The Use of Insecure Contracts in Teaching and Research at the University of Bath: A Bath UCU Committee Report

Date: May 2026

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About the authors
Report Summary
Institutional Context: The Anti-Casualisation Agreement
Methodology
Quantitative data on the use of insecure contracts in teaching at Bath
Qualitative data on the use of insecure contracts in teaching at Bath
Confusion and uncertainty over the GTA 'term-time only' (TTO) contract
The use of insecure contracts in research at Bath
Key Findings
Conclusions: Let's get active

About the authors

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Report Summary

Having both formally begun our respective roles as UCU Bath's Anti-Casualisation Officer and Postgraduate Members Rep in September 2025, we decided to conduct some initial baseline research to help us understand the extent to, and nature in which, insecure (fixed-term and casual) contracts are being used in teaching and research across the University. We present our findings from this research in this report - a combination of the University's own quantitative data alongside interviews with academic and administrative staff and Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs) from almost all academic departments.
With regard to the provision of teaching by staff, these findings reveal significant variation in the both extent and nature of the use of insecure contracts by academic departments. Some academic departments employ very few fixed-term lecturers. Some even employ none at all (Chemical Engineering, Health, Maths, Politics & International Relations).
At the postgraduate level, we find similar variation. Of major concern is our finding that many GTAs are undertaking unpaid work within their departments. This raises potential compliance issues with UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) - the funder of many University doctoral positions - who have stated that:

> UKRI students must not be on an oral or implied employment contract, and ROs may need to take steps to ensure that supervisors or other staff do not imply that a student is in service to

> the university, for example, by asking a student to teach "for experience" while in receipt of a stipend. [1]

With regard to the use of insecure contracts in research, the dominant story we heard from interviewees was that of what a recent UCU Bath report calls the 'traditional operating model' - postdoctoral research positions are fixed-term because the research grants that fund them are fixed term. However, we did also glean information about additional crucially important variable factors to consider regarding the extent to which Postdoctoral Research Assistants and Associates (PDRAs) do or do not get opportunities for support, skills development, integration within wider academic departments, and redeployment to new fixed-term or even open-ended roles. Also, we present information about the piloting of an alternative 'pooled resourcing' model in three University research/research support centres. The pooled resourcing model centres on employing PDRAs on open-ended contracts by pooling grant income, thereby delinking individual research positions from individual grants. We find mixed evidence about the changes effected by the pooled resourcing pilots in the various centres. The University's own evaluations offer evidence for very positive, even transformative, strategic, research, cultural, and personal outcomes in two centres. Our interview with a member of one centre piloting pooled resourcing was also supportive, but emphasised the model's limited significance in challenging deeper structural constraints for research staff.
In this report, we present our data and summarise our key findings. Rather than offering recommendations for actions aimed at remedying problematic practices, our objective is to stimulate conversations within UCU Bath and the wider University that can lead to collectively agreed strategic responses.

Institutional Context: The Anti-Casualisation Agreement

Central to the institutional context in which we present our findings is the 'Anti-Casualisation Agreement' signed by the University and UCU Bath in March

[1] https://www.ukri.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/UKRI-300125-PS-ReviewOfTheUKRIStandardTermsAndConditionsOfTrainingGrant.pdf

2023.[2] The Agreement established a framework for reversing the trend of increasing casualisation of academic labour at Bath. Among the many pledges made by the University in the Agreement, those most relevant to *staff teaching* employment contracts concerned:

- moving research and teaching staff onto open-ended contracts after at least four years of service;
- ensuring that required work commitments do not exceed contracted hours; and
- making the standard fixed-term contract two years long 'unless external funding or local circumstances (for example, maternity cover) make this inappropriate'.

With regard to '*Postgraduates who Teach*' (*PGwT*), the University agreed to build on a 2019 trial of offering 'fractional salaried contracts' for PGwT by committing to 'offering all Postgraduate Researchers who teach and are being asked to undertake at least 0.1 FTE a fractional salaried post'. The University also committed to working with UCU to introduce fractional contracts for 'all teaching work that is not ad-hoc or one off' and to 'looking at the possibilities for longer duration contracts where appropriate'.

With regard to *postdoctoral researchers* on fixed-term contracts, the University acknowledged in the Agreement that 'more can be done to aid the internal redeployment of research and research-related staff through a combination of technical and policy changes so as to improve stability of employment'. It pledged alongside UCU Bath to 'initiate two working parties to determine practical recommendations for changes in our current practices with an aim of reporting by December 2023 with a view to implementing agreed recommendations by February 2024. The Agreement also contains plans for 'testing the feasibility of a pooled resourcing model' in subsequent years. Crucially, the University also pledged to 'implement the jointly agreed actions' and to 'monitor and review those regularly with UCU in the timeframes agreed'.

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2 https://www.bath.ac.uk/publications/collective-agreement-to-address-casualisation-and-insecure-employment-in-the-e-r-job-family/attachments/collective_agreement_to_address_causualisation_and_insecure_employment.pdf

Three years have passed since the signing of the Anti-Casualisation Agreement. The findings we present here should be evaluated in the context of the specific pledges made by the University in the Agreement.[3]

Methodology

In this report we combine a presentation and analysis of the University's own quantitative data with a presentation and analysis of our own qualitative data - interviews conducted with members of staff (Joel) and postgraduate GTAs (Alex) across almost all academic departments. Joel was unable to find individuals from the departments of Economics and the School of Management to participate. Alex was unable to find GTAs to interview in the School of Management or the departments of Chemistry and Electronic and Electrical Engineering.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted either online or in-person. Interviewees gave answers to a set list of questions - one for staff members, one for GTAs, with the interviews often moving to other areas of concern as guided by the interviewee. In a few cases, where individuals were unable to meet they shared written answers to our list of questions. The two lists of questions are shared below:

[3] We also point readers to the University's Code of Practice for the Employment of Research Staff.

Questions for staff members

Teaching

- Can you state or estimate how much teaching is done by 1) GTAs and 2) staff on insecure contracts in your department?
- Transparency – how are these contracts allocated? Advertising (external, internal?), tap on shoulder?
- What is the general length of fixed term contracts?
- What is the general fraction of fractional contracts?
- Are there any unpaid work practices, e.g. not being paid for training, guest lecturing or supervision, convening, marking, etc?
- Departmental narrative – What is the justification given for using temporary/insecure conditions/contracts?
- Do staff on insecure contracts get incremental improvements on the spinal scale?
- Are there any examples of grade mismatch, e.g. grade 6 contract doing grade 7 work?
- What are we missing here?

Research

- Can you state or estimate how much research is done by 1) GTAs and 2) staff on insecure contracts in your department?
- If they exist, what are the conditions?
- Transparency – how are these contracts allocated? Advertising (external, internal?), tap on shoulder?
- What are we missing here?

Questions for GTAs

- How are GTA contracts allocated?
- Are GTAs employed on a casual or low fractional basis?
- What responsibilities does a GTA role entail in your department?
- What is the justification given for casual contracts?
- Do GTAs get incremental improvements on the spinal scale?
- Are there any unpaid work practices, e.g, not being paid for training, guest lecturing, or supervision, convening, marking etc?
- What are we missing here?

Since the capacity to answer the questions regarding staff members required significant institutional knowledge, interviews were generally conducted with relatively experienced, senior individuals. Since the questions concerning GTAs required more experiential knowledge, individuals currently or recently working as GTAs were interviewed.

All respondents have been fully anonymised. We shared the relevant section of our report with each of our interviewees, asking them for their consent to publish before we released this report and waiting a working week for their replies.

Quantitative data on the use of insecure contracts in teaching at Bath

As requested through the Joint Academic Consultation and Negotiation Committee (JACNC), we received some data from the University regarding the use of fixed-term and casual contracts across the University. This data was provided to us by HR. It may not be fully correct (and we have had reports that it might not be). We received three datasets:

- Dataset 1: Teaching carried out by GTAs employed on low-fractional contracts
- Dataset 2: Teaching carried out by GTAs employed on a casual basis
- Dataset 3: Teaching carried out by fixed-term employees

Dataset 1: Teaching by GTAs employed on low-fractional contracts

Table 1: Teaching by GTAs employed on low-fractional contracts

Department	GTA FTE total
Dept of Economics	1.35
Dept of Education	1.44
Dept of Electronic & Electrical Eng	0.20
Dept of Mathematical Sciences	3.41
Dept of Politics, Languages & International Studies	1.47

Dept of Psychology	1.45
Dept of Social & Policy Sciences	3.88

Table 1 shows the departments that employ GTAs on low-fractional contracts along with the amount of teaching undertaken by these GTAs as expressed through a Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) contract. Whilst in the Department of Electronic and Electrical Engineering (EEE), GTAs collectively deliver the equivalent of just 20% of one full-time contract, GTAs in Social and Policy Studies (SPS) are responsible for delivering as much teaching as almost four full-time teaching workloads.[4]

The principal finding of note here is that only a minority of departments currently offer low-fractional contracts to their GTAs. This indicates that departments require more support and encouragement in meeting their obligations to offer low-fractional contracts to GTAs as set out in the 2023 Anti-Casualisation Agreement.

Dataset 2: Teaching by GTA hourly-paid workers

Table 2: Teaching by GTA hourly-paid workers

Department	Hours	FTE
Dept for Health	1367	0.85
Dept of Architecture & Civil Engineering	77	0.05
Dept of Chemical Engineering	1965	1.22
Dept of Chemistry	502	0.31

[4] We received data regarding how much teaching is done by these GTAs as a proportion of the total WAMS allocation for each department. However, we chose not to include this here as GTAs are not currently included in WAMS.

Dept of Computer Science	5793	3.59
Dept of Economics	1171	0.73
Dept of Education	350	0.22
Dept of Electronic & Electrical Eng	252	0.16
Dept of Life Sciences	5223	3.24
Dept of Mathematical Sciences	5040	3.12
Dept of Mechanical Engineering	6588	4.08
Dept of Physics	947	0.59
Dept of Politics, Languages & International Studies	146	0.09
Dept of Psychology	4481	2.78
Dept of Social & Policy Sciences	198	0.12
School of Management	0	0.00

Table 2 shows the departments that employ GTAs on a casual basis, including the total hours of work undertaken by these GTAs as expressed through a Full-Time Equivalent Contract. As above, we note that this shows the majority of departments only employ GTAs on a casual basis.

The data from Tables 1 and 2 reveal a mixed picture:

- In some departments, there is very little or even no requirement for PGRs to carry out GTA teaching duties (e.g. EEE, School of Management, Health, Chemistry,

- In some departments, a lot of teaching is carried out by GTAs who are only employed on a casual basis (e.g. Life Sciences, Physics, Mechanical Engineering)
- In some departments, mostly in the Faculty of Humanities & Social Sciences (HSS), GTAs are employed on fractional contracts for the vast majority or even all of their teaching work (e.g. Politics & International Relations (P&IR), SPS, Education)

These data show there remains significant work to be done to meet the pledge made in the 2023 Agreement to offer PGRs fractional contracts for all their regular teaching.

