UNIVERSITIES & COLLEGES EMPLOYERS ASSOCIATION

Employee experience – Contract Types, Equality Pay Gaps and Workload Management

Presented to Trade Unions – May 2026

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Section A
UCEA Resources on Contract Types

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1. Foreword

I am delighted, on behalf of the Contract Types Reference Group, to present a suite of resources on contract types, which seeks to provide thought leadership to the sector, whilst recognising the independence of individual Higher Education institutions (HEIs).

Supporting employer aspirations to enhance the employee experience is a strategic priority for UCEA, as articulated in UCEA's Strategic Plan – Facilitating transformational change, Enhancing the employee experience 2024-2027. The contracting approaches of HEIs are a significant part of an employee's experience journey and therefore the right contractual arrangements are a key part of continuing to be a sector of choice for employees, whilst recognising the need to maintain flexibility in particular areas of the workforce. We are aware that the external environment such as the impact of Government policy, fluctuating student recruitment/demand, financial drivers and the level and conditions of research funding and grants can largely impact contracting decisions. For example, from April 2027, Scottish institutions will need to improve certain working conditions as a condition of the grants from the Scottish Funding Council, including avoiding zero hours contracts. For individuals, it is recognised that insecure employment can impact health and wellbeing and create barriers to financial security, as well as resulting in the loss of talented staff who are unable to balance their family lives and career without contracts that signal continued employment.

I would like to commend this work to the sector; work which is intended to help change the common misconception on HE's use of contracts, away from a sector with insecure employment towards a sector that employs the majority of staff on permanent contracts. A sector which is confident in its contracting arrangements, where there is not a one-size-fits-all approach to contracting decisions; where contracting decisions are based on the needs of HEIs and employees.

I am heartened to see that the reality of the sector (across all regions of the UK) is that the significant majority of staff are employed on permanent contracts: since 2017/18, the use of these contracts has increased. Only a small proportion of staff are engaged in variable hours or zero hours contracts, such contracts which can suit the needs of individual staff as well as providing HEIs with flexibility to meet business needs. The set of contract types case studies (across a range of HEIs) also demonstrates the depth and breadth of work on staff contracting that the sector continues to take across a range of staff groups, balancing institutional needs with the employee experience. Case studies include exploring pooled resourcing models for large research groups; collective agreement with Unions to improve employment practices; and the use of open-ended contracts with funding end-dates.

I would like to express my great appreciation to the Contract Types Reference Group, including the UCEA officers, for their hard work and commitment to developing these resources, which I believe will be invaluable to HEIs, not only to enhance the employee experience but to adapt to the continuing challenges the sector faces. I would also like to express my gratitude to the HEIs who have spent valuable time working with UCEA officers to develop contract types case studies which provide unique insights into contracting decisions and change projects.

Professor Ken Sloan
Chair of UCEA Contract Types Reference Group and UCEA Board Member
Vice-Chancellor and Chief Executive Officer, Harper Adams University

2. Introduction

The Contract Types Reference Group, chaired by Professor Ken Sloan, Vice-Chancellor and Chief Executive Officer, Harper Adams University, and UCEA Board member, met seven times between March 2025 and February 2026. The membership of the group included representatives from a range of HEIs and UCEA Officers.

The purpose of the Group's work was to analyse and share good practice in the use of contracts, to capture the range of contracting arrangements across the sector, as well as develop principles for future practice with a view to enhancing the employee experience. The work has taken into account and will be cognisant of the changes being introduced under the Employment Rights Act.

The Group worked to develop a suite of contract types resources for the sector, namely:

- **A set of principles for contract types for the sector, followed by a set of prompts and guidelines for HEIs to consider if they conduct a review of their contract arrangements**. The Reference Group recognised that in developing the principles and guidelines, HEIs are all at different stages and some may already have conducted a review of their contract types and made some changes; and others may not feel that the time is appropriate for them to undertake such work at this stage. The resource is there for HEIs to draw from as and when it is needed.
- **A summary of data on the HE sector's use of contract types** to contextualise the contract types work and enable some level of benchmarking by HEIs. A briefing on the analysis of contract types data in higher education has been produced, using data from the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) to report on the use of permanent, fixed-term, variable hours, and zero hours contracts across all providers in the higher education sector.
- **A set of infographics on contract types** to provide a quick and visually appealing summary of how contracts are used across the sector. This shows how the number of permanent contracts has increased in the sector, how the usage of contracts differs across roles and across protected characteristics.
- **A set of Frequently asked questions (FAQs)** to address common questions and misconceptions about the types of employment contracts used in the sector. This resource provides definitions for fixed-term, variable hours and zero hours contracts, shows how the usage of contracts has improved over time and describes UCEA's work in this area.
- **A contract types resource** (which could be applied in a flexible way, across different staff groups) to support HEIs in communicating about the range of contract types with clarity and consistency to provide:
    - A systematic and consistent approach to contracts at an HEI level, with consistent nomenclature for contract types and clear explanations of the contract types and their use at an HEI level.
    - A transparent approach to contracting, which is available to staff and managers and other internal stakeholders (including trade union representatives).

The Group determined that the contract types resource which would be most valuable to the sector was a case study by a University, as a recorded piece held on the UCEA website (password protected), to provide an example of how an HEI thinks systematically in its approach to contract types, which could help HEIs to make links between different pieces of thinking and to provide greater transparency and clarity. The recorded piece is accompanied by a follow-up resource, to prompt reflection and action by HEIs.

- **A set of case studies**, covering issues such as technician contracts, pooled resourcing models and open-ended contracts with funding end-dates. The case studies are drawn from a range of HEIs.

It is recommended that HEIs use these resources flexibly, to inform and shape their contracting arrangements to meet their organisational needs and enhance the employee experience.

3. Principles and reflections for contract types in HE

Principles and reflections for contract types in HEIs

UCEA encourages HE institutions to review their contractual frameworks periodically, with due regard to examples of good practice that exist in the sector and evolving legislative frameworks. The scope and timing of any such reviews are a matter for local determination. Where HEIs plan to review their contractual frameworks, the following guiding principles, drawn from insights across the sector, are recommended for consideration within the process.

Principles

- A contractual framework should seek to reflect institutional needs, including financial sustainability, flexibility and agility, whilst addressing employees' aspirations for predictability and security.
- The types of contracts used, and the relative proportions of each contract type, will differ between HEIs, depending on individual institutions' target operating models.
- It is reasonable for all the people who work for an organisation to understand the basis on which they do so. Contract types, the differences between them, and the circumstances in which different types would be used, should be clear for all stakeholders. The HEI's commitments to staff in relation to contract types should be clear for all.
- Wide stakeholder engagement is advisable in the development of a contract types framework, including senior leadership and workforce representatives.
- HEIs should be cognisant of the equality and diversity profile of staff on different contract types. HEIs are encouraged to consider appropriate monitoring in order to seek to avoid adverse impacts on different staff groups.

Reflections in relation to changing contract types

Aims

- Develop overarching principles covering the HEI's approach to contracts.
- Identify the scope of any review of contract types, acknowledging that some work for the HEI may be undertaken by staff who are employed outside the HEI, for example on sub-contracts or a self-employed basis.
- Identify the aims of any changes to contract types. Changes should aim to develop a workforce of the appropriate shape, aligned with the HEI's priorities and business objectives, rather than just aiming to reduce the use of specific types of contracts.
- Identify and outline the positive impacts that your HEI aims to achieve through an improved approach to contract types, both for the HEI and for the employee experience.
    - (For example, for the HEI: enhanced research performance; improved institutional agility; avoiding delays in recruitment; improving workforce stability; improved alignment between contracts and HEI needs; improved recruitment and retention; improved employee engagement; improved oversight of contract data and EDI).
    - (For example, for employees: greater job security and stability; improved morale, improved engagement; financial inclusion; enhanced career development

opportunities; predictable working patterns all leading to a better employee experience).
- Ensure that desired changes take account of any need for flexibility to respond to fluctuations in business demand.

Consultation and engagement

- Ensure appropriate senior level leadership engagement for any change programme, to improve acceptance.
- Involve a range of appropriate stakeholders during processes to develop changes to contracts, for example involve:
    - Schools/Departments during the design phase.
    - Finance about the impact, sustainability and affordability of proposed changes
- Engage with local trade unions or workplace representatives when considering changes to contract types.
- Consider seeking the views of staff engaged on different contract types, when considering possible changes.

Planning

- Ensure that the HEI's HR and Payroll systems are able to adapt to any planned changes to contract types and/or contract management.
- Review and amend administrative processes associated with contract engagement, management and termination as needed.
- Consider how any amendments to contract types might affect categorisation and reporting of data to HESA.
- Consider culture change (and potentially addressing resistance) as part of any project to implement changes to contract types.
- Consider improvements for local workforce planning and financial forecasting to identify changes in work demands and capacity, as well as opportunities for staff who may be at risk of redundancy.

Implementation

- Consider central and local implementation and resourcing, to seek consistency across the HEI.
- Consider how implementation will be monitored and reviewed.
- Consider data needs (including tracking working patterns, hours and EDI data), and the governance, ownership and oversight of any data. Consider how any audit data might be shared.

Communication with employees

- Think about current levels of understanding about contract types before developing a communications plan.
- Once a new/amended contracts framework is developed, give employees as much clarity as possible about:
    - The types of contracts the HEI uses
    - The reasons for using different contracts
    - The categories of roles on different contracts
    - The terms and conditions associated with different contracts (if there are differences between contract types)

- Seek to ensure transparency and support for line managers about contract types and recruitment/selection processes.
- Seek to ensure that communications about contractual changes are expressed clearly and consistently across the HEI as a whole i.e. across all Schools/Departments.
- Where there are open-ended contracts with funding end-dates, be clear that the end-date relates to the post and not the contract itself and is determined by external funding source(s).

4. Briefing on the HE sector's use of contract types

Contract types in higher education

Executive summary

- In higher education, the majority of staff are employed on permanent contracts and only a small proportion of staff are engaged on variable hours or zero hours contracts.
- This briefing uses data from the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) to report on the use of these contracts across all providers in the higher education sector.
- Since 2017/18, the use of permanent contracts has increased in the sector. The use of zero hours contracts continues to decrease.
- Contract types vary across academic roles. Compared to teaching only roles and teaching & research roles, a higher proportion of research only roles are employed on fixed-term contracts, primarily due to time-limited research funding.
- Variable hours contracts and zero hours contracts are almost exclusively used for teaching only roles.
- While a higher proportion of ethnic minority staff are employed on fixed-term, variable hours and zero hours contracts compared to white staff, the proportion of staff employed on these contracts is similar when analysed by gender and disability status.
- The use of contract types does not show considerable variation across regions of the UK. In all regions, the majority of staff are employed on permanent contracts and a minority of staff are employed on variable hours and zero hours contracts.
- The analysis presented in this document will be updated on a rolling basis to reflect the latest data for and definitions of contracts. HESA will publish staff data for the 2024/25 academic year in February 2026. While headline findings can be analysed from the HESA open data, UCEA will provide a fuller analysis of the 2024/25 data.

