



# Addressing the precarity of academic research careers

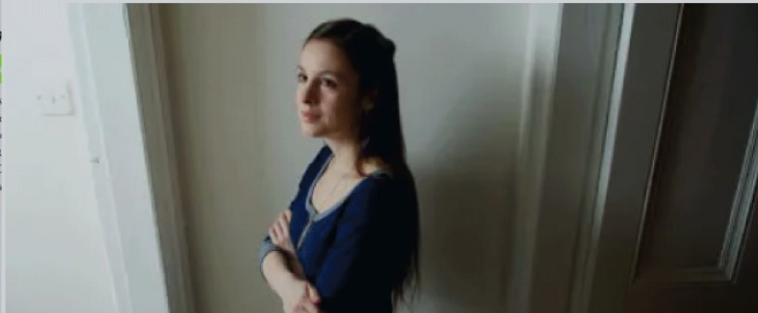
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FINAL CONFERENCE: TOWARDS A NEW ACADEMIC  
CAREER FRAMEWORK FOR LATVIA

5 May 2022

The Guardian

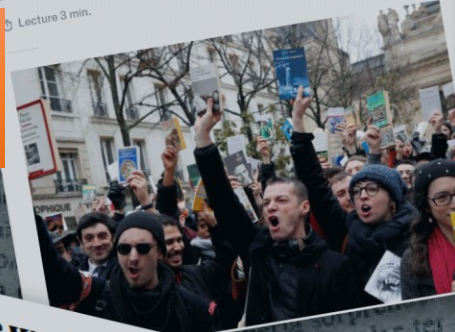


Le Monde

« Ça va être encore plus de compétition et de contrats précaires » : chercheurs et étudiants manifestent contre la loi sur la recherche

A Marseille, Toulouse ou Paris, des dizaines de milliers de chercheurs et étudiants ont défilé.

Le Monde avec AFP - Publié le 05 mars 2020 à 18h27 - Mis à jour le 06 mars 2020 à 08h44



Survey of the extent and effects of structural overtime at the Dutch universities



# Precarity of Research Careers Policy concern in many countries

## Why are many academics on short-term contracts for years?

More than a third of academics are on temporary contracts

The New York Times

TheUpshot

## The Bleak Job Landscape of Adjunctopia for Ph.D.s

Ruthless labor exploitation? Generational betrayal? Understanding the job crisis in academia requires a look at recent history.

## Temporary staff: Assess the working conditions of precariat researchers



## Second class academic citizens: The dehumanising effects of casualisation in higher education

UCU

January 2020



Key findings of research conducted by Nick Megoran and Olivia Mason of Newcastle University, endorsed by UCU  
With a foreword by Chi Onwurah, MP for Newcastle Central  
Launch date: Martin Luther King Day 20 January 2020

Cover Image: Statue of Revd Dr Martin Luther King Jr, Newcastle University

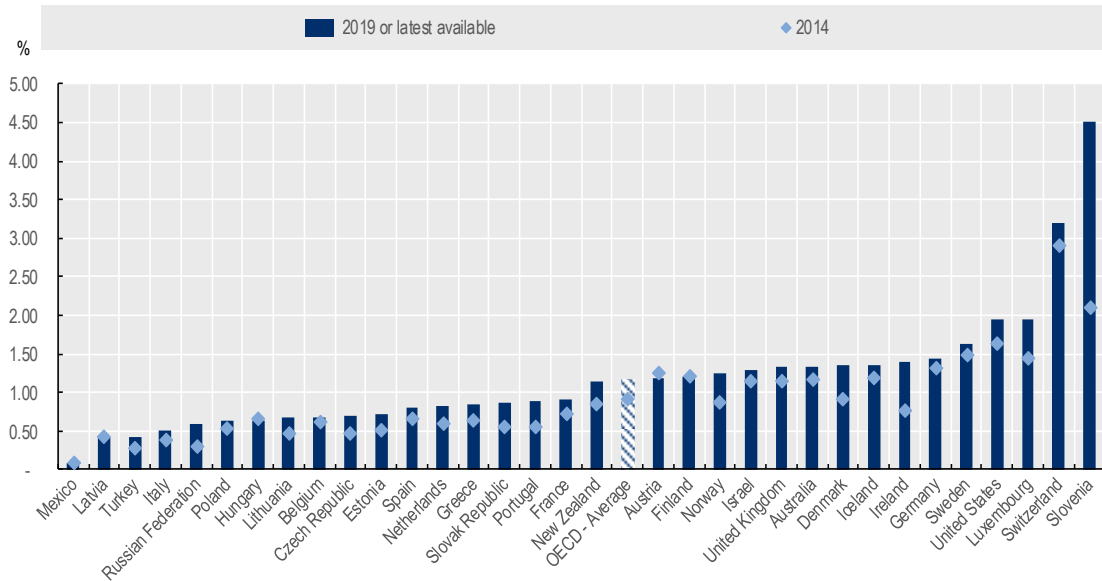
Universities must overhaul the toxic working culture for academic researchers  
Anton Muscatelli