Dataset 3: Teaching by fixed-term employees

Table 3: Teaching by fixed-term employees

Department	Amount of teaching by fixed-term staff (FTE)	Total amount of teaching (FTE)	Proportion
Dept for Health	0.00	27.89	0.00%
Dept of Architecture & Civil Engineering	0.40	17.83	2.19%
Dept of Chemical Engineering	0.30	10.81	2.70%
Dept of Chemistry	1.00	15.81	5.95%
Dept of Computer Science	3.30	32.51	9.21%
Dept of Economics	1.00	31.45	3.08%
Dept of Education	1.00	12.35	7.49%

Dept of Electronic & Electrical Eng	1.10	12.49	8.09%
Dept of Life Sciences	5.70	41.54	12.07%
Dept of Mathematical Sciences	1.00	28.13	3.43%
Dept of Mechanical Engineering	0.70	33.98	2.02%
Dept of Physics	0.00	13.94	0.00%
Dept of Politics, Languages & International Studies	0.00	39.96	0.00%
Dept of Psychology	1.20	20.78	5.46%
Dept of Social & Policy Sciences	1.00	20.64	4.62%
School of Management	4.50	55.21	7.54%

Table 3 shows the departments that employ fixed-term teaching staff. It also shows how much teaching is undertaken by these employees as expressed by a Full-Time Equivalent contract along with the amount of teaching done by fixed-term staff as a proportion of the WAMS allocation in each department. We note that some fixed-term employees may be seconded from industry, particularly in the School of Management and the Department of Life Sciences.

The amount of teaching done by fixed-term employees indicates that progress targeted in the Agreement in 'avoiding 'gap filling' roles on short fixed-term contracts' by 'enabling effective resource planning with respect to teaching capacity' is slow in some departments. Further, we note that this data excludes fixed-term employees who are contracted for non-redundancy reasons, such as covering teaching staff on maternity leave or to cover the teaching load of Heads of Department.

Qualitative data on the use of insecure contracts in teaching at Bath

Having shared our quantitative data, in this section, we present summaries of our interviewees with academic and administrative staff in almost all departments about the situation concerning the use of insecure teaching contracts for both staff and PGRs. These departmental summaries are presented in alphabetical order.

Architecture and Civil Engineering (ACE)

Staff teaching

Our staff interviewee from ACE was only able to answer our questions by email. They did not tell us how many staff are on insecure contracts in the Department. However, we can infer that there are some since they also told us that 'fractional roles are advertised…internally and externally through a competitive process' and that these were usually three-year positions on a minimum of 0.4 FTE. They also referred to the existence of 'externals', i.e. professional experts, who come in to deliver a small amount of teaching. Externals are paid on a casual basis.

Our interviewee told us that they believed that all staff members delivering teaching on any contractual basis receive annual incremental wage increases, either in line with University pay structure rises (casually paid) or HR guidance (self-employed externals). Our interviewee told us that they were unaware of any work going unpaid or underpaid (at the wrong pay grade) in the Department.

PGR teaching

Our staff interviewee informed us that: 'We have been unable to secure any GTA contracts in Dept of Architecture and Civil Engineering, as the university requires an equivalent of 0.2 FTE per year since 2025.' The actual minimum requirement is 0.1 FTE.

We interviewed two GTAs in ACE. Our GTA interviewees explained that lab demonstrations are offered on a casual basis, totalling around two or three hours of workload per week. Beyond this, only one GTA teaching opportunity is available, with some GTAs being employed in Mechanical Engineering to gain more hands-on

teaching experience. As part of their lab demonstrator casual contract, GTAs claim payment for training. However, they do not claim for preparation time. This could amount to some unpaid work occurring at the GTA level.
Our interviewees noted that they were able to select the units which they demonstrated on. GTAs are not offered opportunities to mark, give lectures, or co-supervise final-year research projects. The interviewees explained that most PGRs in the Department want to be employed on a low-fractional basis, yet this contract had yet to be offered.

Chemical Engineering

Staff teaching

Our staff interviewee in Chemical Engineering told us that there are currently no staff on fixed-term or casual teaching contracts in the Department.
The central problem concerning employment practices in Chemical Engineering lay, for our staff interviewee, in a situation they termed 'permanent staff exploitation'. This refers to the Department's practice of not replacing a departing staff member either with an additional hire or even employing someone new on a temporary fixed-term basis. Instead, 'the leaving person's work is distributed among the team'. This is causing workloads and stress levels to rise among remaining staff.

PGR teaching

There is a large amount of lab demonstration teaching work conducted by PGR GTAs in Chemical Engineering. Demand for teaching generally exceeds supply. Emails offering teaching opportunities are sent to the PGR mailing list. GTAs are not offered fractional contracts, but put in casual claims for their teaching hours. Our staff interviewee claimed that the Department had 'very good practices' concerning payment to PGRs for all aspects of their work, including undergoing any training. They did highlight the practice of PGR students not currently being paid for training undergraduate students in the practical methodologies required for their research projects. However, they saw this as an arrangement that was mutually beneficial for all parties.
Our GTA interviewee confirmed some of these findings regarding how GTAs are recruited and paid. However, they highlighted some issues regarding the terms of

their employment. The interviewee noted that they are paid a set amount of hours per demonstration which are often exceeded by the actual length of the demonstration, meaning some unpaid work is being done. They noted that they are paid for training. However, they felt that more could be offered, particularly as some of the training materials have errors. Further, the interviewee explained that, whilst they are paid to mark student work, the time allocated was insufficient. They were originally given 15 minutes to mark a script, with GTAs negotiating for this to be increased to 20 minutes. With regard to the issue referred to by our staff interviewee of GTAs not being paid for their supervision of undergraduate final-year research projects, the responsibilities of GTAs here are significant as they provide methodological training and act as the main point of contact for these students. This may point again to unpaid work being undertaken by GTAs in the Department.

Chemistry

Staff teaching

Our staff interviewee in Chemistry provided answers to our questions by email. They told us that some teaching staff are employed on fixed-term contracts. They were unsure of the general length of those contracts but thought they were usually one- and two-year posts. They did not know the usual fraction of these contracts. Our interviewee believed that staff on fixed-term contracts get annual incremental increases to their pay. They were unaware of any instances of work being unpaid or underpaid for both staff and GTAs.

PGR teaching

Our staff interviewee told us that there is not much teaching for GTAs to do in Chemistry and that the needed teaching is limited to lab demonstrations and some tutorial teaching. The vast majority of tutorial teaching is carried out by teaching staff. GTAs do not give lectures or run workshops in Chemistry. GTAs engaged in teaching generally choose to do three hours per week of lab demonstrations and provide six 1-hour tutorial sessions over the course of the academic year. Opportunities for lab demonstrating work are internally advertised to PhD

students. Opportunities for tutorial teaching are advertised to both PhD students and postdocs.

Computer Science

Staff teaching

The context of the situation in Computer Science must be understood with reference to what our staff interviewee described as a 'massive workload crisis' in 2021. This situation had been created by staff hires not keeping up with huge increases in student numbers. Such was the extent of the burden and frustration back in 2021 that every member of the Department sent a signed letter to the Head of Department (HoD) and Vice-Chancellor complaining about excessive workloads. That letter proved to be a watershed moment, since which time the Department's recruitment policy has been characterised by a 'pretty constant open door hiring policy' combined with a large amount of staff turnover as individuals move to positions at other universities or in the private sector.

Our interviewee told us that there are not many fixed-term teaching contracts for staff members in the Department. Those that are in place are usually two years in length and 'generally genuinely open-ended' in terms of leading to more secure contracts. Our interviewee attributed this to the fact that the Department is rapidly growing in size. In this context of rapid growth, our interviewee was not aware of any examples of working being unpaid or being paid at the wrong pay grade

PGR teaching

Teaching in Computer Science is characterised by a large proportion of lab-based teaching, demonstration, and supervision. Most of this lab teaching is carried out in the Department by GTAs. Usually, this would mean doctoral researchers. However, a 'desperate lack of PhD students' has meant that this teaching is conducted by Masters and even final year undergraduate students. The highly technical nature of this teaching makes this practicable.

To attract PhD students to teaching, mid-fractional fixed-term (0.2-0.5 FTE) Grade 7 lecturer contracts are awarded to PhD students before completion of their

doctorates. Doctoral researchers are convening undergraduate units for which they possess the necessary expertise to teach. In the face of this acute shortage of PhD students, our staff interviewee expressed the sense that certain supervisors are exerting pressure on their students to take on these contracts. As a consequence, a significant number of doctoral researchers are choosing to go part-time on their PhDs, some finding themselves stuck doing large amounts of teaching and therefore unable to make required or necessary progress with their research. Our interviewee highlighted a lack of transparency around the allocation of teaching contracts to PGRs, pointing to informal mechanisms through which certain students were chosen and put forward by certain supervisors.

We interviewed two GTAs who confirmed many of these findings. Although several GTAs are employed on a low-fractional contract in Computer Science, both of our interviewees are employed on a casual basis. The interviewees explained that their allocation to certain units was based on pre-existing relationships with unit convenors rather than a formal process.

Both interviewees assist with supervising final-year undergraduate student projects which involve providing guidance to the student in the first semester and written feedback in the second. One interviewee claimed that although students are assigned both a staff and GTA supervisor, in practice, GTAs take on significant supervisory responsibilities. GTAs also assist with the marking of the project. Both interviewees explained that their first year supervising was an unpaid trial year, with GTAs only being paid for supervision from their second year onwards. One interviewee explained that this was justified on the basis of the budgetary implications of issuing a new low-fractional contract. The other interviewee suggested that they would have been paid for all of their supervision if they had been employed on a low-fractional contract.

Economics

Staff teaching

We were unable to find any staff members in Economics to answer our questions.

PGR teaching

Although no staff members responded to our request for participation, we did interview a GTA in Economics. Our GTA interviewee explained that two teaching contracts are available. Low-fractional contracts commit GTAs to teaching across both semesters, whereas the casual contract lasts one semester. The low-fractional contract can include between 10 to 20 hours of work per week during term time, with most GTAs working closer to 10. The interviewee noted that GTAs can request more or fewer hours. The hours of the casual contract can vary but are roughly similar to the low-fractional contract. These contracts do not include marking, which is, instead, allocated on a separate casual basis. GTAs are paid for preparation time (one hour per hour of teaching) and for their office hours (one hour per week during term time). GTAs are allocated to certain units based on their expertise. No departmental training is offered. GTAs giving lectures is rare and done on an ad-hoc basis. Payment for these lectures is claimed casually.

Education

Staff teaching

We were fortunate enough to speak with two members of staff working in the Education Department. For the sake of clarity, we shall call them Interviewee A and Interviewee B here.

Interviewee A shared with us their view that 'since 2020, I think the Department has become really casualised' with a 'higher proportion of teaching done by insecure people - more GTAs and a lot of part-time teaching only contracts'. Interviewee B held the view that the Department was now 'very focused on trying to get long-standing people on more permanent contracts'. They pointed also to the fact that GTAs in Education are now offered two-year 0.2 FTE contracts. They insisted that 'we're trying our best'.

Interviewee A described a shift in the Department from a 'majority of teaching and research staff towards teaching only staff'. They saw this as having generated a divide between permanent teaching-research staff and temporary teaching only staff members. Interviewee A described the current system of recruiting some part-time lecturers as 'informal' and 'not transparent'. Interviewee B acknowledged that 'education specialist staff' were treated less well than permanent teaching-research staff members. For them, this reflected the prioritisation of

research over teaching not just within Education - 'the University as a whole struggles with this'. They pointed to 'five or six [staff members] on teaching contracts' with 'lots to offer and would want research and teaching contracts'. They did also highlight how senior figures in the Department 'encourage [these teaching only staff members] to join research groups' and 'support their research activity'. These staff members are also permitted to carry out PhD supervision. Interestingly, interviewee B stated that there is still an expectation that staff members on teaching only contracts should contribute to the Department's Research Excellent Framework (REF) submission.