Introduction

As stated in the Terms of Reference, the purpose of our work on contract types is 'to share good practice in the use of fixed-term contracts, and variable or zero hours contracts'. This serves the purposes to 'capture the range of contracting arrangements across the sector'. This briefing aims to provide context to the work of the Reference Group. The Reference Group has noted that the negative perception portrayed of the use of contract types in higher education is not supported by authoritative data. Moreover, the current briefing contributes towards the stated Aims of the Terms of References, namely to:

- Understand organisational drivers for contract decisions in the HE sector including the reasons for using particular contracts in the sector,
- Consider and analyse the relevant data available and determine where further data is required to share good practice in the use of various contractual arrangements/contract types.

Each of these contract types are defined in the Terms of Reference as below:

- **Fixed-term contracts** are contracts of employment that are not open-ended/permanent, depending on the circumstances/business requirements. Fixed-term contracts may be used when an employee is needed to work on a particular task/project or to work for a specified length of time, for example, to provide absence cover or when the funding for the role is external and for a limited period, such as to undertake research.
- **Variable hours contracts** are agreements between two parties, which may be established as contracts of employment, or may be casual contracts between an organisation and an individual with worker status. The contracts are usually open-ended, although they may be fixed-term. The contracts do not have a specified pattern of working hours, and hours may vary from year to year or term to term, for example. Such contracts will have a minimum number of hours (for example on an annual, monthly or weekly basis).
- **Zero hours contracts** are a form of variable hours contracts where there is no minimum number of guaranteed hours. These may also be casual contracts between an organisation and an individual with worker status.

HESA staff record and contract types

HESA, or the Higher Education Statistics Agency, collects information on the use of contracts in higher education through its staff record. This dataset is published annually and represents an objective source for all UK providers. The HESA definitions of fixed-term, variable hours and zero hours contracts are given below. This dataset shows how the use of these contract types has changed over time as well as how their usage varies by role and by the protected characteristics sex, ethnicity and disability status.

- For **fixed-term contracts**[1], the HESA definitions distinguish between permanent, fixed-term, and atypical contracts.
- HESA defines **variable hours contracts**[2] by considering how staff are paid rather than their working patterns. HESA reports on salaried, hourly paid, and other contracts.
- For **zero hours contracts**[3], HESA reports on zero hours and non-zero hours contracts.

In the HESA data set, each contract type is independent from one another: a permanent contract can have fixed or variable hours. Similarly, a zero hours contract can either be permanent or fixed-term.

These definitions are liable to change following a review of HESA's staff record. The proposed changes aim to provide better coverage of technical staff, improvements to tracking career progression and the definition of fixed-term contracts. For fixed-term contracts, the proposal is to track the length of these contracts (including successive contracts) and whether contracts are tied to grant funding. These changes will be introduced for the 2026/27 academic year.

The analysis below considers full person equivalents (FPE, or headcount) from the HESA data. This analysis excludes atypical staff in the sector, with these staff having non-permanent (i.e. four weeks or less) or complex (i.e. work away from the provider) working arrangements. HESA has reported on variable and zero hours contracts since the 2017/18 academic year. Since 2019/20, it has been optional for providers in England and Northern Ireland to report professional services staff to HESA. Around two-thirds of providers continue to report this information. The review of the

[1] Terms of employment, HESA staff record
[2] Hourly paid marker, HESA staff record
[3] Zero hours contracts, HESA staff record

staff record proposes that reporting professional services staff should become mandatory once again from 2026/27.

While the Terms of Reference address principles for employing graduate teaching assistants (GTAs) and postgraduate researchers (PGRs), these two types of roles are not addressed in the current briefing. This is because there is no single marker within the HESA staff return which identifies whether employees are currently engaged in postgraduate study as well as delivering teaching or research.

Current usage of contracts in the sector – HESA 2023-24

The most recent HESA data is for the 2023/24 academic year, reporting on the contractual terms of approximately 453,000 staff across the sector.

Staff group	Fixed-term contracts		Variable hours contracts		Zero hours contracts	
	Count	Proportion	Count	Proportion	Count	Proportion
All staff	98,005	22%	38,445	9%	5,265	1%
Academic staff	71,715	29%	33,880	14%	4,075	2%
Professional services staff	26,290	13%	4,565	2%	1,190	<1%

The table above shows that in 2023/24:

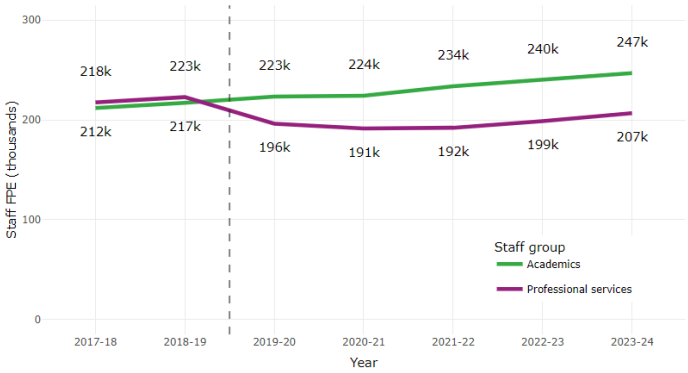
- Four-fifths of all HE staff (78%) were employed on permanent contracts, with 22% being employed on a fixed-term contract.
- Nine-tenths of all HE staff (91%) were salaried, with only 9% of staff employed on variable hours contracts.
- Only 1% of higher education staff were employed on a zero hours contract.

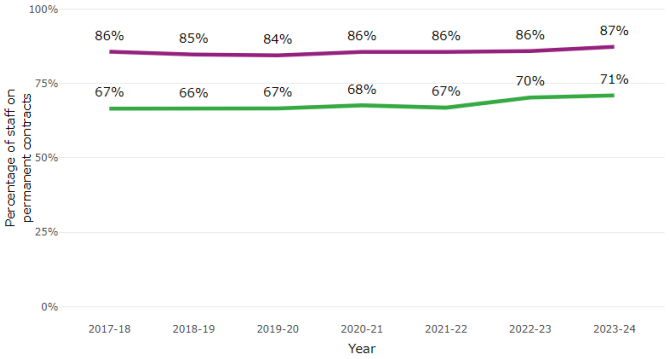
Contract types differed across major staff groups, with academic staff being less likely to be employed on permanent contracts and more likely to be employed on variable hours contracts and zero hours contracts:

- Over two-thirds of academic staff (71%) were on permanent contracts, compared to 87% of professional services staff.
- 14% of academic staff were on variable hours contracts, compared to only 2% of professional services staff.
- While 2% of academic staff were employed on zero hours contracts, less than 1% of professional services staff were employed on this basis.

Trends in the use of contract types

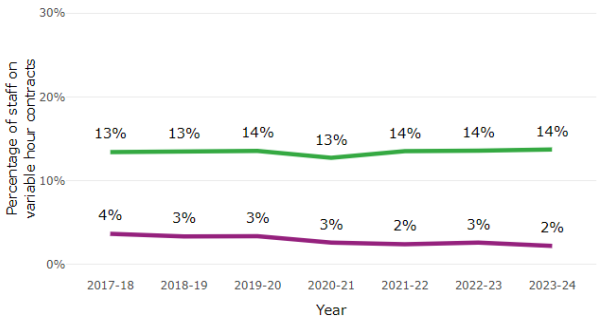
HESA data shows that number of staff employed in the sector has increased from 430,000 in 2016/17 to 453,000 in 2023/24. It is likely that the actual number of staff in the sector is higher than the figure reported by HESA. Reporting professional services staff data has been optional since 2019/20 (indicated by the dashed line). Where providers no longer report on their professional services staff, the reported numbers are lower as these staff are not included in the HESA staff record.

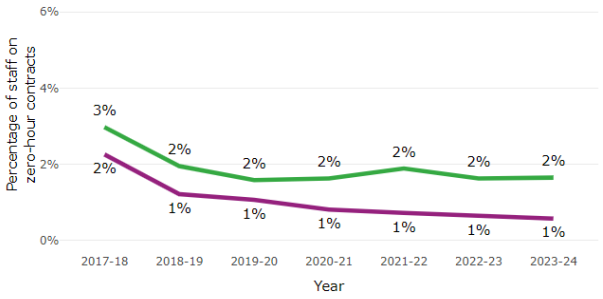




These charts show that:

- Compared to 2017/18, more staff were on permanent contracts in 2023/24.
- 71% of academic staff were employed on a permanent contract in 2023/24, compared to 67% in 2017/18.
- The proportion of professional services staff on permanent contracts increased from 84% in 2019/20 to 87% in 2023/24.
- Around one in seven academic staff were employed on variable hours contracts across the time period (13% to 14%).
- The number of professional services staff on variable hour contracts halved between 2017/18 (4%) and 2023/24 (2%).
- The usage of zero hours contracts has also decreased since 2017/18, with this having decreased from 3% of academic staff in 2017/18 to 2% in 2023/24.
- The proportion of professional services staff on zero hours contracts has decreased from 2% (2017/18) to <1% (2023/24).





Use of contract types across academic roles

The contractual terms of academic staff varies across academic employment functions. The HESA data set divides academic contracts into those which involve teaching, research or both.

Academic employment function	% of all academic roles	% on permanent contracts	% on variable hours contracts	% on zero hours contracts
Teaching only	36%	64%	36%	5%
Research only	21%	36%	1%	<0.1%
Teaching & research	43%	93%	1%	<0.1%

Note: As each contract type is independent from one another, the figures above do not sum to 100%.

- Two fifths of academic roles in 2023/24 involved both teaching & research (43%), a further fifth involved research only (21%) and a third involved teaching only (36%).
- A lower proportion of research only roles (36%) were employed on permanent contracts compared to other functions. This can be attributed partially to time-limited research funding.
- By contrast, most teaching only (64%) and teaching & research (93%) staff are employed on permanent contracts.
- Variable hours contracts are almost exclusively used for teaching only roles. This represents around a third of these roles (36%) in terms of headcount. Variable hours contracts represent 14% of teaching only roles when considered by FTE (full-time equivalent) instead. This shows that these roles tend to have a low number of contracted hours and thus deliver a small proportion of all teaching.
- By comparison, variable hours contracts represent only 1% of research only and 1% of teaching & research roles.
- While zero hours contracts are used to employ a small proportion (5%) of teaching only staff, these contracts are only used to employ an extremely small proportion (<0.1%) of research only and teaching & research staff.

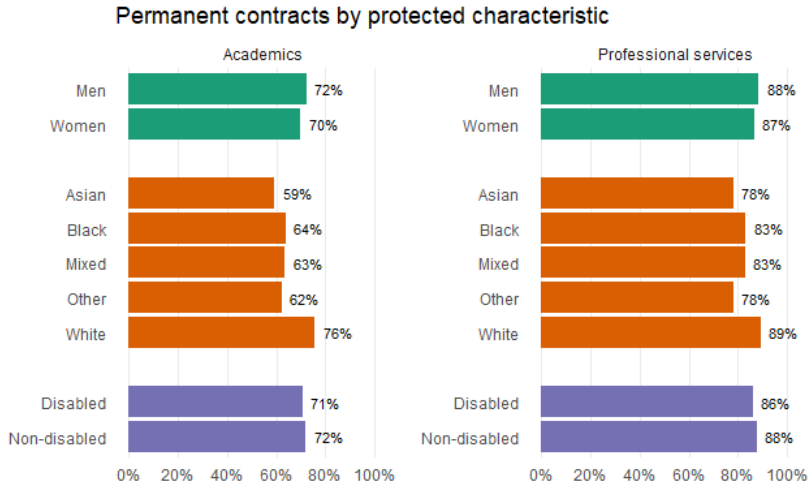
Use of contract types by protected characteristics

The HESA staff return reports on a range of protected characteristics including sex, ethnicity and disability. The tables below show the proportion of academic and professional services staff that were employed on permanent, variable hours and zero hours contracts in 2023/24 for each of these protected characteristics.

