious employment for many categories of staff. It will come as a shock to many people outside of higher education that there are workers on zero hour contracts, workers performing several hours of unpaid work every week, workers on fixed-term contracts for over a decade, workers denied maternity pay, sick pay, annual leave, and more, and workers excluded from staff lists and staff meetings, from decision making fora due to their casual employment status.

It is not a coincidence that the part of the public sector with some of the worst employment contracts and practices is the sector with the lowest level of trade union organisation. It is essential that workers in higher education get organised in their unions and support campaigns to tackle precarious employment. Workers not currently members of their appropriate trade union should join a union today.

All staff engaged in teaching, teaching support, and research are valued members of the university community and deserve adequate and fair working conditions and contracts, which are covered by collective bargaining. Academics in more established and secure roles within HEIs, both members and those not currently members of IFUT, should work with us toward that goal.

Academics have demonstrated a willingness to stand in solidarity with precariously employed staff in pursuit of a fairer system of employing workers in HEIs to reduce the reliance on precarious employment practices, as evidenced by the responses to the IFUT survey. We call on these academics to support local campaigns and initiatives organised by their local IFUT Branch against precarious employment.

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Appendix 1 – IFUT Precarious Employment Campaign and Anti-Precarity charter

Precarious employment is a growing feature in nearly every sector of the economy. Precarious employment has long been a feature of Higher Education but since the economic recession in the early years of this century and the subsequent public funding cuts, employment control mechanisms and ideological pursuit of "flexibility" and "efficiency" in the form of employment precarity for thousands of workers, **precarious employment has increased**. Both employees and students are negatively affected by the increasing casualisation of the higher education workforce. Workers on precarious contracts suffer income and employment insecurity which can impact their mental health, their relationships, their ability to start a family or buy a home. It can be professionally damaging and personally devastating. Precarity also has a negative impact on the quality of research and education in the institutions themselves which in turn affects the rankings of the very institutions hiring people on insecure, part time, temporary contracts.

As the only trade union in Ireland operating exclusively in higher education, this is a core priority for IFUT, and we are prepared to lead on this most important issue. However we want to work with our sister unions to maximise our effectiveness and power. It will take the commitment of all unions operating in the sector to campaign to end precarious employment. We will work along with students, the HE institutions and their representatives, and at a political level to address the causes of precarity and to work together to drive decent employment standards throughout higher education. **In IFUT we believe quality education and research relies on quality employment.**

We are asking each IFUT branch to consider the campaign principles adopted by the IFUT Precarious Employment Campaign Steering Group. We ask branches to engage with this document to afford us your experience and insights when you offer amendments or additions. We want to agree with our branches and the IFUT Executive the consistent messaging and aims of our campaign and once agreed we can commence the work of engaging with workers and other stakeholders to progress our demands.

We intend for this campaign to be informed by the very workers most impacted by the issue of precarious employment in higher education and supported by all staff

We want to involve a cohort of workers in the sector who are currently under-represented in unions in the work of their branch and the Federation

We want to increase our membership thereby increasing our density, power, and effectiveness

We want the campaign to be visible and inclusive

We want to create a new generation of IFUT activists

We want to bring precarity to the fore in our negotiations and to drive decent employment standards

We want to ensure the current negotiated decent terms and conditions for many workers in the sector are not undermined by a race to the bottom

We want to ensure the quality of the teaching and research of our members is enabled to flourish in a system with enhanced decency, respect, and security

We want to increase IFUT's capacity to campaign and organise on issues which impact our members now and, in the future,

IFUT Anti-Precarity Charter

In IFUT we maintain that universities are a public good and should be resourced and funded as such. We believe precarious employment is a symptom of chronic underfunding which has been exploited. We understand that certain types of precarious employment will be needed but that the circumstances of such required precarious contracts should be discussed and agreed locally to minimise the use and type of precarious contracts used across the sector.

Precarious employment can be understood as all employment which is less than full time and / or permanent . For workers in higher education in Ireland this includes workers on zero hours contracts, contracts stating there is no "mutuality of obligation," involuntary part time contracts, short term, fixed-term, seasonal, modular, and hourly paid.

This IFUT Charter will guide both members and branches on how to challenge the abuse of precarious employment, to support and defend members affected by precarious employment and to establish standards of decent work for all in higher education. This charter was developed by the IFUT Precarious Employment Campaign Steering Group in 2022 in conjunction with all branches of IFUT. This charter demonstrates agreed principles which IFUT branches and members will observe in order to increase pressure on employers, funders, and the relevant government departments to improve the employment practices and conditions in the industry.