Interviewee B relayed information from a Department manager concerning the use of fixed-term and casual contracts for teaching staff and GTAs. We were told that, whilst the Department seeks ideally to employ all fixed-term workers on fractional contracts, this is 'not always possible due to available budget or the preference of the worker'. The manager gave an example of a 'variable hour teaching fellow', i.e. member of teaching staff paid on a casual basis, who was offered a fractional contract but 'decided not to go with this because of the flexibility'. Interviewee B pointed to a 'cadre of semi-retired colleagues' who 'don't really want formal contracts but just want the title of Emeritus Professor and can fill in [teaching] holes and gaps'. We were also informed that such variable hour teaching fellows do not receive an automatic annual incremental pay rise, but that rates of pay are reviewed and increased each year by the Department.

PGR teaching

Staff Interviewee A described a system where opportunities for PGRs to teach and, subsequent to completing their doctorates, to secure teaching contracts 'depends on who your supervisor is'. Certain more senior academics are able to give their supervisees more opportunities which can even lead to them securing a permanent contract over time. The way to access this 'pipeline' remains unclear to other PGRs in the Department. Interviewee A stated how, despite there being no post advertised externally, 'sometimes it is announced that there is a new lecturer in the Department'. Interviewee A did acknowledge that GTAs were now offered fractional

contracts and that, for those on fixed-term teaching contracts, the Department was now 'doing its best to make their contracts secure'.

Both GTA interviewees are employed on a low-fractional contract. They told us that vacancies are advertised formally with a full interview process. Our interviewees reported there being more candidates than roles available, leaving some PGRs unable to take on teaching. Although GTAs are assigned to units based on their preferences, these were not always met, meaning that some GTAs who were assigned to units that lay outside of their specialist area had to dedicate more preparation time. GTAs are expected to attend lectures and deliver seminars. One interviewee was given the opportunity to deliver a lecture, but they were not paid for preparation time beyond the usual preparation hours for the seminars as laid out in their contract.

Electronic and Electrical Engineering (EEE)

Staff teaching

Our staff interview with a member of EEE was one of our first and we were still working out the questions we sought to ask. Consequently, we have little data for EEE to present. However, they did tell us that there is only one member of staff currently on a fixed-term teaching contract in the Department. They are on a three-year contract. We were told that 'the only reason for [this fixed-term hire] was timing – teaching needed to be covered, but shifts in department structure and research meant timescale to hire an open ended teaching and research post would have left gaps in teaching delivery for that academic year'.

PGR teaching

Our interviewee in EEE informed us that, as of Semester One of 2025, Department managers had undertaken a 'complete change' in employment practices for GTAs with the basis of employment shifting from a casual to a 0.2 FTE fractional contract. They told us that 80 hours of teaching is delivered by the Department's PGRs working as GTAs during term-time. All student roles were 'highlighted to all relevant potential applicants'. This primarily means PGRs, but there is one role

allocated to final year undergraduates. All appointments are decided on through 'anonymous shortlistening followed by an interview with a mixed panel'.
We were unable to interview anyone working as a GTA in EEE.

Health

Staff teaching

Our staff interviewee in Health told us that fixed-term contracts had been regularly used to cover staff on sabbaticals, maternity leave, sick leave, or for research grants.. Our interviewee estimated that. An additional feature of employment practice in Health is the use of variable hour contracts to pay medical practitioners for their teaching contributions.
We were told that, in the face of grievances being raised by staff concerning excessive workloads, the HoD and EDI Director were working together to reduce workloads, reaching out to staff members and offering them increased support.

PGR teaching

Our staff interviewee in the Department of Health informed us that a cadre of around twenty GTAs are currently teaching in the Department on casual contracts. However, the Department was also currently piloting fractional contracts for GTAs at 0.16 FTE.
Our GTA interviewee confirmed that low-fractional contracts are being offered and is themself employed on this basis. Allocations of these contracts involve a formal application and interview. As only four low-fractional contracts were offered this year, more GTAs applied for the roles than there were roles available. Those employed on a casual basis put their names down for the teaching they wished to undertake in September. The interviewee noted that the hours for those employed on a casual basis vary widely and can be more or less than those employed on a low-fractional basis. GTAs are assigned to units based on their expertise or if the unit convener specifically requests them. The interviewee explained that some GTAs being employed on a low-fractional contract and others on a casual basis creates a hierarchy wherein the low-fractional contract is geared towards academic

career development and is thus considered a ‘fast track’ into academic employment. Resultantly, many GTAs wish to be employed on a low-frational basis, but this is not widely available. No departmental GTA training is offered.
As with many other departments, lecturing opportunities are available but they are rare and assigned on an ad hoc basis. Preparation and lecture delivery can be claimed as overtime. GTAs can assist with the supervision of final-year research projects, which has to be signed off by the Director of Studies. This involves roughly two hours of work per week during term time to support the student, and does not involve marking the final submission. Supervision is unpaid.

Library

Though not an academic department, the Library is a major employer of both staff and students. All staff are on open-ended contracts apart from occasional short-term positions to cover maternity or sick leave. Student positions are advertised through the Student Union at Grade 6 level. Students work between seven and seventeen hours per week and are employed on nine-month rolling contracts. Some recently graduated students are employed as interns on 12-month contracts. Students who work within Research Services are paid out of UKRI block grants.
Our interviewee highlighted instances within the Library concerning mismatches between pay grades and ‘volume of work plus levels of managerial responsibility’. They stated that: ‘There have been difficulties in getting jobs regraded and when HR were approached for help with what a typical workload would look like e.g. for grade 6/7/8 or for grad students, this [help] was not available.’

Life Sciences

Staff teaching

We spoke with an experienced member of the Department of Life Sciences, a department with a staff of around 160 people. They told us that fixed-term contracts are used to employ lecturers to provide cover for staff taking parental leave, long-term sickness absence, and other changes in circumstances. These are

usually 12-month contracts typically at 1 FTE, though fractional appointments at 0.8 FTE or shorter have been used. All positions are advertised externally with 'fair and effective recruitment in mind'. Our interviewee told us of 'a number of staff' within Life Sciences who joined on fixed-term contracts and then transitioned to open-ended contracts in 'teaching-focussed lectureships'.

Our interviewee shared frustrations with this current model of issuing 12-month contracts, saying that "such short contracts and constant turnover isn't good practice... for the individuals, for teaching planning, and time invested in supporting new staff'.

Our interviewee did not believe that there is any work being undertaken at the wrong pay grade or not being paid for. They pointed to the practice of healthcare professionals sharing clinical experience through guest lectures on the undergraduate pharmacy programme which may be unpaid. However, they saw this as an example of established professionals 'wanting to give back to the development of the pharmacy workforce'.

PGR teaching

Our staff interviewee told us that there is no actual need or role for GTAs in Life Sciences. The only need is for 'demonstrators in practical classes', which is a role filled on a 'casual arrangement' with PGR students who are 'usually grateful for the opportunity and the income'. Demonstrators are recruited through open calls via email to the entire Department. All demonstrators attend a training session before they start in the role. Our interviewee also told us that academic staff running laboratories do sometimes ask PGRs to supervise undergraduate projects. This supervision is currently unpaid. We were told that, whilst some PGRs appreciate the opportunity, others see it as 'boring' and question 'why should we do it if it's not paid?' Our interviewee said the Department's teaching team were aware of this issue and discussing how this could be addressed.

Our PGR interviewees confirmed these findings, explaining how demonstration responsibilities are allocated through a sign-up sheet at the beginning of each term. They highlighted how prior relationships with unit convenors enable GTAs to be pre-allocated certain demonstration sessions prior to the sign-up sheet's

circulation. The interviewees claimed that no conversations about a low-fractional contract are currently being held in the Department and that GTAs value the flexibility of a casual contract. Regarding supervising undergraduate and masters projects, the interviewees confirmed that this is unpaid, but that it is considered an unspoken responsibility, particularly as our interviewees' understanding was that recruitment of taught students is tied to an increase in the lab's budget.

Mathematical Sciences

Staff teaching

The Maths Department currently employs around eighty staff members. From 2020-21, senior leaders in the Maths Department led the Department through an intentional process of anti-casualisation. It is the only department at Bath and the only Maths Department in the UK to be awarded an Athena Swan Gold award.
With regard to staff members, the anti-casualisation process meant a steady transfer of six individuals from fixed-term to permanent teaching-only contracts. Our interviewee stated that they were unaware of any staff members still on fixed-term teaching contracts. They reflected positively on this transition:

> These are very valuable people. They do excellent work and I find that, in my experience, when you hire people for a short fixed contract, let's say one year, you don't know what you get. I mean, it's quite risky. So, when you get people that are doing their job very well, we like to keep them.

Our interviewee justified this strategy not just on grounds of ensuring quality performance; they also referred to 'community reasons' - that giving staff members open-ended contracts leads to the cultivation of a richer and more collegial community of scholars. They gave the example of a 'pedagogical research group' that had been recently founded by the Department's teaching team and supported by departmental funds. Our interviewee praised the 'proactive' ways in which members of this group bring new ideas into departmental teaching.

PGR teaching

A large amount of the teaching conducted in Maths is delivered by PhD students working as GTAs. GTA positions are advertised internally. Such is the scale of demand that all PGRs who apply are offered teaching.

As part of the Department's anti-casualisation drive, our staff interviewee told us that all GTAs are now offered fractional contracts at 0.16 FTE which corresponds to six hours, or two tutorial sessions, per week of teaching work. This is the minimal fractional contract available. This academic year, 17 doctoral students opted to teach two tutorials each week and to take this contract this academic year. These contracts are not compulsory; if individuals choose to teach for less than six hours per week they can opt to be employed on a casual basis. 43 students chose to teach one weekly tutorial and therefore chose this option this year. GTA fractional contracts have a semester-long or academic year-long (9 month) duration, but, again, due to the Department's high demand, these contracts are readily renewable. Our staff interviewee was unaware of any examples of work by either staff or GTAs being unpaid or underpaid.

Our GTA interviewee confirmed that PGRs are offered low-fractional and casual teaching contracts. However, it was their understanding that those in the first year of the PhD are only allowed to be employed on a casual basis. The interviewee noted that the time allocated for marking for those on a low-fractional contract is fixed, whereas it varies for those employed on a casual basis. GTAs are allocated to their units on the basis of their preferences. The interviewee was not aware of GTAs being offered lecturing or supervision opportunities. However, GTAs can supervise undergraduate summer interns. This is not paid, the justification being that the undergraduates do research for PGR projects, meaning that GTAs could get a publication out of it.

Mechanical Engineering

Staff teaching

We interviewed an experienced member of the Department of Mechanical Engineering. Our interviewee informed us of the Department having 'real trouble finding people to fill [open-ended research/teaching] posts,' mainly due to insufficiently qualified candidates or to qualified candidates choosing positions

elsewhere. When such posts remain unfilled, the Department turns to 1 FTE fixed-term contracts to fill gaps in degree programme teaching. Despite this problem, they told us that there are currently 'not many' teaching staff on fixed-term contracts and the ones that are around are on one- or two-year contracts which, in some cases, are extended. Fixed-term teaching staff do get annual incremental pay increases.

The Department has experienced significant increases in student numbers in recent years while staff numbers have not kept pace. Even when staff members leave, the post they vacate is not automatically refilled. Naturally, this has meant increased teaching workloads and/or larger class sizes in recent years.

Our staff interviewee told us that there is no use of zero-hour casual contracts in teaching apart from for a handful of industry professionals and retirees who deliver occasional guest lectures. Our interviewee did not see this narrow use of casual payment as an ethical problem.

Our interviewee told us that the undergraduate degree in Mechanical Engineering that the Department offers is 'sought after' and that 'teaching is taken seriously' within the Department. They spoke of a move to 'making teaching-only staff an integral part of the structure' of the Department.