For permanent contracts, this analysis shows that:

- Across all protected characteristics, the majority of both academic and professional services staff in HE are employed on permanent contracts.
- The permanency of contracts does not show substantial variation by gender or disability status. For example, 72% of male academics are on permanent contracts, compared to 70% of female academics.
- A lower proportion of ethnic minority staff are employed on permanent contracts compared to white staff.
- Compared to white academics (76%), fewer ethnic minority academics are employed on permanent contracts (e.g. 64% of black academics, 59% of Asian academics).
- For professional services staff, 78% of Asian staff are on permanent contracts, compared to 89% of white staff.

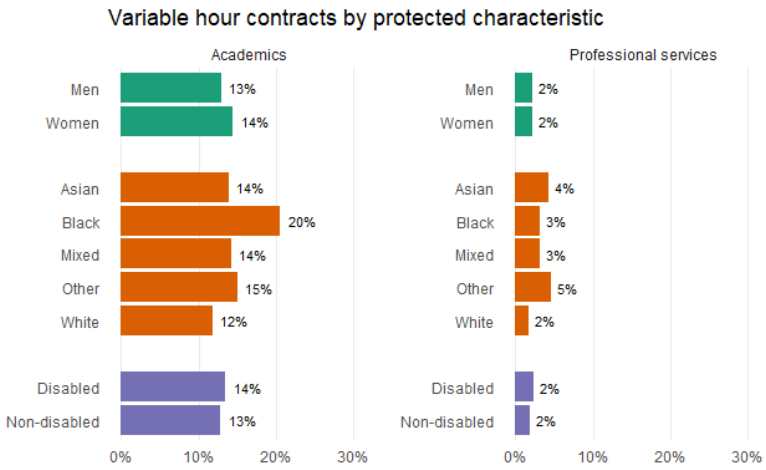
Protected characteristic	% of staff on permanent contracts	
	Academics	Professional services
Male staff	72%	88%
Female staff	70%	87%
Asian staff	59%	78%
Black staff	64%	83%
Mixed ethnicity staff	63%	83%
Other ethnicity staff	64%	78%
White staff	76%	89%
Disabled staff	71%	86%
Non-disabled staff	72%	88%



For variable hours contracts, this analysis shows that:

- Across all protected characteristics, the majority of both academic and professional services staff in HE are salaried.
- The usage of variable hours contracts does not show substantial variation by gender or disability status. For example, 13% of male academics are employed on this basis compared to 14% of female academics.
- A higher proportion of black academics (20%) are employed on variable hours contracts compared to white academics (12%).
- For other ethnic minority groups, the proportion of academics on variable hours contracts is more comparable to that for white staff.
- 2% of white professional services staff are employed on variable hours contracts, as compared to 4% of Asian staff and 5% of staff from other ethnicity groups (i.e. staff who are not Asian, black, mixed ethnicity or white).

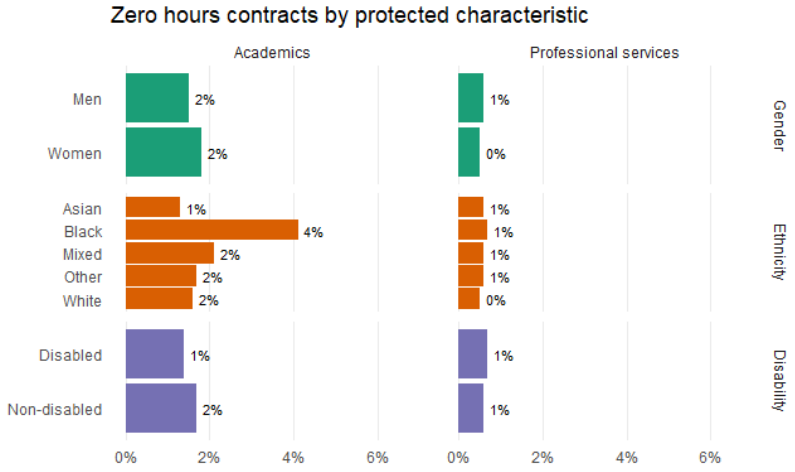
Protected characteristic	**% of staff on variable hours contracts**	
	Academics	**Professional services**
Male staff	13%	2%
Female staff	14%	2%
Asian staff	14%	4%
Black staff	20%	3%
Mixed ethnicity staff	14%	3%
Other ethnicity staff	15%	5%
White staff	12%	2%
Disabled staff	14%	2%
Non-disabled staff	13%	2%



Zero hours contracts show similar patterns to variable hours contracts:

- Across all protected characteristics, only a small proportion of staff in HE are employed on zero hours contracts.
- The proportion of black academics (4%) employed on zero hours contracts is higher than the proportion for any other ethnic group (2% or less).
- The usage of zero hours contracts does not show substantial variation by gender or disability status. For example, 2% of both male and female academics are employed in this way.
- For professional services staff, the proportion of staff employed on zero hours contracts is 1% or less across all groups.

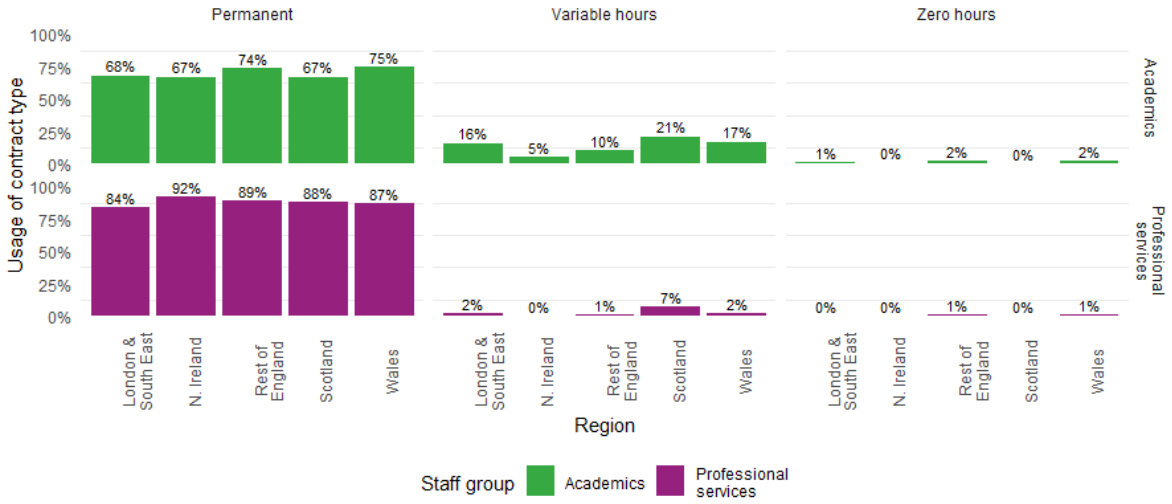
Protected characteristic	% of staff on zero hours contracts	
	Academics	Professional services
Male staff	2%	1%
Female staff	2%	<1%
Asian staff	1%	1%
Black staff	4%	1%
Mixed ethnicity staff	2%	1%
Other ethnicity staff	2%	1%
White staff	2%	<1%
Disabled staff	1%	1%
Non-disabled staff	2%	1%



Use by contract types across nations & regions

The usage of contract types does not show considerable variation across regions of the UK. The analysis below considers HEIs based in London and the South East, the Rest of England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

The chart below indicates the proportion of academic and professional services staff employed on permanent, variable hours and zero hours contracts across these five regions.

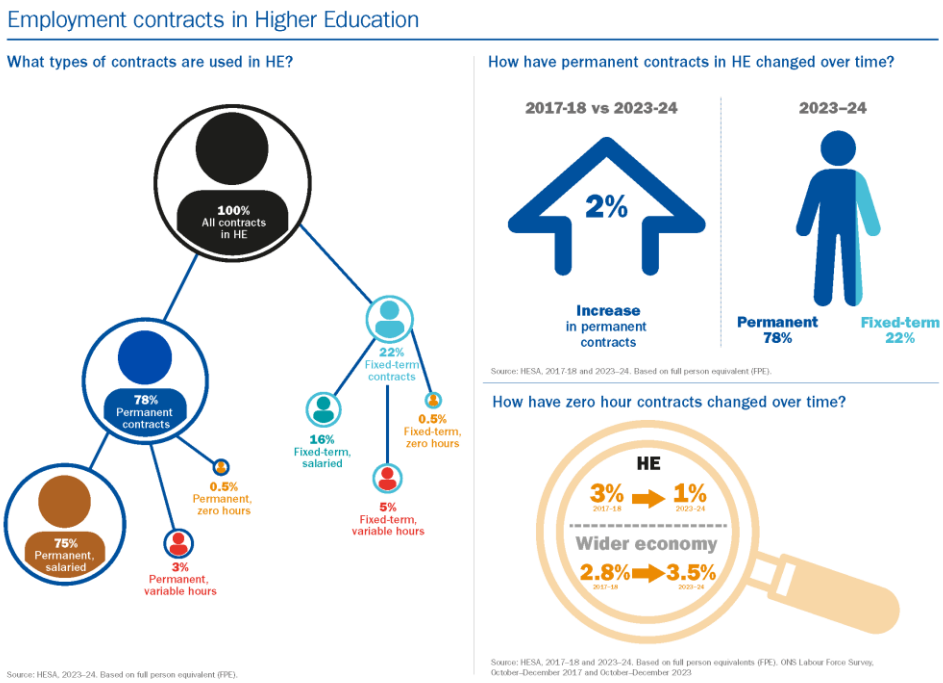


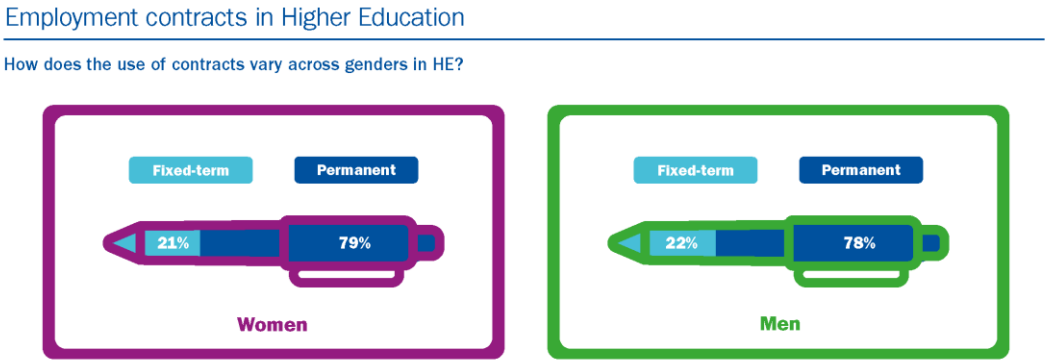
This analysis shows that:

- Across all regions, between two thirds and three quarters of academic staff (e.g. 75% in Wales, 33% in Northern Ireland, Scotland) are employed on permanent contracts.
- Over four fifths of professional services staff in each region (92% in Northern Ireland; 84% in London and the South East) are employed on permanent contracts.
- In Scotland, a higher proportion of staff are employed on variable hours contracts (21% for academics; 7% for professional services) than other nations.
- Elsewhere, the proportion for academic staff ranges between 16% and 5% across regions.
- In each region, 2% or less of professional services staff are employed on variable hour contracts.
- Across all five regions, 2% or less of academics are employed on zero hours contracts.
- 1% or less of professional services staff are employed on zero hours contracts across all regions.