A survey has warned that researchers are too stressed. It's up to universities to improve their working environment



## Share of doctorate level attainment in the population

25-64 years, 2014 and 2019 or latest year available



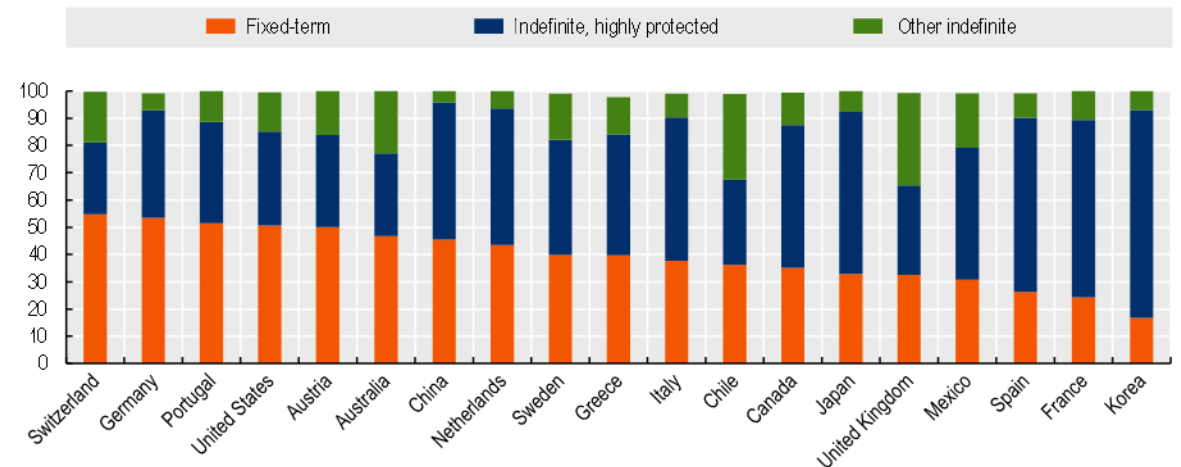
OECD (2020), "Education at a glance: Educational attainment and labour-force status", OECD Education Statistics (database), <https://doi.org/10.1787/889e8641-en> (accessed on 22 September 2020).

- The OECD average share of 25-64 year-olds with a doctorate is around 1%, but **the share has been increasing**, and if current trends continue, 2.3% of today's young adults (those aged 25-34) will enter doctoral studies at some point in their life.
- The **share of doctorate level attainment** in the population (25-64 year olds) of OECD countries **has increased by 25%** during the 5-year period 2014-2019.
- **The traditional academic career cannot absorb the increasing number of doctorate holders wishing to stay in academia.**

- Higher education has been the traditional sector of employment for doctorate holders in most countries.
- **Many younger doctoral holders will no longer find a stable career position in academic research.**
- Around one third of the OECD labour force are in temporary or part-time jobs or are self-employed, but **the scale of precarity is much higher in the academic research sector**, especially among early-career researchers.