PGR teaching

Our staff interviewee told us that unit convenors in Mechanical Engineering can request the support of one GTA for each fifty students registered for their unit. GTAs run what are called 'Practice and Feedback Sessions' in which students work through technical problems. After unit convenors' requests are approved, the GTA roles are internally advertised. Our interviewee told us that there is a problem recruiting enough GTAs, especially for final-year undergraduate units that require specialist knowledge. When GTA roles are not filled it simply increases the workload of unit convenors.

Our staff interviewee told us that GTAs are expected to receive training before beginning their roles and that they are paid for this time. They are also paid for their marking. GTAs are offered 0.15 FTE contracts for running Practice and Feedback Sessions

We interviewed two GTAs in Mechanical Engineering. The interviewees explained that, contrary to the claims of our staff interviewee, they were not aware of low-fractional contracts being available, and that all GTAs are employed on a casual basis. Units are allocated on a first-come-first-served basis. GTAs are informally asked to help with the supervision of undergraduate final-year projects, unpaid. This involves meeting with these students every week, helping them in the labs, and troubleshooting their work. GTAs are not involved in the marking of these projects. The benefit for GTAs is that these students do work which assists GTAs in their own research activities. Students are offered lecturing opportunities on an ad hoc basis, which is paid.

Physics

Staff teaching

A workload model has been in operation in the Physics Department since 2003. This model was originally designed according to 'principles, not numbers'. The model was adopted and adapted, first, by the Faculty of Science and, later, across the University. Whether current departmental workload models are driven by principles over numbers is an open question.

For our interviewee, the core principle that has always informed the Physics workload model is equality: '...basically, my aim since 2003...is to try to get the total workload as even as possible across all of us'. This aim is based on the belief that 'we're all in the same team and we contribute in different ways'. This statement points to a more open, heterogeneous definition of 'contribution' and of 'value': 'I think we have been very good in Physics at valuing everybody's different contributions'. This principle of equality extends equally to fixed-term staff members:

> ...temporary teaching lecturers who've come in...are treated the same way, ...given the same sort of esteem and prestige as everybody else in the Department. They are given the general sort of workload allowances as anybody else would do. They're not seen as being, you

> know, kind of cannon fodder - you know, you're doing the teaching so that everybody else can swan around or anything.

In practice, this means:

> asking [fixed-term teachers] the same questions as everybody else: what would you like to be teaching? Where do your skills lie? What are your interests?...You are only here for a short time. What do you want to get out of it?...What would you like to be able to put on your CV at the end?...What kind of opportunities would you like?

Our staff interviewee highlighted the long-term existence of a strong team culture that has diminished 'personal ownership' of teaching courses or units. They did acknowledge that this inclusive, egalitarian, and collectivist approach may be easier to take in a department like Physics where 'we do tend to be fairly generalists' where 'anyone of us could probably teach most of years one and two'. That said, they insisted that the principle of attempting to match teachers' expertise and interests with departmental teaching needs ultimately generated the best outcomes both for staff members and 'for the students to have people teaching things that they want to teach and are qualified to teach'. It therefore ' 'maximises the sum of human happiness'.

A further core principle emphasised by our interviewee was that of 'transparency' in workload allocation. This means publishing teaching requirements and final workload allocations of all staff members. In the absence of transparency, people start coming up with all sorts of conspiracy theories' that undermine team cohesion. Clearly, the larger the staff cohort the more challenging this workload allocation process becomes. Over the past two decades, the Physics Department has grown from 18 to 45 members of staff

Our staff interviewee informed us that all fixed-term teaching contracts are advertised externally unless there is an internal candidate on the redeployment register. They told us that there are currently four fixed-term teaching lecturers who have been working in the Department for around two years. This, however, was an unusually high number due to a combination of uncommon factors involving long-term parental and sickness leave. They expressed the belief that those

currently being employed on fixed-term contracts have found the experience beneficial, gaining key teaching experience ahead of deciding whether to pursue employment in teaching or elsewhere, though they acknowledged that Physics Departments are invariably not concerned with teaching experience but research experience and potential.

PGR teaching

Our GTA interviewee explained that all GTAs are employed on a casual basis, with no low-fractional contracts offered. Teaching is allocated in two ways: either PGRs talk to their supervisors to identify opportunities or the admin team within the Department will advertise opportunities needed at short notice. GTAs do not mark work, supervise final-year projects, or deliver lectures. The informal nature of GTA hiring, our interviewee claimed, means that PGRs are often unaware of teaching opportunities unless their supervisor informs them. The interviewee noted that an issue with being employed on a casual basis meant that they could not schedule their other work around fixed teaching commitments. Further, our interviewee explained that many GTAs did not know that they could claim payment for preparation time as this was not communicated clearly. Moreover, the interviewee was not aware of any standardised ratio for the number of preparation hours per teaching hour.

Politics & International Relations

Staff teaching

We were given detailed email answers by a team of three staff members working in the Politics and International Studies division of P&IR. What follows, then, relates to Politics and International Studies and not Modern Languages, hence the designation of P&IR rather than PoLIS.

Over recent years, there has been a concerted and determined effort to move P&IR away from the use of insecure contracts in teaching. Central to this effort has been the successful transfer of staff members from fixed-term to open-ended contracts. At the time of writing (Autumn 2025), P&IR had two (out of 40) remaining staff members on fixed-term contracts delivering nearly 8% of all departmental staff

teaching. However, according to one senior member of the Department, as of April 2026, the final fixed-term staff member has now been given an open-ended contract, thereby ending the use of insecure teaching contracts in the Department.
Our interviewees were unaware of any instances of unpaid or underpaid (grade mismatch) work being undertaken in the Department. All teaching staff on fixed-term contracts received annual incremental increases according to the University's spinal pay structure.
With regard to the use of insecure contracts in research, our interviewees informed us that there are no fixed-term postdoctoral research positions at present. However, were a research grant funded that provided for a fixed-term research position, it would be recruited for as usual.

PGR teaching

Our staff interviewees told us that, for Politics programmes, GTAs are employed to cover first-year seminars and assessment marking 'for reasons of staff capacity and as an opportunity for PGRs to gain experience for their potential careers - and [for] a wage with associated benefits (sick leave, holiday pay, access to salary sacrifice for USS)'. Each year, funding for GTA teaching must be signed off by the HSS Faculty's Accountant and Dean. This determination is based on the Department's operating budget which, we were told, is decreasing by around 15% annually at present.
Our staff interviewees gave us information for the use of GTAs teaching on Politics degree programmes within P&IR. Here, GTAs cover 14% of the total teaching across all Politics programmes. GTAs mark around 1,700 assessment scripts which equates to 29% of all marked scripts. New GTAs are recruited in May/June usually via a job advertisement on the University's jobs page which is then highlighted via email by the Department's Postgraduates who Teach (PGwT) Support Officer. These positions are filled in accordance with the same recruitment system as all academic jobs and are open to all PhD students in and beyond P&IR.
Until 2023, the Department used hourly paid contracts for GTAs. These are no longer in use. All GTA teaching is conducted under new 'Term-Time Only' (TTO) fractional contracts under which salaried payments are made monthly during the nine months of teaching, but not over the summer. However, there is no break in the continuity of the contract which is rolled over in September.[5]

[5] However, please see our section on the Confusion and Uncertainty over GTA Fractional Contracts for more recent, less optimistic developments here.

These contracts include time allowance for all required teaching, marking, training, invigilation, and student support duties. If there is extra marking work to be distributed this is paid on an hourly basis. This is generally the only casually paid labour now undertaken by GTAs. However, hourly paid contracts would be used if the Department failed to recruit enough GTAs and could not reassign unfilled teaching hours to existing GTAs on TTO contracts.

Our interviewees told us that GTAs now benefit from open-ended fractional employment contracts (TTOs) 'with the duration linked to their student enrolment status'. These contracts have fractions of 0.1 to 0.13 FTE. We were told that these contracts 'instead end when a student either resigns or they come to the end of their studies, so they are a mixture of open-ended and fixed'. Our staff interviewees told us that, currently in P&IR, additional work for GTAs is paid at the following rate: 45 minutes per essay, 30 minutes per exam script, 30 minutes per presentation, and two hours paid per hour-long seminar. They suspected that payment rates for this work differed across departments, meaning that GTAs were being paid different rates for the same work. They told us that this is something currently being tackled at the Faculty (Humanities & Social Sciences) level.

Our GTA interviewee confirmed all the above findings regarding how GTAs are recruited, how their contract works, and how they are paid. We note that the guest lecturing programme recently implemented in P&IR – where a budget is set aside to pay for GTAs to lecture in a formal process managed by the PGwT Support Officer – is a model that could be rolled out across the University. This would avoid current issues regarding, first, some guest lecturing being unpaid and, second, guest lecturing being dependent on pre-existing relationships with unit convenors. Further, the TTO contracts ensure that GTAs gain incremental increases in their pay for each year of employment (though, again, see section on the Confusion and Uncertainty over GTA Fractional Contracts). Our interviewee commended the PGwT officer and the PGR Director of Studies for the support they provide to GTAs and their role in ensuring that all work is properly paid.

Psychology

Staff teaching

We interviewed two senior members of staff in the Psychology Department. Teaching in Psychology takes place in the context of an 80% increase in student numbers over the past eight years.

Our interviewees told us that the Department employs teaching fellows on one- and two-year contracts, the extension of which depends on departmental 'demand'. They told us that most of these positions were part-time rather than full-time and described a 'lot of churn' of staff occurring in the Department. They also highlighted the existence of certain 'ridiculous' low fractional contracts given for administrative, marking, and supervision teaching work. They gave the example of a 0.2 FTE contract which would have been bad enough if it were for teaching allocated on one weekday, but was actually offered for teaching spread across multiple days. However, they did acknowledge the particular context within Psychology in which part-time contracts suit individuals predominantly doing counselling and clinical work. This may be the case but, according to our interviewees, it has generated a real lack of continuity within the Department's teaching cadre.

PGR teaching

In Psychology, until recently, only first-year undergraduate assessments were marked by GTAs. The logic here was that GTAs only marked first-year work because these assignments do not impact students' degree classifications. However, this has now been extended to assessments written by later year undergraduate students.

Our staff interviewees told us that the Department's leaders are 'committed to improving the process, especially for GTAs'. In practice, this means transforming the old, quite informal, decentralised, and casualised model of GTA recruitment and employment. Under this model GTAs were offered teaching by particular staff members, usually their supervisors; were not given formal training; and were paid casually by the hour. Additionally, GTAs were not really monitored and their preparation hours were not fully accounted for in their payment.

Our interviewees told us that, historically, it had often been a 'struggle' to recruit GTAs. This led to unit convenors trying to 'get in early' to secure the services of available GTAs. They spoke of unit convenors giving 'casual taps on the shoulder' to PGRs whose research interests corresponded to the teaching units they ran. Under this system, there were no annual increases in pay and, consequently, no acknowledgement of the skills developed by experienced PGRs.

Our staff interviewees spoke of a process underway to establish a much more formalised and centralised system under which GTAs would be offered fractional contracts. They expressed the intention of setting up a structure that would provide an ongoing contract for the full duration of a PGR's doctoral period. The changes already in place include establishing:

- a standardised formal process for recruiting GTAs;
- a formal training process for new GTAs;
- a requirement of unit convenors to specify and communicate full expected preparation and teaching hour requirements to GTAs.

The overarching goal is to be able to 'offer fractional or casual [contracts] to GTAs for the same work and let them choose'.