5. Use of employment contracts in Higher Education

a. Infographic – Employment contracts in Higher Education







b. Briefing on contract types infographic

Briefing for Employment contracts in HE infographics

The Contract Types Reference Group's suite of contract types resources for the sector aim to inform and shape HEIs' contracting arrangements to meet organisational needs and enhance the EX. This briefing supports the new infographics examining 'Employment contracts in HE' with notes to limit text-heavy explanations within the infographics themselves. The infographics, seeking to clarify facts and figures behind a key issue for HE sector employment, use information from the latest (2023-24) available HESA data. They present accessible information of sector level data showing the use of different contract types for both academic and professional services employees.

While this data dates to 2023-24, UCEA members have been clear that they continue to seek updated facts, figures, and infographics and for such information to be utilised locally. Specifically, this work explores existing practice and develops principles for future practice in relation to fixed-term, variable hours and zero hours contracts.

Within the Terms of Reference, these contracts are defined as below:

- *Fixed-term contracts* are contracts of employment that are not open-ended/permanent, depending on the circumstances/business requirements. Fixed-term contracts may be used for work on a particular task/project or to work for a specified length of time. Fixed-term contracts are defined using the HESA field 'Terms of employment'.
- *Variable hours contracts* do not have a specified pattern of working hours, and hours may vary from year to year or term to term, for example. Such contracts have a minimum number of hours (for example, on an annual, monthly or weekly basis). Variable hours contracts are defined using the HESA field 'Hourly paid marker'.
- *Zero hours contracts* are a form of variable hours contracts where there is no minimum number of guaranteed hours. These may also be casual contracts between an organisation and an individual with worker status. Zero hours contracts are defined using the HESA field 'Zero hours contract'.

We aim to develop additional contract types infographics and will soon be uploading new Pay Gaps infographics. All infographics are available as individual jpeg attachments on the UCEA website and we encourage their use. Feedback, suggestions and examples used at local level will always be well received, and we hope the information below is useful:

What types of contracts are used in HE? shows the different types of contracts that are used in HE and the proportions of each contract type. This shows that the majority of the contracts in HE are permanent and salaried, while fixed-term contracts, variable hours and zero hours contracts are the minority of cases. The diagram shows that contracts have both a term (permanent/fixed-term) and a working pattern (salaried/variable hours/zero hours). This shows that contracts can be permanent while having variable hours or fixed-term but salaried. This infographic uses HESA data from 2023-24, reporting on both academic and professional services staff – atypical staff are excluded, however. HESA also refer to permanent contracts as 'open-ended'.

'How have permanent contracts in HE changed over time?' considers the use of permanent contracts in the sector. In 2017-18, 76% of all staff in the sector were employed on permanent contracts. In 2023-24, the proportion of staff employed in this way increased to 78%, an increase of 2%.

‘How have zero hours contracts changed over time?’ considers the use of zero hours contracts in the sector. In the first year that HESA collected data on these contracts (2017-18), 3% of all staff in HE were employed on this basis. The proportion of staff employed on a zero hours contract has decreased to 1%. HESA divided contracts in the sector into zero hours contracts and non-zero hours contracts i.e. those with a guaranteed number of hours.

Data from the ONS Labour Force Survey shows that 3.5% of the UK workforce were on a zero hour contract between October and December 2023. The proportion of staff on zero hour contracts has increased in the wider economy from 2.8%, the rate reported between October and December 2017. These dates are matched with the census dates of the HESA staff return from 2017-18 and 2023-24.

‘How does the use of contracts vary across genders in HE?’ shows that the proportion of men and women HE staff is similar when comparing employment contracts. This is based on HESA data reporting the biological sex of staff, not their gender identity.

‘How does the use of contracts in HE vary by ethnicity?’ considers the proportion of HE staff on permanent contracts across five ethnicity groups. While 82% of white staff in HE, the proportion of staff on permanent contracts is lower for Asian staff (66%), black staff (73%), mixed ethnicity staff (72%), and staff from other ethnicity groups (66%).

c. Frequently Asked Questions on Contract types

What is HESA and why do we use their data?
HESA is the Higher Education Statistics Agency. They collect data on staff on an annual basis across all Higher Education (HE) providers based in the UK. The data that they collect concerns the employment conditions of almost half a million staff, including their roles, contractual terms and protected characteristics.

What is a fixed-term contract?
A fixed-term contract is a contract that is not open-ended/permanent depending on the circumstances/business requirements, used when employees work on a particular task or project, or for a specified length of time.

What is a variable hours contract?
A variable hours contract is an agreement between two parties (which could be a contract of employment or a casual contract between an organisation and a worker).

These contracts do not have a specified pattern of working hours and these hours may vary from term to term or year to year. These contracts have a minimum number of hours. A variable hours contract could be either permanent/open-ended or for a fixed term.

What is a zero hours contract?
A zero hours contract is a form of variable hours contract where there is no minimum number of guaranteed hours. These may also be casual contracts between an organisation and an individual with worker status. A zero hours contract could be either permanent/open-ended or for a fixed term.

How is the usage of contract types changing over time?
The percentage of staff employed on permanent contracts has increased from 76% in 2017/18 to 78% in 2023/24. For academic staff, this has increased from 67% to 71%. For professional services, this has increased from 85% to 87%.

The proportion of staff that are employed on variable hours contracts has remained constant at 8% between 2017/18 and 2023/24. For professional services, the usage of these contracts has halved from 4% (2017/18) to 2% (2023/24).

The proportion of staff that are employed on zero hours contracts decreased from 3% to 1% between 2017/18 and 2023/24. For academic staff, the use of zero hours contracts has decreased from 3% to 2%, while it has decreased from 2% to <1% for professional services.

Why might universities and staff choose fixed-term contracts?
Examples of when universities may choose to employ staff on fixed-term contracts are to provide absence cover (such as for staff on sickness absence or family friendly leave) or when the funding for the role is external and for a limited period, such as to undertake research. These contracts may also be used to accommodate changes to student demand. These contracts are also commonly used to provide development opportunities for postgraduate students and to early career researchers who have time-limited research funding.

Why might universities and staff choose variable hours (and zero hours) contracts?

Variable hours contracts may be preferrable to other contract types, depending on operational requirements and employee needs. For example, these contracts may be used to bring industry practitioners and other specialists with expertise into higher education institutions (HEIs) to deliver teaching that would not otherwise be possible. These contracts also offer staff a high degree of flexibility and may be appropriate for postgraduate students who support teaching alongside their studies.

How is UCEA supporting HEIs in their use of contract types?

UCEA believes that contracting arrangements are an integral part of an employee's experience (EX). UCEA is currently working with its members in order to share good practice in the use of fixed-term, variable hours and zero hours contracts. This work establishes how prevalent these contracts are within the sector as well as the reasons that institutions have for using these contracts. Case studies demonstrate good practice in the sector and show how institutions have worked with their staff and trade unions on contracting behaviours at a local level. UCEA is also working to develop a set of principles that employers should consider when designing roles and structures as well as when reviewing contractual frameworks.

Section B

UCEA Resources on Equality Pay Gaps

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1. Foreword

I am delighted, on behalf of the Equality Pay Gaps Reference Group, to present a suite of resources on equality pay gaps, to support HE Institutions (HEIs) further to reduce sector pay gaps. Equality pay gaps can be seen as a measure of an employer's fairness to its employees, an indicator of its commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion, and how it rewards and values its employees, ultimately impacting the employee experience.

UCEA's Five Employee Experience (EX) Pillars are the foundation of UCEA's work to support employer aspirations to enhance the employee experience (a strategic priority for UCEA, articulated in UCEA's Strategic Plan – Facilitating transformational change, Enhancing the employee experience 2024-2027). Pillar three is "Promoting inclusion and sharing the steps HEIs can take to reduce the gender, ethnicity and disability pay gaps."

Whilst we know that pay gaps are a wider societal issue, it is heartening to see that, due to the sustained and hard work of HEIs over a number of years, the sector continues to make excellent progress to reduce equality pay gaps whilst focusing their attention on intersectional pay gaps. UCEA's most recent (2025) Intersectional Pay Gaps Survey reports that trends continue to be on a downward trajectory and pay gap reporting from HEIs compares favourably with that for the wider economy. UCEA's equality pay gaps case studies present experiences, challenges, and insights into the work HEIs have taken to tackle equality pay gaps and UCEA's (2024) Report – Reducing pay gaps – actions taken by HEIs – captures a sample of activity undertaken in the sector to reduce gender pay gaps and other pay gaps. Although 107 HEIs (representing two thirds of UCEA's current membership) responded to the 2025 survey, there is a need to encourage more members to participate.

It is crucial to raise the profile of the sector's work on equality pay gaps, as a sector of employers of choice, increasing transparency whilst recognising the importance of simplicity in this messaging, making the sector's equality pay gaps work accessible to different audiences and clear any misconceptions about what a pay gap reflects. There is also a need for employers to create safe, encouraging environments to enable staff to share their protected characteristics information which enables employers to develop targeted action plans which go a long way in narrowing or closing pay gaps.

I am pleased to see that exciting work has begun to address the gender pensions gap in the sector. A new gender pensions gap reference group is being formed, including representatives from a range of HEIs, and I am looking forward to hearing about the steps that the sector can take to tackle this complex and challenging area, including any urgent consideration of actions that can be taken which are within the control of HEIs.

I would like to commend this work to the sector and express my sincere gratitude to the HEIs and UCEA Officers who, through the Equality Pay Gaps Reference Group, have worked hard to maintain momentum and deliver this collection of resources for the sector, which I am sure you will all find useful.

Professor Jane Harrington

Chair of UCEA Equality Pay Gaps Reference Group and UCEA Board Member
Vice-Chancellor, University of Greenwich

2. Introduction

The Equality Pay Gaps Reference Group, chaired by Professor Jane Harrington, Vice-Chancellor, University of Greenwich, and a UCEA Board member, met six times between April 2025 and February 2026. The membership of the Group included representatives from a range of HEIs and UCEA Officers.

The focus of the Group's work was to build on progress to date to close gender, ethnicity and disability pay gaps, taking into account any legal developments, such as the relevant changes being introduced under the Employment Rights Act and the draft Equality (Race and Disability) Bill. Following in-depth debate by the group, three 'High-priority' areas for delivery were identified:

1. **Determine what is appropriate and useful regarding equality pay gaps data.**
   UCEA has produced a briefing on statutory gender pay gap reporting across nations of the UK and an equality pay gaps data briefing. While pay gaps reporting varies across the nations of the UK, 107 HEIs currently report their gender, ethnicity and intersectional pay gaps through UCEA's intersectional pay gaps survey. The median gender pay gap in HE was 11.5% in 2024, down from 12.0% in 2023. The median ethnicity pay (4.7% in 2024) has also decreased compared to 2020 (5.8%). As well as showing progress toward closing pay gaps, the widespread reporting shows that HEIs are well prepared for mandatory ethnicity and disability pay gap reporting.