IFUT will endeavour to enhance access to more secure employment and career pathways for precariously employed academic and research staff whenever possible

IFUT members will not cooperate with exploitative employment practices and raise same with branch as they are encountered

IFUT will engage with the university / universities to reduce their reliance on the work of casual staff

IFUT will engage with student unions to garner support for the IFUT campaign based on acceptance that a quality education of students depends on quality conditions for the staff who contribute to their teaching and learning. We will ensure students are aware of the unacceptable conditions of employment of some of the staff with whom they interact

IFUT will work with the Athena SWAN committees and Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Units to ensure the gender and ethnicity dimensions to precarity are explored and tackled

IFUT will reserve the right to take collective action to defend the rights of precariously employed workers

IFUT will demand that precarious employees are recognised as full members of the university workforce and be afforded access to work tools and supports at the outset of their employment.

All precarious staff should be included in the communications system of the university and should receive all information including announcements, job advertisements, President's Addresses, notice of staff meetings and should be listed in their school or department website.

IFUT will call for inductions for precarious staff in recognition of their isolation and vulnerability, including the opportunity to meet their IFUT Branch representatives and receive information on joining their union.

IFUT will demand that our colleagues are paid for all of the work that they do including lecture preparation, meetings and marking.

For fixed-term workers, IFUT will engage with employers to review the cynical approach taken to many Fixed-term Contracts whereby employers attempt to avoid a worker securing a CID under either Cush or the Protection of Employees (Fixed-term Work) Act.

For regular hourly paid academic staff, IFUT will seek agreement that hourly paid academic staff will be offered positions at a ratio of full-time comparators. We will call on the university to regularise the employment of hourly paid staff to regular, part time academic positions on banded contracts or another acceptable alternative agreed locally.

For part time staff, we will seek agreement that they enjoy the same terms and conditions of their full-time colleagues including access to maternity, paternity, compassionate, study, sick leave schemes and more. We will demand that part time staff have transparent, fair access to paid annual leave. We will demand that additional hours that are available are offered to existing staff in the first instance and that where an employee works regular additional hours their contract is amended to reflect this.

IFUT will seek to engage with individual employers and / or across the sector to agree a realistic research career framework guided by best practice from around Europe to provide transparency, fairness, and pathways for researchers. IFUT will demand that research staff are kept up to date on decisions about funding that affect their position.

IFUT will seek agreement that PhD Students undertaking work which should be paid, are paid appropriately on agreed terms and conditions and, as paid workers, receive equal treatment to their counterparts across the university.

IFUT will support demands that the PhD stipend will be raised to no less than the living wage (currently €28,000 per annum) to ensure equal access to higher education for PhD students who do not have independent means of financing their studies, and in recognition of the important role PhD students play in contributing to the research of universities.

IFUT will demand that the university / universities cease the practice of introducing new grades of precarious workers to perform many of the duties of full time, permanent colleagues, on lesser terms and conditions. Where new grades have been introduced without agreement, IFUT will seek engagement with the university to establish the appropriate terms and conditions, including salary scales and progression routes for the grade.

IFUT will support every precariously employed member who is informed they will be made redundant. We will call on employers to fulfil their legal obligation to consider alternatives to redundancy. Where a post is redundant IFUT will demand members receive enhanced redundancy terms.

IFUT will seek engagement with employer locally and across the sector regularly to secure information showing the impact these policies have had on reducing casualisation.

Appendix 2 – Cush Report breakdown of employment figure per institution.

The NUI Galway figures include hourly paid occasional lecturing staff. This cohort was not included in the figures of any of the other universities. The NUIG figures included 1646 hourly paid lecturing staff. The figures were based on Q3 of 2015. The first table lists headcount, and the second details Full time Equivalents (FTEs).

University	Headcount	Part-time Permanent	Part-time fixed-term	Full-time fixed-term	Full-time permanent	NOT full-time and permanent
UCD	1036	66	52	80	838	198
UCC	748	60	15	70	603	145
TCD	729	31	36	149	513	216
NUIM	278	4	8	14	252	26
NUIG	2422	160	1659*	13	590	1832
UL	612	34	68	134	376	236
DCU	580	0	155	89	336	244
Total	6405	355	1993	549	3508	2897

University	Total FTE	NOT full-time and permanent FTE No.	NOT full-time and permanent FTE %
UCD	932.88	116.05	12.4%
UCC	701.26	107.63	15.3%
TCD	654.24	168.65	25.8%
NUIM	273	21	7.7%
NUIG	730.67	140.67	19.3%
UL	551.5	181.5	32.9%
DCU	454.5	121.5	26.7%
Total	4298.05	857	19.9%

In relation to hourly paid staff, the report states, 'except for NUI Galway, the Universities have not provided figures in respect of hourly paid contracts. The figures supplied by Galway indicate that this is a significant phenomenon in the university sector.' (Cush, 2016)

Appendix 3 – Breakdown of contract type within each institution.