One issue of concern for our staff interviewees is that the current pay scale for casual ('variable hours') employment gives the impression that individuals are paid at a fixed grade band and cannot be given spinal increases within bands. Consequently, the only possibility for a pay increase would be to jump eight spinal points to the next band. Such a situation would seem both unfair and inconsistent with the contract these individuals sign within which the possibility of pay progression is included. If this is in fact the case, our interviewees feared that it would prevent them giving GTAs who prefer to stay on casual contracts pay progression that reflected their increasing teaching experience. Our interviewees could not see why it could not be possible to specify a spinal point within a band at which to pay GTAs casually and to award incremental increases commensurate with experience. They told us that they were currently seeking clarification and guidance from HR on this. Being able, first, to clarify the situation concerning pay progression and, then, to guarantee it was seen as vital.

Our staff interviewees highlighted an 'importance difference' between Psychology and other departments, namely that, in their estimation, around 80% of GTA work in Psychology is marking and 'only a few units have regular contact between GTAs and students throughout the semester'. This means that GTA work in the Department is concentrated in intensive periods which makes fractional contracts less appealing and also raises concerns for international PGRs about breaking conditions of their scholarships and visas by working excessive hours during times of marking. They told us that 'a move to fractionals is something many [PGRs] saw negatively and were concerned about'. However, they emphasised that 'the biggest issue' with moving to fractional contracts concerned 'negative perceptions of the one unit where [fractional contracts] had been used in Psychology' and a '(mis)perception that [GTAs] cannot ask for extra hours based on having to do extra work'. An additional concern raised by some PGRs was that the attempt to introduce a 9-month term-time only contract was designed to 'avoid having to pay increases for the next contract'. Some PGRs even described the proposed fractional contracts as 'exploitative' which, our interviewees emphasised, was 'obviously the opposite to what's intended with anti-casualisation'.

Our interviewees told us that they intended to address GTAs' concerns with the teaching unit in question and hoped that doing so might 'make [PGRs] more open to fractionals in the future'.

We spoke to three GTAs in Psychology regarding their contracts. Currently all GTAs are offered casual contracts except for one unit which offers low-fractional contracts. GTAs are recruited centrally each year and units are allocated based on GTA preference. However, unit convenors may get in touch with specific PGRs to teach on their unit based on their expertise. The interviewees reported that there are no standard recruitment practices, leading to some GTAs either receiving no teaching opportunities or teaching units that fall outside of their expertise. The interviewees reported that the vast majority of GTAs prefer to be on casual contracts. This is because, where low-fractional contracts are offered, the interviewees reported the workload exceeding the contracted hours. Interviewees reported that GTAs may be given the opportunity to assist in supervising final-year projects (this includes regular supervisory meetings, providing written feedback, and being the first marker on the final script) and help to run research groups,

neither of which are paid. The justification was that it will look good on a CV and possibly lead to publications. Similarly, guest lecturing opportunities are available. The interviewees disagreed as to whether these are normally paid or unpaid, suggesting inconsistency. Further, interviewees reported that Research Assistant contracts were available, but often not advertised openly.

Social and Policy Studies (SPS)

Staff teaching

We were able to conduct two separate interviews with senior staff members in SPS. We will call them Interviewee A and Interviewee B.

Interviewee A told us that the Department currently employed eight teaching staff members on fixed-term contracts (out of a total of around sixty staff members). Interviewee A told us that fixed-term contracts are generally offered for one or two years, but this mainly depends on the length of the research grants awarded to the staff members whom fixed-team lecturers will cover. Sometimes lower fractional contracts are offered if an individual has other existing fractional contracts in place, e.g. a small fractional postdoctoral research post.

Interviewee A told us that, whilst all new positions were formally advertised, contract renewals often were not. They described a system in which workload planning was frustrated by delays at University- and Faculty-level. A source of frustration here relates specifically to announcements about whether staff will be granted sabbaticals, since the teaching workload of each staff member on sabbatical must be covered in some way, usually through the use of fixed-term contracts, and, crucially, when a staff member goes on sabbatical departments receive a sum of money from their faculty which covers some of the costs of replacing them.

Interviewee A told us that departmental plans are contingent on approval at Faculty level; approvals that can face delays. For Interviewee A, the timing of University and Faculty planning rounds could be brought forward. . Planning rounds carried out in the Spring rather than in January make both workload planning harder and leave colleagues facing redundancies in a state of uncertainty and stress for longer than necessary.

Interviewee A made the important point that measuring the contribution of fixed-term lecturers to total departmental teaching depends on whether one measures it as a proportion just of all teaching hours or as a proportion of all workloaded hours. Relatedly, they highlighted the fact that fixed-term lecturers are generally not allocated significant administrative roles - this means that they are denied the opportunities to develop different academic skills and experiences and, second, it means that fixed-term lecturers' workloads have a higher relative concentration of teaching.

Interviewee A described a commitment within the Department to 'push [the length of fixed-term contracts] in a longer-term direction' and thereby to 'move to fewer renewals'. However, they described the difficulty of achieving this within the current system. As well as delays in University and Faculty planning rounds, Interviewee A highlighted the nature of a workload model that 'periodises on an annual basis' thereby 'precipitating one year thinking'.

Interviewee A was unsure whether staff and GTAs on fixed-term contracts got incremental increases when those contracts were renewed but believed that they did.

Interviewee B emphasised that it was not merely a matter of the amount of teaching delivered by those on fixed-term contracts but the central prominence of the units they teach. They gave the example of the core first-year introductory unit on the International Development with Economics degree programme being taught last year 'at the eleventh hour' by a newly-arrived fixed-term lecturer - 'So, you know, it's a major unit to deliver and she was just right into it.'

Whilst Interviewee B noted a general increase in the length of fixed-term contracts offered in the past year - from 6-9 months to 1-2 years and from partial fractions to full-time - they attributed it not to an intentional cultural or structural shift, but merely to an influx in longer-term grant income that created the space to offer longer contracts. Consequently, this should not be interpreted as 'a direction of travel that will continue'.

Another major issue raised by Interviewee B was the lack of transparency around the extension of fixed-term teaching contracts for existing staff members. Whereas, in some situations, staff members get a 'tap on the shoulder', in other circumstances, positions are advertised externally instead with internal candidates

compelled to compete against each other as well as outside candidates. Interviewee B acknowledged how this situation and the lack of clarity is causing a lot of 'hurt' and 'stress'. This 'transparency aspect' is 'really absent in our department and has been for a long time'.

Interviewee B highlighted a departmental narrative that locates responsibility and power for employment decisions elsewhere: the Department is 'always beholden to other forces - Finance, HR; it's not us'. Interviewee B did acknowledge some degree of truth in this position. However, they did also insist that the narrative was 'questionable' and that it 'creates a convenient image' of insecure contracts being 'beyond our control'. Interestingly, Interviewee B did also give an example of another source of power here - research funders who compel academic departments to hire external candidates on fixed-term contracts lasting for the duration of the grant awarded to their staff member.

Interviewee B was not aware of any examples of work undertaken in the Department being unpaid or underpaid (grade mismatch).

PGR teaching

We corresponded with two GTAs - one via an interview, the other over email. Our interviewee explained that GTAs are recruited through an advert on the University's job page. However, teaching allocation remains opaque. They claimed that it is not clear how GTAs are assigned to certain units, and the interviewee reported being assigned to a unit well outside of their specialist area. This resulted in preparation time exceeding the terms of their contract. Both low-fractional and casual contracts are offered, with the casual contracts being below 0.1 FTE. GTAs can choose which contract they prefer. Both preparation time and marking are included in these contracts. No teacher training is offered in the department. Whilst GTAs are paid for marking, there is no breakdown in terms of how much time marking each script should take. Some GTAs are offered the chance to deliver lectures, but this process is not formalised and is contingent upon a supervisor (or another member of staff) offering this opportunity. GTAs are paid for these lectures, including one hour of prep time per hour of lecture. Our other respondent flagged the issue of some training taking place before the commencement of the low-fractional GTA contract, meaning they were not paid for this training.

School of Management

We were unable to secure an interview with anyone from the School of Management.

Confusion and uncertainty over the GTA ‘term-time only’ (TTO) contract

Several staff interviewees mentioned the rollout of ‘term-time only’ (TTO) contracts for GTAs. These contracts are essentially nine-month contracts, running from October to June and omitting payment from July to September, that renew automatically the following October. TTO contracts offer GTAs the stability and certainty of stable employment during their doctoral studies. They also ensure that GTAs are rewarded for their increased teaching skills and experience with annual incremental increases. When contracts are automatically renewed these incremental increases are also automatically applied, thereby avoiding the danger of human error leading to these increases being overlooked.

We conducted an interview with an individual knowledgeable of the situation regarding the rollout of these TTO contracts. We were told that, though HR managers agreed to administer their rollout for academic departments last year, HR managers subsequently realised that the software applications they use to set up and administer employment contracts would not permit such TTO contracts to be set up in the system. Unfortunately, due to a breakdown in communication, this fact was not relayed to department administrators, leading to confusion amongst staff and PGwTs when it became clear. Consequently, as far as we understand at the time of writing, all contracts that are supposedly offered on a TTO basis will not renew but will actually expire in July.

The fact that we were told by another interviewee that HR managed to find ‘workaround’ solutions to implement the transition from fixed-term to open-ended contracts for postdoctoral research staff in various research centres when implementing the pooled resourcing model suggests that the ‘computer says no’ conclusion drawn by HR managers here is one that is far more a matter of convenience and commitment rather than a totally plausible response to a

technical impasse. Regardless, to the extent we can make sense of things, we seem to be on the precipice of a messy and fractious situation when GTAs' fractional contracts fail to renew in July.

The use of insecure contracts in research at Bath

The 'traditional operating model' and the 'pooled resourcing' model

In this section, we explore the use of insecure contracts in research posts. Overall, there is a pretty simple tale to tell - Postdoctoral Research Assistant and Associate (PDRA) roles are virtually universally and seemingly unavoidably fixed-term because the research grant that funds them is itself fixed-term. There is, however, the existence of a model designed to overcome this situation. The 'pooled resourcing' model is described in the UCU's report titled 'Pooled Resourcing in Research and Research Related Activities' thus:

> The heart of the model is one where the link between a specific piece of grant income and the individual's job is broken. This is achieved by creating groups of people around a core capability, or core capabilities, of the group who move between projects paid for from different funding sources. The size of the core group is determined by understanding the pipeline of work, with anticipated peaks or non-core skills being met by people on fixed-term contracts.

In financial planning terms, the pooled resourcing model works by a research centre's directors first taking a two-year outlook on projected income and projecting a realistic two-year minimum expected income level. Having specified this 'low tide mark', as one interviewee termed it, the centre can then calculate how many researchers that minimum allows it to employ. It then offers open-ended contracts to that number of researchers. If over that two-year period income exceeds that minimum, fixed-term contracts can be used to increase the number of researchers. If income actually goes below it, the centre can consult with team members on possible solutions which can include voluntary redundancies or

potentially an agreement to share the blow by a universal move to lower fractional contracts.

That report lists the following as prospective benefits of the pooled resourcing model:

- **The model is agile**. By having a resourced core, the ability to stand up new projects quickly follows, overcoming the recruitment lag that many PIs experience.
- **The model is expert**. The resourced core of people who are repeatedly deepening the application of their knowledge and experience through multiple projects offers the opportunity for higher quality outcomes.
- **The model is developmental**. By retaining talented people in the core by means of open-ended contracts, it affords the opportunity to invest in people and makes the defined University career pathways both meaningful and accessible.
- **The model is inclusive**. Those in the core will not be subject to the financial exclusion that those on fixed-term contracts frequently experience. This is at a stage in people's lives when they might typically want to settle down with a partner, establish a home, and have children. It is unsurprising that many women leave academic career paths shortly after completing their doctoral studies in the face of such pressures.
- **The model is strategic**. It offers an opportunity for Deans/University leadership to make low risk strategic investments in research by either recognising groups of emerging importance and offering them the opportunity to adopt the model, or by identifying a particular areas of research importance and seed funding a number of core positions utilising the model with the aim of creating a self-sustaining research entity.