2. **Raise the profile of equality pay gaps work in the sector, through communications and engagement.** UCEA has produced a series of infographics and Frequently asked questions (FAQs) that provide important context and improve engagement with equality pay gaps resources. These visual resources explain common issues such as how pay gaps differ from equal pay, what pay gap statistics represent and the factors behind differences in the average pay of men and women.

3. **Develop sector-level good practice guidance for employers regarding encouraging sharing of protected characteristics information by employees.**
   UCEA has produced a checklist alongside a set of learnings from nine HEIs which is accompanied by disclosure rates for gender, ethnicity and disability for the HE sector and comparable sectors. Discussions by the Reference Group identified that the shape of the resource should be simple and user-friendly with a focus on story-telling, based around a set of learnings from HEIs to provide the ability for HEIs to draw from these different contexts. The Group also highlighted that it would be useful for HEIs to be able to benchmark their protected characteristic data against the sector and more widely in this area. In order to address pay gaps across protected characteristics, it is important that employers have accurate information about the individuals in the higher education workforce.

Underpinning these high priorities, a set of case studies will continue to be developed from within and outside the HE sector; these will be added to UCEA's existing bank of 10 pay gaps case studies.

It is recommended that HEIs use this suite of resources flexibly, to build on their progress to tackle equality pay gaps, to improve their position as employers of choice and enhance the recruitment and retention of their staff.

3. Equality pay gap reporting arrangements
- Statutory gender pay gap reporting across nations of the UK England, Scotland & Wales

Since 2017, gender pay gap reporting has been required through the Equality Act 2010 (Specific Duties and Public Authorities) Regulations 2017. This legislation applies to employers in England, Scotland and Wales with 250 or more employees. This does not apply, however, to public authorities in Scotland and Wales.

For public employers, data must be reported for the census date of 31 March each year. Data for any given year must be reported within a year of the census date.
The six statistics that are required for reporting are:

- Mean and median pay gap - the average (both mean and median) difference in the hourly pay of men and women
- Mean and median bonus gap - the average (both mean and median) difference in the performance related pay of men and women
- Proportion of male and female staff in receipt of a bonus
- Pay quarters - the proportions of male and female employees in the lower, lower middle, upper middle and upper quartile pay bands

The statutory data that is reported by individual employers is presented through the Government's Gender Pay Gap Service – an online portal for searching and comparing gender pay gap data.

The draft Equality (Race and Disability) Bill proposes to introduce mandatory ethnicity and disability pay reporting using the same six statistics listed above. This is expected to apply to private sector employers in Great Britain and public sector employers in England with 250 or more employees.

In March 2026, the Government announced new legislation on action planning to reduce gender pay gaps. From April 2026, employers in England, Wales, and Scotland with 250 or more employees will be encouraged to publish action plans through the Government's Gender Pay Gap Service. Action planning also covers support for employees experiencing menopause and health conditions such as endometriosis, fibroids, and polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS). Submitting an action plan will be voluntary at first, with plans for 2026-27 to be submitted by 30 March 2027 for public sector employers. Submission of action plans for 2027-28 will become mandatory, with the deadline being 30 March 2028.

Scotland

As HEIs in Scotland are public authorities, the gender pay gap regulations described above do not apply to them. Instead, gender pay gap reporting is under The Equality Act 2010 (Specific Duties) (Scotland) Regulations 2012. Since 2013, public authorities with more than 20 employees are required to publish their mean gender pay gap, defined as the percentage difference between men's average hourly pay and women's average hourly pay. This statistic must be reported every two years. Prior to April 2016, this applied to employers with 150 or more employees.

Public authorities in Scotland are **not** required to report gender bonus gap data, pay quarters, or the proportion of male and female staff that received bonus pay. The Public Sector Equality Duty in Scotland requires public authorities to publish an equal pay policy and information on

occupational segregation. This typically includes reporting the proportion of staff in each grade by gender.

The draft Equality (Race and Disability) Bill is not expected to require public sector employers in Scotland to report ethnicity and disability pay gaps. As is the case with gender, Scottish public authorities must currently report information on equal pay and occupational segregation for both ethnicity and disability.

In January 2026, the Scottish Government announced changes to the Tertiary Education and Training (TET) Bill. Universities in receipt of Scottish Funding Council (SFC) funding will need to comply with all Fair Work First criteria from April 2027. This includes a requirement to 'address workplace inequalities, including pay and employment gaps for disabled people, racialised minorities, women and workers aged over 50'.

Wales

Statutory gender pay gap reporting does not apply to Welsh HEIs, as they are public authorities. Since 2011, the Equality Act 2010 (Statutory Duties) (Wales) Regulations 2011 has required Welsh public authorities to publish an action plan to address any gender pay difference which they identify.

This action plan should address:

- any policy of the authority that relates to the need to address the causes of any gender pay difference;
- any gender pay equality objective published by it (including revisions); and
- a statement about the steps it has taken or intends to take to fulfil its gender pay objective and how long it expects it to take.

The Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) in Wales requires public sector bodies to report the number of male and female staff that they employ broken down by job and grade.

A 2020 report by the Workforce Partnership Council said that the Welsh Government has encouraged public bodies to make gender pay gap data publicly accessible, including reporting through the UK Government portal. Though not required in legislature, most Welsh universities report their gender pay gap through this platform.

The draft Equality (Race and Disability) Bill is not expected to require public sector employers in Wales to report ethnicity and disability pay gaps. While the PSED covers race and disability, public authorities in Wales are not required to report workforce data for characteristics other than gender.

Northern Ireland

Section 19 of the Employment Act (Northern Ireland) 2016 set out the requirement for gender pay gap reporting in Northern Ireland. As of January 2026, there is no current regulation that requires employers to publish gender pay gap data. The Department for Communities invited employers to respond to a public consultation on these regulations in Northern Ireland between November 2024 and February 2025.

Gender pay gap reporting is expected to be introduced in early 2027. It is expected that this will apply to employers with 250 or more employees in the private, public, and voluntary sectors. The

proposal is that employers will be required to publish the same statistics as are required for the statutory reporting in England.

These six statistics are:

- Mean and median pay gap
- Mean and median bonus gap
- Pay quarters
- Proportion of male and female staff in receipt of a bonus

The Department for Communities has yet to publish its response to this consultation.

The draft Equality (Race and Disability) Bill will not apply to employers in Northern Ireland. There are no current plans to introduce ethnicity or disability pay gap reporting in this nation.
The Section 75 duties require public authorities in Northern Ireland to have due regard for the need to promote equality of opportunity around gender, disability, race, religious belief and other characteristics. This requires public authorities to submit an equality scheme to the Equality Commission. While equality pay gap reporting is not required as part of this legislation, schemes may include a commitment to calculate or report this type of data.

4. Equality pay gaps data briefing

Survey coverage

- UCEA's latest intersectional pay gaps survey reported data on ethnicity, disability and intersectional pay gaps in higher education. A total of 107 Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) submitted data on these pay gaps for 2024, representing three-fifths of UCEA membership.
- This is the fifth year that UCEA has conducted the survey.
- The report includes data on action planning to close equality pay gaps across four thematic areas. It also provides voluntary reporting on disability pay gaps across 73 HEIs.
- This widespread reporting of ethnicity and disability pay gaps stands HE employers in good stead ahead of the draft Equality (Race and Disability) Bill. This incoming legislation will introduce mandatory ethnicity and disability pay gap reporting for public sector employers in England.

Gender pay gap

- As of March 2024, the median gender pay gap in higher education is 11.5%. This remains lower than the median pay gap in the wider economy (13.1% in 2024). The mean gender pay gap in higher education is 13.6%, with this being lower than wider economy figure (13.8%).
- The median gender pay gap continues to close in higher education, down from 12.0% in 2023.
- 11.4% of women in the sector received bonuses, with this being greater than the proportion of men receiving bonuses (10.7%).
- The median gender bonus gap (excluding Clinical Impact Awards) stands at 11.7%, up from 7.1% in 2023.

Ethnicity pay gaps

- For the March 2024 census date, 50 HEIs reported pay gaps data for five ethnicity groups and 57 reported data for two ethnicity groups.
- The median ethnicity pay gap between white and ethnic minority staff in higher education is 4.7% for 2024, down from 5.8% in 2020.
- While 13% of white staff received a bonus, only 10% of ethnic minority staff received bonuses.
- Data across five ethnicity groups shows the importance of considering granular data. The median ethnicity pay gap between white and black staff (10.1%) is larger than that between Asian and white staff (4.2%). Moreover, there is a median ethnicity pay gap (-1.0%) in favour of staff from other ethnic backgrounds (i.e. staff who are not Asian, black, mixed ethnicity or white).
- For all ethnicities, the median ethnicity pay gap is lower than the median gender pay gap.

Intersectional pay gaps

- Intersectional pay gaps consider the compounding effect that gender and ethnicity have on equality pay gaps. They compare, for example, differences in the average pay of white men and ethnic minority women.
- UCEA has taken an intersectional approach to equality pay gaps in the sector since 2018, publishing Caught at the Crossroads. This approach shows that gender pay gaps exist within ethnicity groups and that ethnicity pay gaps exist within genders.

- When compared to white men, the median pay gap experienced by ethnic minority women is 16.3%. By contrast, the median pay gap is 7.3% between white men and ethnic minority men and 13.1% between white men and white women.
- The largest median pay gap is that between white men and black women (20.7%). This compares a median intersectional pay gap of 6.3% between white men and Asian men.

Disability pay gaps

- A total of 73 HEIs voluntarily reported one or more statistics about the disability of their workforce.
- UCEA estimates that 8% of the HE workforce has declared a disability, that 76% declared no disability, and that 16% did not disclose this information.
- 68 HEIs reported their disability pay gap. At the median HEI, the median disability pay gap is 8.2%, lower than the wider economy figure of 12.7%.

Pay gaps action planning

- UCEA has collated information on local action planning to reduce equality pay gaps across 119 HEIs. This analysis considers four thematic areas: recruitment, promotion, employment policy and organisational culture.
- For recruitment, common forms of action planning include using neutral language and promoting flexible working in job adverts, monitoring data on inclusion outcomes and making use of skills-based assessments.
- Actions to support career progression include mentoring and coaching, leadership programmes such as Aurora and StellarHE, and internal reviews of the processes and criteria for promotion.
- In terms of employment policy, HEIs have addressed equality pay gaps by encouraging flexible working, conducting equal pay audits, and assessing their reward processes against protected characteristics.
- HEIs have fostered a positive organisational culture by delivering unconscious bias training, setting up staff networks and ensuring buy-in and accountability from senior leadership.

Interactive pay gaps dashboard

Institutions who have participated in the latest survey round gain access to the Intersectional pay gaps dashboards at https://dashboards.ucea.ac.uk/. This online interactive dashboard enables nominated individuals to benchmark their HEI's gender, ethnicity and intersectional pay gap data against sector level data.