Institution	Contract type	N
University College Dublin (UCD)	Permanent	71
	CID*	7
	Fixed-term	23
	Hourly paid/Casual	6
	Not stated	1
University College Cork (UCC)	Permanent	64
	CID	4
	Fixed-term	22
	Hourly paid/Casual	6
Trinity College Dublin (TCD)	Permanent	39
	CID	7
	Fixed-term	21
	Hourly paid/Casual	6
	PHD Candidate	4
	Not stated	1
Maynooth University (MU)	Permanent	51
	CID	3
	Fixed-term	11
	Hourly paid/Casual	10
University of Galway (UG)	Permanent	27
	CID	1
	Fixed-term	11
	Hourly paid/Casual	3
	PHD Candidate	1
Mary Immaculate College Limerick (MIC)	Permanent	30
	CID	3
	Fixed-term	4
	Hourly paid/Casual	3
Dublin City University (DCU)	Permanent	28
	Fixed-term	9
	Hourly paid/Casual	1
Technological University Dublin (TUD)	Permanent	5
	CID	2
	Fixed-term	1
	Hourly paid/Casual	5
	PHD Candidate	2
University of Limerick (UL)	Permanent	1
	Fixed-term	5
	Hourly paid/Casual	5
	PHD Candidate	1
Marino Institute of Education (MIE)	Permanent	7
	Fixed-term	3
	Hourly paid/Casual	2
Royal College of Surgeons of Ireland (RCSI)	Permanent	8
	Fixed-term	2
	Hourly paid/Casual	1
Other	Permanent	11
	Fixed-term	6
	Hourly paid/Casual	1
Not stated	Permanent	4
*CID was not one of the main options provided, yet appeared frequently as 'Other (please specify)'		

Institution	Job role	N
University College Dublin (UCD)	Professor	17
	Associate Professor/Senior Lecturer	19
	Assistant Professor/Lecturer	59
	Researcher	6
	Tutor/Teaching Assistant/Fellow	4
	Other	2
	Not stated	1
University College Cork (UCC)	Professor	6
	Assistant Professor/Lecturer	61
	Researcher	20
	Tutor/Teaching Assistant/Fellow	6
	PhD	1
	Other	2
Trinity College Dublin (TCD)	Professor	8
	Associate Professor/Senior Lecturer	10
	Assistant Professor/Lecturer	34
	Researcher	11
	Tutor/Teaching Assistant/Fellow	8
	Librarian	3
	PhD	2
	Other	2
Maynooth University (MU)	Professor	15
	Associate Professor/Senior Lecturer	9
	Assistant Professor/Lecturer	35
	Researcher	7
	Tutor/Teaching Assistant/Fellow	6
	Librarian	2
	Not stated	1
University of Galway (UG)	Professor	6
	Associate Professor/Senior Lecturer	1
	Assistant Professor/Lecturer	26
	Researcher	7
	Tutor/Teaching Assistant/Fellow	3
Mary Immaculate College Limerick (MIC)	Associate Professor/Senior Lecturer	4
	Assistant Professor/Lecturer	34
	Tutor/Teaching Assistant/Fellow	1
	Other	1
Dublin City University (DCU)	Professor	6
	Associate Professor/Senior Lecturer	5
	Assistant Professor/Lecturer	22
	Researcher	3
	Tutor/Teaching Assistant/Fellow	1
	Other	1
Technological University Dublin (TUD)	Assistant Professor/Lecturer	10
	Researcher	3
	Tutor/Teaching Assistant/Fellow	1
	PhD	1
University of Limerick (UL)	Associate Professor/Senior Lecturer	1
	Assistant Professor/Lecturer	8
	Researcher	3
Marino Institute of Education (MIE)	Assistant Professor/Lecturer	8
	Librarian	4
Royal College of Surgeons Ireland (RCSI)	Professor	2
	Assistant Professor/Lecturer	6
	Researcher	1
	Other	2
Other	Assistant Professor/Lecturer	6
	Researcher	7
	Other	5
Not stated	Assistant Professor/Lecturer	4

Appendix 4 – Hourly rate per institution

Institution	Respondents (n)	Paid hours per week Mean ± SD	Total hours worked per week Mean ± SD	Percentage of the hours worked that were unpaid (%)
TUD	5	9.8 ± 6.5	21.0 ± 9.6	**46.7**
University College Cork	7	6.4 ± 2.5	15 ± 5.9	**42.9**
Maynooth University	8	8.1 ± 5.4	19.9 ± 13.4	**40.9**
University of Galway	5	5.6 ± 3.9	14.2 ± 8.9	**39.4**
Mary Immaculate College	5	13.0 ± 5.5	33.0 ± 6.7	**39.4**
University of Limerick	5	6.8 ± 2.4	21.6 ± 8.4	**31.5**
University College Dublin	4	7.8 ± 4.6	29.0 ± 8.6	**26.7**
Trinity College Dublin	5	5.0 ± 2.0	19.8 ± 17.5	**25.3**
Overall	44	7.8 ± 4.6	20.9 ± 11.3	**37.0**

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