The pooled resourcing model faces significant systemic obstacles; obstacles detailed in UCU's report. In short, it must overcome the bureaucratic intransigence of the 'traditional operating model for research' that is 'embedded in our automated IT systems'. It also clearly requires a relatively well-established research group with

a track record of grant success, enough to confidently predict and efficiently ensure stable future income to support a cadre of research associates. Nonetheless, this kind of model has been used by the Institute for Mathematical Innovation for several years with significant success (see below for more details).
The Anti-Casualisation Agreement signed by the University and UCU in March 2023 provided for the piloting of the pooled resourcing model in several centres:

- The Tobacco Control Research Group (TCRG)
- The Institute for Advanced Automated Propulsion Systems (IAAPS)
- Research and Impact Services (RIS)

In the section below, we provide the information we have about the outcomes of these pilots as of April 2026. First, however, we report on information obtained from interviews with staff members from academic departments about the use of insecure contracts in research work within the 'traditional operating model'.

Information about and perspectives on the 'traditional operating model'

The story related by staff interviewees was invariably that of having to make PDRA positions fixed-term due to the fixed-term nature of the research grants that fund them. There remains, however, other very important issues concerning postdoctoral researchers and the conditions of their employment, the opportunities for support, training, and career development they are offered, and the efforts made by research centres and departments to redeploy them as redundancy approaches. Here, we share the information we gleaned on these questions from our staff interviewees.
Our interviewee in Chemical Engineering told us that the Department did make significant efforts to help their postdoctoral researchers redeploy to new PDRA positions. However, they acknowledged that, despite the Department's best efforts, whether postdocs are able to find a new research position once theirs expires is 'very much dictated by the funding landscape'. Our interviewee found it hard to conceive of a pooled grant income model working in Chemical Engineering due to the fact that the Department hosts 'such different research areas that require such

different skill sets'. The same position was articulated by our interviewee in Physics. Similarly, in EEE, our interviewee was enthusiastically supportive of the pooled resourcing model but was unsure that this model would work in EEE due to the wide range of research interests and skills present across the Department. Our interviewee emphasised that 'people that are already within the Department are very much encouraged' to apply for posts when they arise.

Our interviewee in Life Sciences informed us that most research staff in the Department are employed on fixed-term contracts ranging from six months to three years tied to external grants. Again, they told us that there were examples of postdoctoral researchers on fixed-term contracts moving to open-ended contracts. Fixed-term postdoc positions are first advertised internally to allow for existing researchers at risk of redundancy to take the opportunity of redeployment if their skills and experience align. If this is not possible, such posts are advertised externally.

Our interviewee highlighted the existence of casual hourly paid research contracts of under six months given to individuals to work on specific research projects with industry partners. These individuals are invariably PGR students finishing their doctorates and waiting for their vivas before moving on elsewhere. Our interviewee acknowledged that they are 'tapped on the shoulder with no fair and effective recruitment process'. However, they insisted that this is because they have the particular skills and experience to fit that particular project and 'otherwise, we wouldn't get the funding and do the research'. Our interviewee in Life Sciences told us that they were 'not sure what more can reasonably be done to mitigate the impact of short-term research grant funding on researchers with fixed-term contracts' and was curious to see any University data on the numbers of researchers being successfully redeployed and fixed-term staff transitioning to open-ended contracts. They did tell us that there were examples of some staff members staying in the Department on successive fixed-term research contracts working on different grants for more than over years, which pointed to the redeployment scheme seeming to work. However, they acknowledged that it did not work for everyone and was dependent on a 'skillset-grant match'.

In Mathematical Sciences, our interviewee highlighted efforts made within the Department to welcome and integrate fixed-term Postdoctoral Research Fellows into its research community.

In Psychology, our interviewees told us that there were currently forty research-only staff on fixed-term contracts in the Department: eight to ten Research Assistants (Grade 6), around 25 Research Associates (Grade 7), and five Research Fellows/Senior Research Associates (Grade 8). They pointed to annual turnover of research staff of 20-25. They emphasised the transparency of the recruitment process and applicant anonymity in the decision process. However, they highlighted a trend in which those staff members applying for research grants are feeling or being pressured to lower prospective research budgets which has led them to allocate lower pay grades to postdoctoral research positions, i.e. from Research Associates to Research Assistants. The lack of clarity in the system for assigning pay scale points has led to 'inconsistencies and inequalities,' one such being a situation where for fellowship applications internal Research Associates must apply at Grade 7 whilst external candidates can apply at Grade 8. Our interviewees highlighted how support for career progression, both to higher grades and into open-ended positions, is much better at the University of Bristol; a situation that has even led to staff losses to Bristol.

Information from the pooled resourcing pilots

Here, we present the information we have managed to glean via University documents and interviews concerning the outcomes of the piloting of the pooled resourcing model in three research centres within the University: the Tobacco Control Research Group (TCRG), the Institute for Advanced Automated Propulsion Systems (IAAPS), and the Research and Impact Services (RIS). We also provide information about the Institute for Mathematical Innovation (IMI) which has independently very recently moved to a pooled resourcing model.

Tobacco Control Research Group

The Tobacco Control Research Group is a large, well-established, and successful research group at Bath that 'monitors and investigates corporate influence on

health behaviour and policy'.[6] It has a track record of securing large grants and, consequently, it employs a total staff of around forty, including a twelve-strong research team, a 'Tobacco Tactics' team of seven, nine PGRs, and ten administrators. The existence of a cadre of researchers with significantly overlapping methodological skills was one core element that made the TCRG an appropriate candidate for the pooled resourcing pilot.

Despite this track record of securing numerous grants, the TCRG depends overwhelmingly on one donor, Bloomberg Philanthropies, which awarded it a four-year grant of $8.9m in January 2023. In one essential way, therefore, this makes the TCRG a poor case study for the pooled resourcing pilot because, in reality, the TCRG is not pooling funds from multiple research grants. However, in terms of the institutional, cultural, strategic, and personal changes that the shift to the pooled resourcing model might influence or effect, the case of the TCRG remains important.

The TCRG moved to the pooled resourcing model in January 2023, transferring all postdoctoral researchers from fixed-term to open-ended contracts. An 'Evaluation of the Move to Open-Ended Contracts' produced by the University Executive Board in April 2024 shared quantitative and qualitative research findings about the pilot's first year. The Evaluation (2024, pp.4-5) reported that interviewees who were previously on fixed-term contracts described their experiences of a 'postdoc wasteland', about 'being trapped as a perpetual research associate', about insufficient advice and support, and about the effects of fixed-term contracts overall as 'damaging, creating anxiety and impacting on productivity'. Though it acknowledged that the pilot was still in its early days, the Evaluation reported the following key findings:

- 'Established' staff more able to 'make a significant contribution to securing a major grant of £8M (approx.) and to ensuring this grant was successfully established' (UEB 2024, p.2).
- '...an almost universal sense that the stability created through moving to an open-ended contract would be significant in shaping research thinking and activity' (ibid, p.3).

[6] https://www.bath.ac.uk/teams/tobacco-control-research-group-members/

- Staff interviewees reporting an enhanced ability to 'concentrate on skill development and plan for the longer term' and the belief that this would 'lead to improved outputs' (ibid, p.3).
- Management reporting 'a developing focus on the quality of research' (ibid, p.3).
- 'A greater spread of grant activity across the team' (ibid, p.3).
- The belief among staff members that having an open-ended contract would increase their opportunities for applying for and winning grant funding (ibid, p.3).
- A significant level of belief among staff members that the move to an open-ended contract had improved their wellbeing and sense of being valued (see Figures 1 and 2 below) and a greater feeling of belonging in the University (ibid, pp.4-5)
- An end to 'financial exclusion', primarily by becoming 'able to apply for mortgages and consider the next steps in their personal life' (ibid, p.4).

Figure 1 - Question: Overall, the move to an open-ended contract has improved my wellbeing (UEB 2024, p.4)

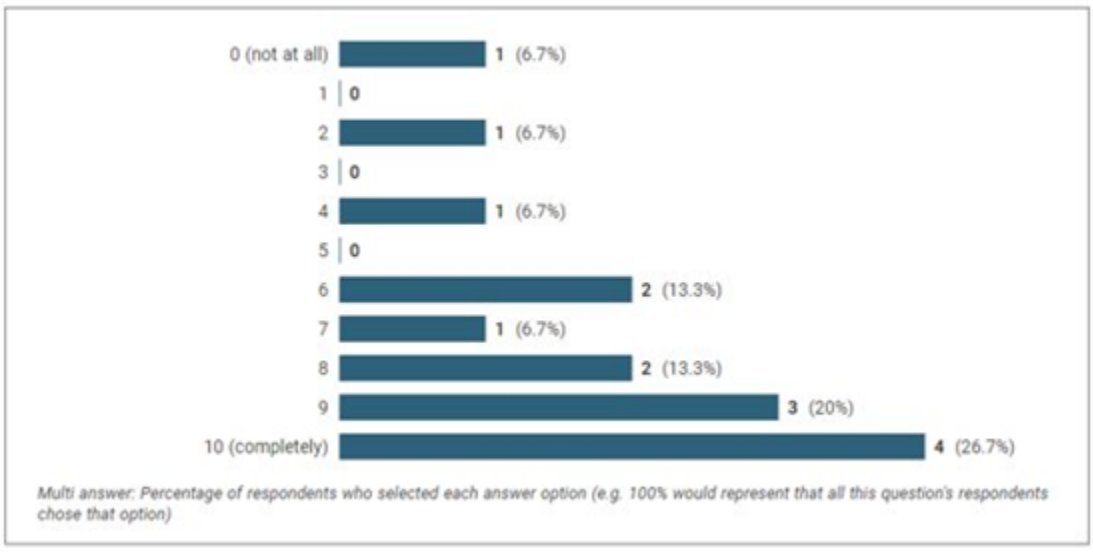
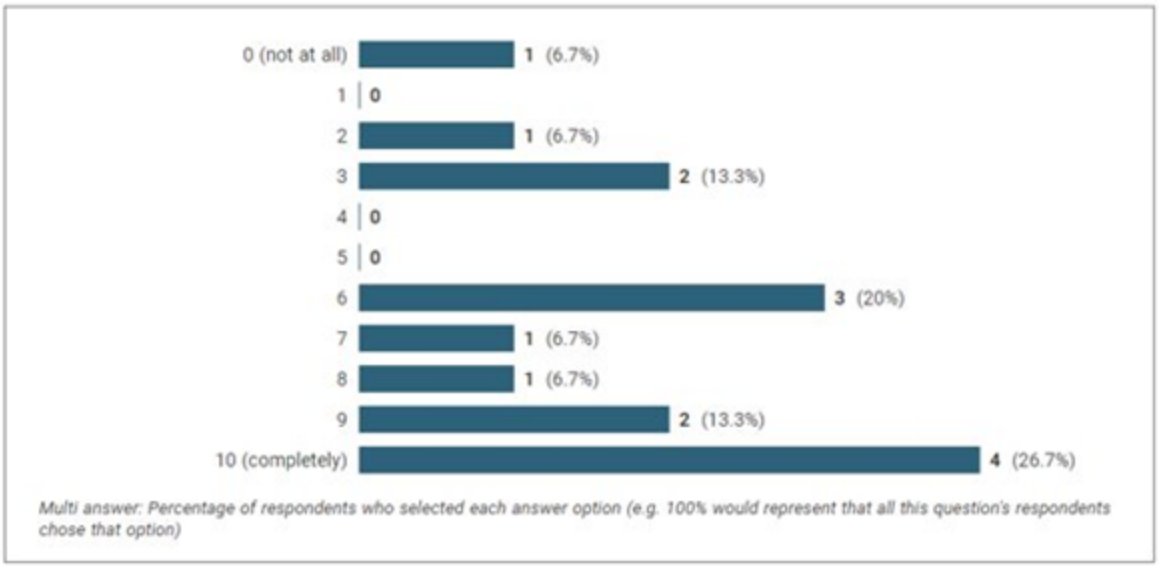


Figure 2 - Question: Overall, the move to an open-ended contract has improved my sense of feeling valued (UEB 2024, p.5)



The Evaluation (2024, p.6) offered provisional 'early findings' that: 'a positive picture is emerging in terms of impact'; that the '*personal* gains' [*sic*] were 'more marked' and that 'the challenge at an institutional level will be to harness the engagement generated through this change and support growth and progression'.