The data included within this dashboard considers the six measures required in statutory gender pay gap reporting in England, Wales and Scotland, namely:

- Median and mean hourly pay gaps
- Pay quarters
- Median and mean bonus gaps
- The proportion of staff in receipt of a bonus

This interactive dashboard also presents data on disability pay gaps, for the six statistics listed above. The dashboard also presents users with time series data for equality pay gaps between 2020 and 2024.

5. Communicating pay gaps - Myth-busting

a. FAQs on Pay Gaps

What is the definition of a “pay gap”?

The overall difference in average hourly pay between groups of employees within an organisation.

What is a pay gap in terms of gender, ethnicity, and disability?

- **Gender pay gap** - a percentage difference between the average pay of women and men.
- **Ethnicity pay gap** – a percentage difference between the average pay of employees from different ethnic backgrounds.
- **Disability pay gap** – a percentage difference between the average pay of disabled and non-disabled employees.

What is the difference between a mean and median pay gap?

- **The mean pay gap** - add up the hourly pay of all staff in each group, then divide this figure by the number of staff. Mean pay considers all staff and so is affected by senior pay.
- **The median pay gap** - list all staff in each group by their hourly pay from highest to lowest, then select the middle staff member. Median pay shows what the typical worker earns.
- Each pay gap expresses the differences in the average pay of women and men as a percentage.

Why is pay gap reporting important?

Pay gap reporting supports equality in the workplace, improves pay transparency and shows where further action is needed.

What is ‘vertical segregation’ and ‘horizontal segregation’?

- **Vertical segregation** is when individuals with different protected characteristics (e.g. men and women) work at different seniority levels.
- **Horizontal segregation** is when individuals with different protected characteristics work in different occupations, such as job functions or subject areas.

Why do pay gaps differ between departments, organisations, and sectors?

Pay gaps vary because the mix of roles, seniority levels, and working patterns can be very different. Some departments or sectors may have more senior or higher-paid roles dominated by one group, which affects the averages.

Why might a pay gap change over time?

An employer’s pay gap will change as the composition of its workforce changes. This will happen when staff with different characteristics are recruited, change roles or advance in their careers.

What is equal pay?

Under the Equality Act 2010, women and men have the right to receive equal pay for doing 'equal work'. Equal work is work that is classed as like work, equivalent work or work of equal value. The Equality (Race and Disability) Bill is expected to extend this right to ethnicity and disability.

Does a pay gap mean people are being paid unfairly or unlawfully?

No. As pay gaps consider the average pay of groups, it does not mean that women and men are being paid differently for equal work. Pay gaps show differences in the average pay of men and women, as a result of them working in various roles at various levels. While organisations strive to eliminate pay gaps, it is a legal requirement that women and men receive equal pay for equal work.

What is intersectionality and what is an intersectional pay gap?

- **Intersectionality** is a way of understanding how different parts of a person's identity overlap, such as their gender, ethnicity and disability status.
- An **intersectional pay gap** is a percentage difference between the average pay of groups which differ by more than one characteristic. The pay gap between white men and ethnic minority women, for example, is intersectional as it looks at both gender and ethnicity.
- Compared to white men, **pay gaps for ethnic minority women are larger** than those for white women or ethnic minority men.

What is happening in Higher Education (HE) to address pay gaps?

In HE, employers uphold equal pay through grading structures and job evaluation schemes. Pay gaps have closed across the sector because of local action planning by individual HE institutions (HEIs). Common forms of action planning include evaluating equality outcomes throughout recruitment, providing mentoring and staff networks, encouraging flexible working, and delivering unconscious bias training. Despite it not being mandatory, HEIs are reporting on ethnicity and disability pay gaps.

How is UCEA supporting HEIs in addressing this important issue?

"Promoting inclusion and sharing the steps HEIs can take to reduce the gender, ethnicity and disability pay gaps" is a particular focus of UCEA's Employee experience Five Pillar Programme of work (Pillar Three). UCEA's reporting provides detailed and sector-specific data, including infographics.

UCEA and its members continue to work collaboratively to close pay gaps. This is not a quick and easy process as pay gaps have complex causes. All UCEA members have supported our work to understand these causes and to implement effective interventions.

UCEA has engaged with key stakeholders including other sector bodies. We showcase good practice from other sectors and have responded on the sector's behalf to Government consultations in this area.

Are things improving in HE and are pay gaps narrowing?

Pay gap reporting from our surveys shows a downward trajectory and favourable comparison with the wider economy. Key findings include:

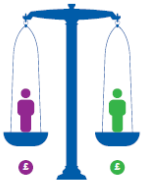
- The median gender pay gap in HE is 11.5%, lower than the wider economy figure (13.1% in 2024);
- The median ethnicity pay gap in higher education stands at 4.8% in 2024, down from 5.8% in 2020;
- At the average (median) HEI, the median disability pay gap is 8.2%, lower than the figure for the wider economy (12.7%);
- Our intersectional data shows that gender pay gaps exist within ethnic groups and ethnicity pay gaps exist within genders.

b. Infographics - Examining the gender pay gap in Higher Education

Examining the gender pay gap in Higher Education

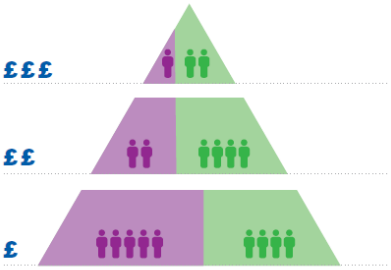
What is the difference between equal pay and the gender pay gap?

Equal pay is the right for **women** and **men** to be paid the same for like work, equivalent work or work of equal value.

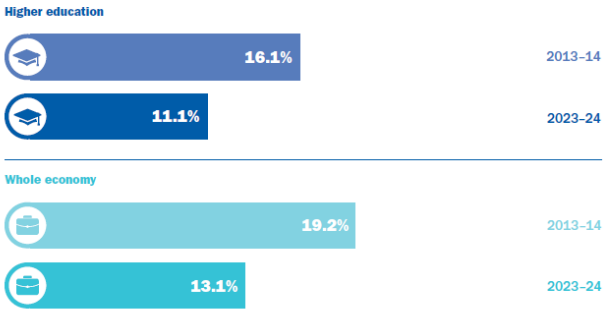


The gender pay gap is the percentage difference between the average pay of **women** and **men** across the whole workforce.

There may be different average rates of pay for women and men across an organisation.



Gender pay gap over the decade: how is HE doing?



Source: ONS ASHE, 2014, 2024 Based on median gross hourly earnings excluding overtime for all employees (full-time and part-time).

How are HEIs advancing gender equality?

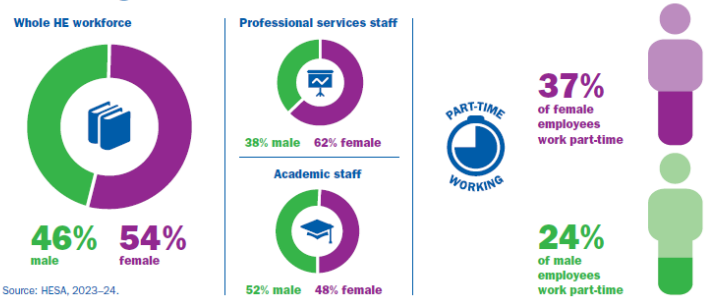
Advance HE's Athena SWAN Charter recognises HEIs for demonstrating their broad commitment, not pay related alone, to promoting gender equality.

Number of Athena SWAN Charter institutional awards



Source: Advance HE.

What is the gender balance in the HE workforce?



Source: HESA, 2023–24.

What is horizontal segregation?

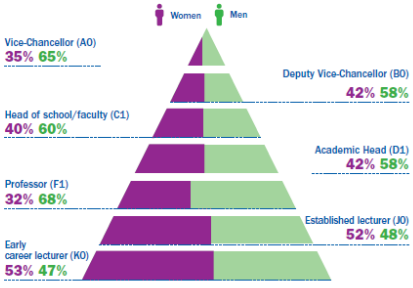
Gender pay gaps highlight areas that require investigation by employers. Differences in the distribution of women and men in the workforce is often referred to as 'occupational segregation'. Horizontal segregation is when women and men work in different occupations, such as job functions or subject areas.



Source: HESA, 2023-24. Hourly rate based on median earnings for full and part-time staff and 35 hour working week.

What is vertical segregation?

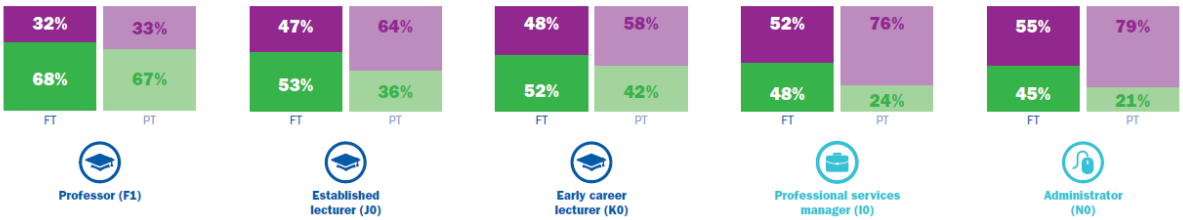
Vertical segregation is when **men** and **women** work at different seniority levels. This is not about equal pay – as men and women should be paid equally on the ranges for each job level – but typically, including in HE, women are underrepresented in the senior levels and may be overrepresented in the lower levels.



Source: HESA, 2023–24. Based on head count for all staff (full-time and part-time).

How does the gender balance differ by roles?

The balance between **male** and **female** employees varies across roles between full-time (FT) and part-time (PT) work, for example:



Source: HESA, 2023 –24. Selected job levels. HESA contract level shown in brackets.

6. Encouraging sharing of protected characteristics information by employees - Disclosure rates for gender, ethnicity, and disability

107 HEIs participated in the UCEA's 2025 Intersectional Pay Gaps survey. All respondents reported the proportion of their staff who had disclosed their gender and ethnicity. A further 94 HEIs reported on their staff's disclosure of disability status. The data from this survey shows that:

- Gender was the most commonly disclosed protected characteristic.
- 102 of the responding HEIs (95% of the sample) reported that at least 99% of their staff had disclosed their gender.
- 59 HEIs (55% of responding HEIs) reported that at least 95% of their staff had disclosed their ethnicity. A further 52 HEIs (49% of responding HEIs) reported that between 75% and 95% of their staff had disclosed their ethnicity.
- Disability status was the least commonly disclosed characteristic.
- Nevertheless, over four fifths of HEIs (86%, 81 HEIs) reported that at least 75% of their staff had disclosed their disability status. Of these, 29 HEIs reported that at least 95% of their staff had disclosed their disability status.

Protected characteristic	HEIs	Lower quartile	Median	Mean	Upper quartile
Gender	107	100%	100%	99%	100%
Ethnicity	107	90%	95%	92%	97%
Disability status	94	82%	92%	85%	96%

Disclosure rates elsewhere

- As information on **gender** is required for statutory gender pay gap reporting, most employers will collect and hold information about the gender of their staff.
- The Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) does not specifically require public sector employers to collect data on **race** or **disability**. Nevertheless, accurate information on relevant protected characteristics will support employers in having due regard to the PSED. Accurate data on their workforce will also enable employers to track progress toward equality objectives and assess the impact of their policy changes.
- For **ethnicity**, a 2023 analysis by Deloitte of 25 FTSE 30 companies indicated that 8 of these employers reported ethnicity pay gap data and that their disclosure rates for ethnicity ranged between 70% and 90%.
- In 2022, 96% of the NHS workforce disclosed their ethnicity to their employer.
- 81% of the Civil Service workforce disclosed their ethnicity in 2024.
- In 2024, 86% of NHS employees disclosed their **disability status** to their employer.
- In 2025, 75% of Civil Service employees disclosed their disability status, with 5% refusing this information and 20% having an unknown disability status.