## Job security of corresponding authors, by country of residence

Percentage of corresponding authors, 2018, selected economies

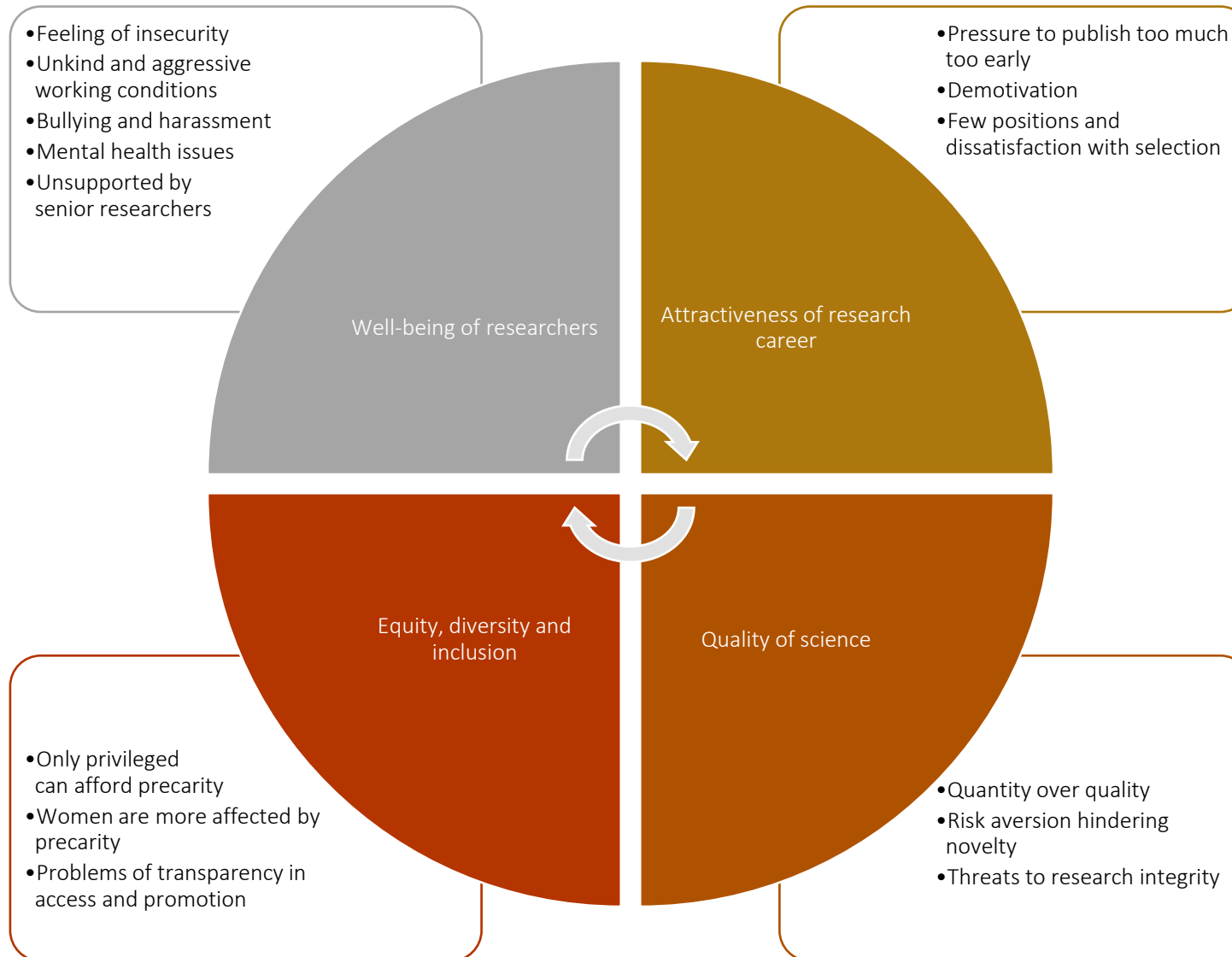


<http://oe.cd/issa>

# Effects of precarity

Wellcome Trust  
Survey (2020)

Nature postdoctoral-  
researcher survey (2020)



# Challenges

- The “permadoc” phenomenon
- Outdated career structures
- Unstructured postdoctoral phase
- Excessive dependency on senior researchers
- Lack of diversity in the research workforce
- Lack of inter-sectoral mobility
- Compatibility of family life and academic career
- Issues arising from international mobility
- Under-developed human resources management in institutions
- The academic career is no longer attractive for some
- Poor evidence base
- Detrimental effects of covid-19

Findings from 15 country notes and circa 100 policy interviews in 11 countries, at EU level and with TUAC members.

# Recommendations

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1. Improve the **working conditions** and offer more transparent, predictable and flexible career prospects for postdoctoral researchers
2. Offer broad **professional development** during postdoctoral training
3. Promote **equal opportunities, diversity and inclusion** in research careers by identifying and addressing existing biases and challenges
4. Establish better links between research assessment and funding, and **human resource management** policy objectives
5. Improve **institutional practices** regarding human resource management in research
6. Promote the **inter-sectoral mobility** of researchers
7. Support the **international mobility** of researchers
8. Develop the **evidence base** on research careers
9. **Include all relevant stakeholders** in the governance and coordination of research careers and ensure concerted, systemic action

# Factors influencing impact of policy

## Enablers

Consultation with stakeholders

Sector-wide agreements

Funding with strings attached to policy objectives

Postdoc networks

## Barriers

Research culture

Incentives shaped by research assessment metrics

Uncertainty regarding funding

Lack of good evidence base

## Further reading

OECD publishing

### REDUCING THE PRECARITY OF ACADEMIC RESEARCH CAREERS

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POLICY PAPERS  
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### 3 Challenges and new demands on the academic research workforce

Academic career structures and the allocation processes for research funding largely reflect merit-based competition among individuals, which has proven its effectiveness over time in promoting excellence in fundamental research. However, concern is growing about how these structures and processes affect the precarity and attractiveness of research careers and generate a lack of diversity in the scientific workforce. There is an expectation that science will not only produce highly-cited publications, but also rapidly translate into societal benefits and solutions to global challenges – such as the COVID-19 pandemic. The emphasis on individual disciplinary excellence and short-term outputs fits uneasily alongside the need for more transdisciplinary research, more novelty and risk-taking in research, and more data-intensive research. This chapter reviews recent OECD analysis of the challenges within science systems, many of which are accentuated by COVID-19, and what these imply for policy measures to build a diverse, appropriately skilled and motivated science workforce.

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<https://doi.org/10.1787/72f6f879-en>





# The research workforce of the future: promoting alternative career options for doctoral and postdoctoral researchers

Follow up project to the *Research Precariat* project

# Terms of reference

- Focus on career options within and beyond academia for doctoral and postdoctoral researchers
- Focus more on the value of PhDs than the question of whether there are too many PhDs
- View equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) as cross-cutting issues
- Include research evaluation in relation to recruitment and promotion of individual researchers
- Recognise lack of comparative data and different national contexts ('country note' approach)



*Let's Discuss!*

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