We conducted an interview with a member of TCRG. The personal experiences and reflections contrast with these University findings. Whilst they acknowledged that the move from fixed-term to open-ended contracts offered meaningful benefits, especially to more junior staff members, they argued that a wider perspective on the meaning of this shift in contractual basis for enhancing the career prospects of postdoctoral researchers leads one to question its significance.

Our interviewee first challenged the notion that an open-ended contract allows postdoctoral researchers to be named as PIs or Co-Is on all major grant applications. They highlighted how traditional funders often require applicants to be members of faculty when applying to be PIs or Co-Is, meaning that postdocs can only appear as 'named researchers' on other people's grant applications. Interestingly, they also pointed out that some funders of fellowships aimed at 'early career' researchers require applicants to not have held a "permanent" post which raises questions about the eligibility of those on open-ended contracts. .. Our interviewee did acknowledge that there were some grants – particularly from non-traditional research funders – where research staff could serve as PI or CoI

and that moves were underway to make it easier for research staff – on fixed-term or open-ended contracts – to apply for those grants. This is very welcome as until now there has often been a time-consuming and rather untransparent approval process.

This reality is compounded in a situation where there is a pressure to apply for ever more grants - a situation of particular relevance in the TCRG where the need to diversify funding revenue is pronounced but where only very few members hold faculty posts.

The interviewee further noted that the shift from fixed-term to open-ended contract made no difference to the research staff member's experience of workloading. Whereas faculty staff get workloaded acknowledgment of roles such as serving on University committees, research ethics committees, and doctoral supervision, research staff – on fixed- or open-ended contracts – do not.

Ultimately, whilst our interviewee remained supportive of the move toward pooling resources and providing postdoctoral researchers with open-ended contracts, they stated that it is important to clearly communicate what this shift does – and what it does not do. They were not convinced that this model seriously challenged the 'structural division' between faculty staff and research staff. The model did not, for example, offer research staff a clear pathway to becoming faculty staff. The career trajectory ceiling of becoming a Senior Research Fellow remains unchanged. The structural obstacles to becoming a faculty member are clearly exacerbated by a wider sectoral context in which 'there are no jobs; there is nowhere to go'.

In conclusion, based on our *limited information*, there seems to be markedly different top-down and bottom-up perspectives on the effectiveness and significance of the shift to the pooled resourcing model in TCRG

Institute for Advanced Automated Propulsion Systems (IAAPS)

IAAPS 'carries out fundamental and applied research into propulsion technologies, engineering processes, and sustainable and inclusive mobility'. The information we present about the IAAPS pilot was gleaned from two interviews; one from a senior member of IAAPS (Interviewee A), another from a senior member of the University's HR team responsible for designing, implementing, and monitoring and evaluating these pilots (Interviewee B).

IAAPS has a track record in securing major grant funding. It employs five directors, over thirty academic staff, nineteen postdoctoral research staff, and eight administrators. IAAPS' reliance on multiple sources of research funding at any one time and the fact that it also employs a cadre of researchers with significantly interchangeable skills who regularly work on different research projects simultaneously make it a suitable case for the pooled resourcing pilot.

Interviewee A gave more detail on the nature of IAAPS' funding and consequent employment practices before the pooled resourcing pilot. Whilst IAAPS did capture larger, longer grants, it also wins a lot of short-term, small-scale funding from industry partners. Many such grants are just six or even three months long and come with significant budget constraints. This caused real issues for both staff and the research centre. For staff, this led to a very challenging psychological and financial situation where some research staff were working for several years moving from short-term contract to short-term contract. For IAAPS, though the flow of short grant contracts was pretty constant, it made IAAPS extremely difficult to manage, according to Interviewee A. This situation made IAAPS a prime candidate for the pooled resourcing pilot.

The shift from fixed-term to open-ended contracts was significant for IAAPS' researchers. In one case, according to Interviewee B, it meant giving an open-ended contract to someone who had been on successive fixed-term contracts for around thirty years! Interviewee B noted several real benefits arising from the IAAPS pilots. First, a settled pool of researchers has allowed more researchers to apply for research grants. Second, it has allowed Primary Investigators (PIs) to start bidding for new types of funding opportunities, including smaller, shorter grants. Whereas in the past, employment requirements would have deterred PIs from applying, now researchers can easily apply for the kinds of small grants that very often support preliminary literature review or proof-of-concept activities that underpin subsequent larger grant applications.

Interviewee A, a member of IAAPS themselves, echoed these benefits, stating that 'whilst the landscape for funding is currently torrid, there have now been multiple tangible funding opportunities that we have only applied for because of the security of staff recruitment that the pilot offers'. Furthermore, they also highlighted a difference in behaviour among staff who had moved from fixed-term to

open-ended contracts. They noted one staff member in particular whose motivation levels used to peak and trough with their level of contractual security and was now consistently motivated in their work. They also mentioned how longer time horizons allowed for 'better conversations about professional development'. As for research staff becoming PIs and Co-Is, Interviewee A emphasised how IAAPS had always been a close-knit, collaborative team within which individuals had long been empowered to lead and take on roles associated with being Primary Investigators. Finally, Interviewee A also recognised that if funding were to dry up and cuts needed to be made, the pooled resourcing model would allow for a more decentralised and human process of consultation within which management could engage in dialogue with research staff to explore potential 'counter-proposals' such as the universal reduction of working hours rather than redundancies.

The 'managerial overhead' required to administer the pooled resourcing model is very significant. Interviewee B acknowledged that IAAPS' directors had to shoulder a major bureaucratic burden to run this pilot. Interviewee B also told us that 'we had to do workarounds in the HR system' for it to accommodate these new alternative contractual arrangements. Interviewee A acknowledged that the model came with increased financial responsibility, but emphasised that this was the unavoidable consequence of decentralising financial decision-making away from Finance and becoming more autonomous and taking more responsibility. This has meant fully taking on the task of managing risk and 'constantly having to look at our project pipeline'. However, this is a responsibility that Interviewee A broadly welcomed, arguing overall that 'it forces [directors] to take [management] more seriously' and become 'better line managers and heads of group'. That said, Interviewee A did say that, due to the current administrative workload, the pooled resourcing model was not currently scalable within IAAPS.

Research and Impact Services (RIS)

RIS functions within the University to 'help researchers develop proposals, run projects and disseminate their findings' offering support and advice across the whole research cycle from 'pre-award' idea development and grant-writing to

building relations with external partners and communicating research findings to maximise social and economic 'impact'.[7]

Unfortunately, the RIS business model of securing income by providing project management services to PIs has proved unsuccessful enough for it to face financial challenges so significant that the University is now in consultation with its staff over making redundancies. We were told by interviewees that the financial model for RIS on which the pooled resourcing pilot was based was informed by an untenable projection for the minimum income threshold - the 'low tide mark' - for employing staff members on open-ended contracts. Putting aside the major personal costs to RIS' staff, from the perspective of pilot evaluation alone, it might be fairly said that the 'model' that failed was not pooled resourcing but the specific business model of RIS.

Institute for Mathematical Innovation (IMI)

We spoke with a member of the IMI familiar with the recent process initiated by the Institute to pool grant income funds to create four open-ended research positions. IMI seems to be a good fit for the pooled resourcing model since: a) it has a good sized team of researchers with a relatively high level of interchangeable skills and expertise which can be applied to multiple research projects and b) it gets research grant and consultancy fee income from a diverse range of funders.

IMI has four open-ended contracts of which two are filled and two are empty after the departure of two of the researchers who previously held these posts. Our interviewee told us that HR had advised them to devise a process for the fair and transparent conversion of two researchers from fixed-term to open-ended from a group of nine researchers currently employed on fixed-term contracts within IMI. Four people applied for the two positions.

Our interviewee described a challenging experience using 'Stonefish', the HR recruitment system. They recalled using the system during the time of Covid and finding a clear option to request the transfer of an employee's contract status from fixed-term to open-ended. However, when they came to use the same system this time, the option for open-ended also required an end date, which should not be necessary. Our interviewee expressed frustration that they had to receive

[7] https://www.bath.ac.uk/professional-services/research-and-impact-services-ris/

additional guidance from HR about how to move employees to open-ended contracts in Stonefish that was not clear from the platform.

Whilst our interviewee did point to the recent promotion of two colleagues from Mathematical Innovation Research Associate (MIRA) to Mathematical Innovation Research Fellow (MIRF) and the ambition of current MIRFs to achieve promotion to the position of Senior Mathematical Innovation Research Fellow (SMIRF!), they also recognised the structural career ceiling confronting research staff. They told us that they knew only one example of a research fellow becoming a professor at the University. They pointed to what they saw as unnecessary obstacles that research staff must face to be given permission to apply as PIs or Co-Is on research grant applications, specifically the need to gain the approval not just of faculty deans but the Pro-Vice Chancellor for Research; a process that can take long enough to derail applications. They told us that research staff must even get approval to access the PAM (Proposal to Award Management) system required for calculating grant costs.

Since the shift to pooled resourcing is only just taking place now, our interviewee told us that it was too early to identify any changes within IMI. However, they did point to the presence of a strong, mutually supportive team of researchers within IMI that was able to cultivate 'collective knowledge' about many things, including about bureaucratic hurdles and how to overcome them.

Key Findings

Reviewing the evidence we present in this report leads us to share the following key findings:

Findings regarding staff teaching

1. More is being done

In the Anti-Casualisation Agreement, the University stated that 'more could be done to enable effective resource planning with respect to teaching capacity across departments to avoid the necessity of employing staff in 'gap filling' roles on short fixed-term contracts wherever possible.' In many departments, more *is* being done. However, the overall picture across the University is one of inconsistency and significant variation in departmental employment practices.

2. Significant variation across departments

We find a large amount of variation in uses of fixed-term contracts across academic departments. Whilst we acknowledge that there will always be some variation, fundamentally, all departments must navigate very similar structural conditions. Despite this similarity, some departments employ and have a major reliance on staff employed on fixed-term contracts whereas others have managed to end the use of fixed-term contracts and have even been able to migrate fixed-term lecturers onto open-ended contracts.