7. Resources – Equality Pay Gaps

The resources below are intended to support members in calculating, benchmarking and better understanding their gender, ethnicity and intersectional pay gaps. The UCEA resources consist of reports, infographics, case studies and guidance notes. If HEIs would be interested in providing case studies or have examples of resources that have been particularly useful, please get in touch with research@ucea.ac.uk.

UCEA pay gap resources

- Intersectional pay gaps reports
- Reducing pay gaps – actions taken by HEIs
- Pay Gap Journeys – Case Studies
- Gender Pay Gap Action Planning Road Map
- Taking action: Tackling the gender pay gap in higher education institutions
- Infographics: Examining the gender pay gap in HE
- Caught at the crossroads: an intersectional approach to gender and ethnicity pay gaps
- Equal Pay Reviews and Gender Pay Gap Reporting – Guidance for HEIs

Government guidance

- Creating an action plan to reduce your gender pay gap and support employees experiencing menopause
- List of recommended, evidence-informed actions
- Gender pay gap reporting: guidance for employers in England, Wales and Scotland
- The gender pay gap: guidance for employers in Scotland, mygov.scot
- Ethnicity pay reporting: guidance for employers
- Consultation on The Gender Pay Gap Information Regulations in Northern Ireland
- Gender pay gap reporting: EHRC
- Consultation on the Equality (Race and Disability) Bill: mandatory ethnicity and disability pay gap reporting

Other guidance on pay gap reporting

- Ethnicity pay reporting: a guide for UK employers (CIPD)

Ethnicity categorisation

- List of ethnic groups
- Standards for ethnicity data
- Ethnicity data: data quality resources
- Aggregating to improve ethnicity data quality

Disability reporting

- Disability workforce reporting (CIPD)
- The employment of disabled people 2024 - DWP (gov.uk)
- Disability, England and Wales: Census 2021

Benchmarking resources

- Office for National Statistics: Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings
- UCEA analysis of statutory gender pay gaps data returns

- UCEA Intersectional Pay Gaps in Higher Education report (previous years)
- UCEA Intersectional Pay Gaps dashboard

Positive action resources

- Employment Statutory Code of Practice: EHRC
- Positive action in the workplace: guidance for employers (gov.uk)

Section C

UCEA Guidance on workload management

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      Working Time Regulations 1998
    - HSE Management Standards
    - USHA Guidance on the Management of Work-related Stress Within Higher Education Sector

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1. Foreword

Effective workload management is a strategic necessity in the Higher Education sector. It directly underpins staff wellbeing, research productivity, teaching quality, and institutional reputation. When workloads are balanced and transparent, staff have the capacity to deliver high-quality education, produce excellent research, and engage meaningfully with students. At the same time, the institution benefits from reduced staff turnover, stronger performance, and greater agility in responding to regulatory and financial pressures.

The provision of guidance on workload management is not straightforward in the Higher Education context, a sector characterised by complexity, unpredictability, and a rise in competing priorities. Employees' roles are often multi-dimensional, and they are carried out within a highly regulated environment. Academics juggle the complex mix of teaching, research, and administrative responsibilities, while a diverse range of professional services staff are responsible for critical operations that are essential to keeping institutions functioning effectively. Furthermore, personal experiences, preferences and perspectives, as well as external pressures, combine to make workload management challenging.

This is why I am delighted, on behalf of the Workload Reference Group, to put forward this comprehensive guidance which draws together the key elements that contribute to effective workload management. Whilst it does not provide all the answers, it provides UCEA members with an accessible and adaptable framework to review the policies, processes and procedures that form part of workload management within their institution.

I would like to extend my gratitude to the Workload Reference Group and UCEA colleagues who worked collaboratively to bring this guidance together. The guidance has been strengthened by practical examples of work undertaken in this area, and I am grateful to the institutions which have shared their experiences in the form of case studies.

Professor Wendy Larner
President and Vice-Chancellor, Cardiff University
Chair of UCEA Workload Reference Group and UCEA Board Member

2. Introduction

UCEA's work on Employee Experience (EX) emphasises that how staff feel about their work - their sense of fairness, autonomy, support and value - shapes their performance and retention, and the institutional culture. Workload management practices influence key aspects of the EX. These include day-to-day wellbeing, long-term engagement, career development, and the ability of employees to contribute meaningfully towards achieving the institution's strategic objectives.

The UCEA Workload Reference Group was set up in the Spring of 2025 to develop sector guidance on the management of workload across all staff groups within Higher Education institutions (HEIs). The Group, chaired by Professor Wendy Larner, President and Vice-Chancellor, Cardiff University and UCEA Board member, consisted of members with a broad range of expertise including HR, Health and Safety, university leadership and teaching and learning from a diverse range of UK HEIs.

The Group focused specifically on workload management, and not workload measurement (for example, how time is allocated to activities such as teaching and research in academic workload allocation models). Workload management was considered in the broadest sense of effectively managing how much work there is for individuals and teams to do, and how demanding it is to complete it – throughout this Guidance, it refers to the institution's approach to the effective and efficient planning, scheduling, allocating, and monitoring of workload amongst employees.

The Group had the clear objective of developing sector guidance around a central theme:

> **Effective workload management is about creating a sustainable level of workload that supports staff wellbeing and organisational success, including during times of change.**

Essentially, this means that workload management is about fostering an environment and organisational culture where staff wellbeing is a core priority, alongside the achievement of an institution's strategic objectives. Together with any policies and processes that are put in place, good workload management includes encouraging a working environment in which staff feel able to raise any concerns they may have regarding their workload. The potential risks of not managing workload effectively, including the undermining of inclusiveness and work-related stress, are also integral to this theme.

During the course of its work, the Group regularly noted the considerable progress that has been made in the sector in terms of Health, Safety and Wellbeing strategy and the provision of wellbeing initiatives for staff. The prioritisation of staff wellbeing across the sector is evident in the feedback UCEA regularly receives from its widespread networks, joint work with sector partners, and benchmarking surveys. Good employment practices and frameworks exist across the diverse HE sector; and employee benefits often greatly exceed the minimum legislative requirements as reported in the UCEA Benefits of working in HE Report 2023 - annual leave, family-friendly policies, flexible working arrangements, sickness absence policies, pay allowances, and pension schemes in particular, compare favourably with other sectors. Similarly, UCEA's annual absence surveys indicate that HE sector sickness absence levels compare favourably with the wider economy.

This guidance supports institutions by offering a practical framework that can be adapted to local contexts. It aims to help institutions align workload management approaches with broader EX strategies to create positive, inclusive and sustainable working environments. The UCEA Workload

Reference Group recommends that HEIs review this guidance in the context of their own institutional circumstances, and as part of a whole university approach to developing effective policies and practices in workload management, alongside those offering health and wellbeing support to staff.

3. Principles of Workload Management

Workload management principles are the foundation for addressing the complex task of managing workload effectively, ensuring both organisational success and a healthy, inclusive workplace.

Effective principles for workload management can help:

- Provide a structured framework that aligns organisational priorities and objectives with time, resources and capacity.
- Clarify priorities, ensuring work delivery; and foster accountability and consistency, enabling proactive planning.
- Support employers in fulfilling the duty of care that is required, including under the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974.
- Reduce work-related stress and promote equality and inclusion.
- HEIs engage proactively with employees and trade unions to ensure a safe working environment.

To facilitate these aims, the UCEA Workload Reference Group has developed a framework to support HEIs in developing guiding principles for workload management which can be adapted according to the institution's needs and circumstances. The guiding principles are intended to apply to all staff and, as such, may be considered alongside any existing principles the institution has, such as in relation to academic workload allocation.

The UCEA Workload Reference Group recommends incorporating the principles below into workload management processes.

Strategic alignment and accountability

Effective workload management requires an alignment of work with strategy and accountability, balancing employee agency with organisational objectives. It embeds allocation and prioritisation in planning, taking account of peaks and troughs in workload. It considers staff training, skills, knowledge, and development needs, and provides clear direction about duties and expectations, including when roles change. It recognises a commitment to work flexibly and positively for individuals and teams; to work collaboratively and efficiently, using process, systems and technology provided by the institution; and the importance of line management support in achieving sustainable levels of workload.

1. An understanding that the planning of workload and its prioritisation form part of normal business management, which is necessary to support the strategic aims and operational priorities of the University/College/faculty/school/department/directorate.
2. An acknowledgement by employees and managers that it is usual for workplaces to experience natural peaks and troughs in terms of workload to achieve the organisation's strategic objectives.
3. The training, skills, knowledge and professional development of individual employees should be taken into account. Clear communication regarding responsibilities, duties and expectations should take place when staff move role and/or progress to a higher grade.
4. A commitment by staff to have a flexible and positive approach to their work, and to work to the best of their ability within the grade of their role. This is particularly important where change is necessary at an organisational or team level, e.g. staff may need to work outside the

boundaries of their own role, work may need to be redistributed between different teams within the institution, or resources may be limited/finite.
5. A willingness by staff and managers to remain open to adopting new technologies that may enhance operational efficiency and support workload management.
6. An acceptance by staff that management/leadership are ultimately responsible for decisions relating to the effective management of workload, taking into account these general principles of workload management. A balance will need to be found between giving employees a sufficient degree of agency and control over their workload, and the requirements of the role and overall team/departmental aims.

Wellbeing and inclusiveness

Principles that embed wellbeing, equity and inclusivity are essential to effective workload management – they promote work-life balance and support leadership and line managers to ensure manageable workloads, while encouraging personal responsibility for health and wellbeing. The following principles can help to ensure that all staff, regardless of background, needs and life events are supported equitably in a healthy working environment - with proactive stress risk assessments which can identify and prevent harm before it arises. The principles below focus on creating a supportive, healthy environment and workplace culture that aligns with organisational values and legal obligations.

7. Safe working environments, working practices and awareness of relevant institutional policies, legislation and guidance (e.g. relevant health and safety, working time legislation and the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) Management Standards for work design).
8. Active consideration of the work-life balance, health, safety and wellbeing of individual employees; and more generally, the facilitation of a healthy working environment that is in line with the institution's approach to staff health and wellbeing, and core values. This should include, for example, encouraging staff to take appropriate breaks, and to book annual leave in accordance with the institution's policy/procedures.
9. An understanding that staff have a personal responsibility to take reasonable care of their own health and safety at work, and to seek support from their manager when needed.
10. Workload planning which reflects principles of equality, diversity and inclusion, and takes into consideration any issues identified in any Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) undertaken in relation to workload management.
11. Workload planning which is underpinned by fair, open and transparent decision-making, and ensures that individual workloads are reasonable and equitable (taking into account local, individual and team circumstances, including any reasonable adjustments). The privacy and confidentiality of any issues raised by individual employees should be maintained, and data protection legislation should be complied with.
12. A proactive approach to the management of work-related stress to include organisational risk assessments for work-related stress – see USHA's Guidance for Managing Work-Related Stress Within the Higher Education sector.