3. University- and faculty-level planning plays a major role

It is clear that the nature of University- and faculty-level planning and, crucially, the *timing* of their annual planning rounds play a major role in determining the ease or difficulty of the departmental-level task of workload, employment, and recruitment planning. In terms of the nature of such planning, the information communicated to us by multiple interviewees working in academic departments that they are being pressured from above to find budget cuts to teaching is clearly of real concern. Whether this decision to cut teaching budgets in the face of falling student numbers is financially prudent or reactive and short-termist is an issue that our branch should debate.

The delaying of University- and faculty-level planning rounds from January by several months puts departmental planners in a challenging situation since they are unable to finalise plans for the subsequent academic year and have those plans approved at faculty-level. This is a source of major frustration.

4. Departmental leadership is crucial

Whilst we acknowledge the legitimate challenges, pressures, and frustrations that come with managing staff workloads, employment, and recruitment, our findings also highlight the indispensable role that principled, determined, and courageous leadership can play in enacting and institutionalising the culture and practices of secure, stable employment. Our interviews with academics, administrators, and PGRs in Physics, Mathematical Sciences, and P&IR in particular reveal the nature and qualities of this kind of leadership in action and the positive effects it can help bring to fruition. Through further research and possibly creating a channel for

inter-departmental communication, a model of best practice might be articulated and replicated more widely across the University.

5. Short-term horizons and managerial inertia

An observation and frustration conveyed by several interviewees concerned the short-termist horizons of planning at faculty level and, consequently, at departmental level. They expressed the belief that there were no major structural reasons for why such horizons could not be extended. One experienced interviewee argued that faculty- and department-level managers should be able to offer plans for three-to-four years ahead and specify with a good degree of accuracy their teaching staff requirements, but, since they commonly do not, this leads to a need to issue shorter fixed-term teaching contracts. They lamented that heads of department say they want the flexibility to make decisions at the last minute, but the privilege of this flexibility comes at the price of fixed-term staff members' insecurity.

The same interviewee felt that a 'large part of the problem' of the continued casualisation of academic labour at Bath is caused by 'the refusal of managers to manage'. More specifically, they pointed to a situation in which, whilst department-level 'middle managers' cannot get senior managers in Finance and HR to approve the lecturer posts they require, senior managers, in turn, are unwilling to manage middle managers. They suggested that it would make 'more sense to give departments stability' by 'allowing them to make permanent hires and expecting them to plan ahead'.

It can be argued that the current model serves managerial and University interests, but only if such interests remain conditioned by short-term horizons. This contradiction was perfectly articulated by one interviewee who argued that the current model is 'a very lean model but [one] that operates at breaking point'.

6. Underemployment is the business model

A dominant assumption is that, since staff members will always be taking sabbaticals, parental leave, sick leave, and being 'bought out' by research grant awards, academic departments will always need to employ teaching staff on

fixed-term contracts to cover them. This assumption was expressed by one interviewee, an experienced, senior academic and administrator:

> As soon as people go on sabbatical or they get ill, they go on maternity, paternity leave, we're over the edge of what we can cope with. So, yeah, I mean, I think it just basically shows we're a bit understaffed, you know, and, in effect, we could really do with one or two more permanent staff all the time rather than having to sort of fill in the gaps.

This assumption is based on a deeper, more essential, and generally implicit belief or acceptance that the University's (and HE sector's) business model is founded on, and can only be founded on, a practice of systemic underemployment where the target is to maintain employment levels in academic departments as low as possible to cover teaching loads.

This implicit acceptance and dominant assumption should be made explicit and should be challenged. There is no reason why each and every academic should not be workload at, say, 80-90% rather than 100-110+%. We posit that any extra costs would be mitigated by an increase in research grant income brought in by academics liberated to read, think, debate, and generate exciting new research ideas and plans. Academics would also have more time to reflect on and enhance their teaching which would improve student satisfaction. Both developments would attract more students to this university.

7. Minimising and even ending the use of fixed-term teaching contracts is challenging but possible

As the example of several academic departments show, minimising and even ending the use of fixed-term teaching contracts is challenging but possible. The reality of departmental budgets is such that it is very often the case that the funds available for paying for fixed-term contracts do not derive simply from one source whereby a fixed-term lecturer is covering the work of one specific staff member. Consequently, as we were told by one interviewee, department managers can draw on a combination of resourcefulness and principled determination to delink funds

and teaching positions, to pool resources over a longer time period and offer either longer fixed-term contracts or even shift individuals to open-ended contracts.

Findings regarding GTA teaching

1. Unequal progress in contracting

Whilst a good number of departments now offer low-fractional contracts to GTAs, this is still not the case in many others. Whilst low-fraction contracts may be ill-suited for some departments, due to GTA teaching responsibilities falling below 0.1 FTE, other departments wherein GTAs have more responsibilities could be supported to offer low-fractional contracts.

2. Pay progression

The majority of GTAs interviewed (on both casual and low-fractional contracts) did not report receiving incremental increases in their pay each year. In fact, most were not aware that this is something that they are entitled to. The implementation of a TTO contract in PoLIS (specifically in the P&IR division) has enabled GTAs to receive incremental pay increases for each year of employment in the university. Rolling out these contracts across the University departments would be a crucial first step in resolving this issue. For departments which use casual contracts, due to GTA teaching responsibilities falling below 0.1 FTE, Heads of Department and HR could be empowered to move casually employed GTAs up the spinal point for each year of employment to reflect their greater experience and skill.

3. Issues of transparency and equity

Informality remains a concern in certain areas. In several departments, there are reports of "tap on the shoulder" recruitment where PhD supervisors influence the allocation of teaching roles or provide lecturing opportunities. Interviewees in Health and Education, in particular, refer to some PGRs having access to a ‘pipeline’ or an ‘academic fast track’ depending on their connections with senior members of staff. Some departments have pursued formal recruitment processes which could act as a model for other departments. Moreover, P&IR’ guest lecturing programme -

to which all PGRs can apply - makes lecturing opportunities for GTAs widely available, and could be rolled out more widely across the University.

4. Unpaid work practices

Several GTAs referred to expectations within their departments that GTAs assist with supervision or give lectures. This is often justified on the basis that this will lead to a future publication or would 'look good on a CV'. Nevertheless, it amounts to GTAs working without pay. Moreover, some GTAs report being not properly remunerated for preparation time. There is a broader issue, also, at play here whereby some GTAs employed on a casual basis are unclear regarding what they can or cannot claim for. Offering low-fractional contracts more widely which clearly lists the responsibilities of GTAs could be a remedy here.

Findings regarding research

1. The 'traditional operating model' can be challenged

The traditional operating model of fixed-term postdoctoral research posts funded by fixed-term research grants is almost ubiquitous. Some of our interviewees pointed to the limiting and often very detrimental institutional and personal consequences of this model. The wider systemic landscape - the current logic and practice of research funding - imposes very real and seemingly insurmountable obstacles to doing things differently. However, whilst they also highlight major challenges, what we find from the outcomes of the pilot of the pooled resourcing model point to a potential source of positive, albeit limited, change.

2. The increased administrative workload of the pooled resourcing model

The administration of the pooled resourcing model has clearly given certain individuals a lot of additional work; individuals whose backgrounds and skillsets are primarily not administrative but academic. If the burden falls on the shoulders of just one or a few individuals, it takes real solidarity with one's colleagues and an ethical or political commitment to the model to keep the show on the road. Where

this model works in other institutions, individuals are employed specifically to administer it. This should be the case at Bath.

3. Systemic barriers to the pooled resourcing model

Interviewee B emphasised how the challenges and work associated with pursuing the pooled resourcing model are exacerbated by a funding landscape that 'doesn't reward permanent contracts'. They lamented how, whilst funding bodies 'say you need to do nice things for your people,' their grant conditionalities make it very difficult for universities, research centres, and grant applicants to do anything other than minimise costs and timeframes. Consequently, they emphasised these wider 'systemic barriers' that limited the realistic scope for expanding the model.

4. Institutional will and cultural shift

A shift to a fundamentally different logic and practice of administering the employment of researchers requires changes to the bureaucratic system used in this administration. In a pilot project, this may require temporary or imperfect 'workarounds,' but if the pooled resourcing model remains in place after pilots end more permanent changes are required. Such changes are not impossible. 'Computer says no' is not a credible response. There must be the institutional will, primarily, it seems, with the University's HR team, to undertake these technical changes.

This change in institutional will is just one aspect of a wider 'change in mindset' that is required if this University is to support and implement a shift, to the fullest extent possible within the current funding ecosystem, to pooled resourcing. Interviewee B highlighted the ideology and consequent logic and practices of individualism entrenched in the contemporary academy according to which universities often function as little more than 'hotels' providing optimal facilities for its 'guests' (preferred researchers). The pooled resourcing model disrupts this logic and these practices: 'Instead of thinking about me, it's about thinking about us'. From this perspective, the pooled resourcing model is 'quite a counter-cultural thing'.

5. Prospects for expanding the pooled resourcing at Bath

With regard to the potential for expanding the pooled resourcing model within Bath, Interviewee B identified the primary limiting factor as only a few research groups with the appropriate profile - an established track record of grant capture from multiple sources and a cadre of researchers with interchangeable skills. Nonetheless, they pointed to the forthcoming release of the Vice-Chancellor's new strategic plan and speculated that a renewed focus on priority research areas and the establishment and/or development of larger research groups could theoretically support the greater expansion of pooled resourcing. Interviewee B argued that this 'made sense' for the University as it sought to further cultivate, build up, and, crucially, retain its 'talent'. Fundamentally, however, as Interviewee B emphasised, any significant institutional shift towards the pooled resourcing model will take 'counter-cultural' intentional, courageous, and foresighted leadership.

6. The structural limits of the pooled resourcing model

Though it is based solely on one extensive interview with one highly experienced member of the research staff in TCRG, we know enough to recognise the prevalence of the issues they raise and the intransigent, structural nature of the burdens and limited career opportunities they face. Though based on limited information, we posit that the pooled resourcing model should be acknowledged as a positive model for the University and research centres to pursue rather than any panacea capable of resolving the fundamentally unequal and often unjust structural division between faculty and research staff.

Conclusions: Let's get active

What should be done in response to the findings in this report? In terms of specific actions and recommendations this is for all members of the community of the University to debate and decide.

First, it is important to say that we should not be defeatist. Though it can often be a frustrating and even disheartening experience, we do encourage members to join and exert influence on administrative committees which, in turn, can influence University policy on these matters. For example, one interviewee drew our

attention to the 'Research Staff Working Group' (RSWG), a group representing research staff and reporting on its activities to the University Research and Knowledge Exchange Committee. The co-chair of the RSWG is a member of this committee. A recent example of RSWG activity has been its contribution to raising the profile of Departmental Research Staff Leads, who act as key intermediaries between research staff and departmental and institutional structures, supporting their integration, representation, and ability to voice concerns.

There is no corresponding Teaching Only Working Group. We believe that the creation of such a working group within the managerial structure of the University could surely not harm the interests of those currently employed on teaching-only and/or fixed-term teaching contracts.

We are aware of ongoing plans within HR to draw up new guidance on the use of small fractional contracts for GTAs. We suggest that it is vital for UCU to be directly involved in developing such plans to support HR in ensuring that the guidance adheres to the pledges signed up to by the University in the Anti-Casualisation Agreement.

Finally, whilst we have structured our own report on the division between teaching and research staff, we wish to emphasise that it is not us but the current system that separates them. In reality, what unites teachers and researchers is far more than what divides us. The challenges we *all* face centre on issues of security, opportunity, acknowledgement, and respect. Consequently, we do recommend the intentional creation of spaces for all staff who are not 'permanent' academic faculty staff members to come together to reflect, learn, plan, and act together in overcoming inequalities and injustices relating to employment conditions and opportunities.