Monitoring and review

These principles focus on proactively responding to changing demands and anticipating the impact of these changes on workload. They include the importance of regularly reviewing workload at both departmental and individual levels, with adjustments made during routine planning or in response to specific events, such as restructuring, together with plans to mitigate any effects on teams or individuals.

13. Regular review of workloads at a faculty/departmental and individual level. From time to time, circumstances will arise that will generally prompt a re-examination and re-prioritisation of how

work is managed and allocated. This might occur as part of the usual business or operational planning cycle, or in response to a specific event. At an individual level, reviews should take place in 1:1 and performance management/appraisal meetings, with such discussions including training and development, and the capacity for innovation, as relevant to the role.
14. Active consideration of the workload implications of organisational change, including restructuring, and other workplace initiatives/unusual circumstances. Any identified impact on teams or individual staff should be assessed and discussed, as relevant, in advance, together with plans to address/mitigate the impact and support implementation of the change.
15. Cover for family leave, carer's leave, long-term sickness absence or vacant positions to be determined in relation to the capacity within the team/faculty/school/department/directorate to cover the work in question, where possible, in accordance with the above principles.
16. Effective processes to manage workload scheduling, reporting, tracking and assessing.
17. Clear guidance/effective escalation processes to deal with concerns raised by employees in relation to their workload.

4. Identifying and resolving workload related concerns

Managing workload effectively, often within constantly changing environments, forms part of normal business planning processes. Early identification of any concerns relating to workload is important to prevent potential risks, such a work-related stress and inequalities, becoming a reality or escalating further.

A common challenge in workload management is the perception that demands are excessive. However, concerns may also arise from workloads that are inconsistent, unfairly allocated, or even insufficient.

This section of the Guidance focuses on identifying where workload may be a concern for staff, and contributory factors that can have an influence on workload, at an individual employee level, or for groups of employees or teams. Guidance is also provided for proactively handling workload related concerns.

Identifying signs of workload concerns

Reviewing objective indicators such as benchmarks that compare work volume, and that evaluate whether inefficiencies are a contributory factor, will help distinguish whether workload problems stem from excessive work, or whether the issues arise from other reasons particular to the individual employee. These reasons may include ineffective time management, a mismatch of skills/experience for the role, or performance issues. As these issues will often co-exist and interact, a structured review of workload will enable the HEI to objectively assess the extent to which workload management is an organisational or individual issue. Indicators should be considered against levels of workload that would be considered reasonable in a 'business as usual' context.

The following indicators provide a systematic means to review workload and identify concerns.

Managers' diagnostic for identifying workload concerns

Review leading and lagging indicators

1. Are there any **leading indicators** of workload issues e.g.:
    - New programmes of work or initiatives
    - Organisational change
    - Budgetary/economic factors
    - New or revised organisational objectives/strategic plans
    - Service/delivery reprioritisation
    - Developments in expectations, including those of students
    - External influences such as regulatory updates or governance reforms
    - Planned absences – for example, sabbatical or family/carer's related leave

2. Are there any **lagging indicators** of workload issues e.g.:
    - Failure to meet agreed objectives/performance targets
    - Increases in unplanned absences – e.g. sickness absence
    - Accumulation of unused annual leave or time off in lieu
    - Disproportionate overtime to cover routine work or regularly working past normal hours
    - Employee feedback from e.g. staff survey, pulse surveys, wellbeing surveys, 1:1 conversations (e.g. about unclear priorities, conflicting deadlines, being over-stretched)
    - Unusually high levels of staff turnover

Review employee behaviour and performance

1. Are people working overtime to manage their work?
2. Are response times for deliverables slower, or deadlines regularly missed or barely met?
3. Do employees say they are busy more often than they say they are making progress?
4. Has the team stopped improving because they are overstretched?
5. Do people look tired, stressed, or disengaged?
6. Are staff making more mistakes or producing lower-quality work/output?
7. Are there signs of reduced creativity or problem-solving capacity?
8. Is there reduced participation in meetings, or collaboration within or across teams?
9. Are there signs of withdrawal or visible stress, such as irritability?

Review systemic issues

1. Has there been frequent switching of work priorities?
2. Is there a lack of clarity about priorities?
3. Are requirements or expectations unclear?
4. Are meetings too frequent and impacting on working time?
5. Are processes inefficient?
6. Are there too many priorities in progress at the same time?

Review capacity and demand

1. Is demand for work, services or outputs consistently exceeding capacity?
2. What is the team's capacity (skills, time, availability)?
3. What are the workload demands (tasks, deadlines, complexity)?
4. Is the alignment right (are the right people doing the right work?)?

Resolving workload management issues

It is important for HEIs to encourage a culture where employees feel psychologically safe and able to raise workload concerns. However, managers and employees have a shared responsibility for resolving workload concerns. Most concerns about workload can be managed through the day-to-day interactions between line managers and their staff; therefore, staff should be encouraged to raise their concerns with their line manager in the first instance.

For managers, the resolution of work-related concerns will involve listening and open consideration of staff perspectives. For employees, it will require being receptive to guidance and feedback; at times, this may include adjusting priorities or ceasing tasks or preferred work.

To support the resolution of workload concerns:

- Managers will need adequate information to understand the concerns, such as the indicators suggested above.
- Employees can help managers by:
  - Providing the reasons for why a workload issue exists and why the problem relates to workload.
  - Providing information that supports the employee's view – for example, a change to service delivery and expectations, or the inability to take annual leave.
  - Providing evidence that helps illustrate the issue – for example, data related to staff turnover or absence that is planned and unplanned.
  - Offering suggestions of practical steps or measures that could help resolve the concern.

Where it is not possible to resolve a workload management issue, it may be necessary to consider other interventions that may resolve the concern in a timely and efficient manner. A process such as the one illustrated below, which includes the development of practical solutions and continuous monitoring, can be used.

Process flow chart

The following chart outlines model steps for managing workload related concerns:


1
Issue Raised
A workload concern is identified by employees, managers, stakeholders, or through other indicators – for example, student complaints, staff turnover
2A
2B
Analyse the Issue
Gather relevant information, review data, and identify underlying causes or contributing factors
Assess Risk
Consider the level of risk, potential impact, and consequences of taking or not taking action
3
Is further action required?
Yes
No
Develop practical options or solutions to address workload concerns and manage risks
Implement agreed actions, assigning tasks, roles, and responsibilities with clear outcomes
Review and report on progress e.g. to staff, committees, and governance structures
Communicate the outcome clearly to employees
Continue monitoring risks as part of regular business planning activities

Practical steps to address workload concerns

In 2025, UCEA commissioned People Insights to deliver the report - A Tale of Two Perspectives: Bridging the Gap in HE EX - which explores the different experiences of professional services and academic staff working in HE. The report, which reviews practices around addressing workload concerns in 75 universities, highlights that universities tend to approach workload management through four interconnected strategies that tackle both the underlying causes and the day-to-day pressures staff face. They begin by investigating the root causes of workload concerns through focus groups and reviews of how tasks are allocated. Alongside this, they hold regular resourcing meetings to anticipate pressure points and redistribute work before issues escalate. They also invest in training and support, offering workshops on time management, prioritisation, wellbeing, and equipping managers to better assist their teams. Finally, they identify ways of streamlining systems and processes, simplifying workflows, improving digital resources, and removing outdated or duplicated documentation to reduce unnecessary administrative burden. Together, these practices create a more sustainable and proactive approach to managing workload.

The above model can support effective workload management through embedding the interconnected strategies as ongoing organisational practices over time. A checklist has been provided in **Appendix 1** that identifies a wide range of practical steps that can be taken at an institutional, managerial and employee level to address workload management issues, in the short, medium and longer-term.

5. Equality considerations

Considering the equality implications of workload management is important - a standardised and uniformly applied approach to workload can produce unintended, hidden, and cumulative disadvantages for employees with protected characteristics.

For example,

- **Age**: Fixed shifts or promotion metrics that favour long, uninterrupted hours may disadvantage workers within a particular age group typically characterised by having childcare commitments.
- **Disability:** A workload allocation model that fails to include reasonable adjustments for different working patterns.
- **Sex**: A workload allocation model that allocates all teaching hours in a uniform way might overload academic staff returning from maternity leave by omitting adjustments that may be necessary for childcare responsibilities.
- **Religion or belief**: Work scheduling that ignores prayer times, fasting periods, or religious holidays could force staff to choose between religious observance and workload demands.
- **Marital status:** Shift or work patterns that favour either single workers or married workers can be disproportionately disadvantageous.

Disadvantages may also intersect beyond a single protected characteristic – for example, a part time female worker with child caring responsibilities.

The workload management principles in **Section 3** of this Guidance, which focus on **Wellbeing and inclusiveness,** highlight the importance of designing workload management policies and practices with fairness and inclusivity at their core.

Equality Impact Assessments

Most HEIs in the UK are public authorities under the Equality Act 2010[4]. To consider whether a workload practice, for example the development of a new policy or system, has any equality impact considerations, it may be appropriate to complete an equality screening or impact assessment to demonstrate any requirements owed under the Public Sector Equality Duty[5].

With this in mind, two examples of completed Equality Impact Assessments (EIAs) are provided in **Appendices 2 and 3**. The first, **Appendix 2,** is an example of an EIA that evaluates the equality implications of introducing a revised academic workload allocation model. The second, **Appendix 3,** evaluates the equality implications of introducing a new system for allocating and tracking work. A further example of an EIA in the context of research staff is provided by UK Research and Innovation (UKRI)[6].

6. The management of workload to prevent work-related stress

This section of the guidance provides an overview of the management of work-related stress and highlights key resources which will enable HEIs to review their stress management framework.

Unrealistic or unmanageable workload has the potential to lead to work-related stress by creating an imbalance between job demands and employees' capacity to meet those demands. It is, however, recognised that work-related stress does not exist in a vacuum - working life interacts with external stressors that are not related to work—such as financial pressures, family/carer's responsibilities, or health issues - the compounded effect of which can be complex to separate from the employer's obligation to identify and mitigate foreseeable hazard arising from work itself.

Statistics and legal responsibilities

The most recent HSE Annual Statistics (2025) indicate that 964,000 workers in Great Britain reported suffering from work-related stress, depression or anxiety. In the Education sector[7], there were an estimated 94,000 workers suffering from work-related stress, depression or anxiety (new or long-standing), which represents 53% of all ill health in this sector. UCEA's annual sickness absence report for 2023/24 found that mental health continues to be the most common cause of sickness absence, accounting for 28.0% of all absences in the HE sector.

The effects of work-related stress are wide ranging and may include:

- Increased sickness absence and presenteeism
- Higher staff turnover and retention problems
- Reduced productivity and performance
- Lower morale, motivation, and engagement
- Increased risk of errors, accidents, and poor decision-making
- Strained working relationships and conflict

There are also legal, reputational and compliance risks associated with high levels of work-related stress. These obligations exist through:

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[4] Equality Act 2010
[5] Public Sector Equality Duty: guidance for public authorities - GOV.UK
[6] Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) Guidance for REF2029, including best practice, is available on the Research Excellence Framework webpage.
[7] The HSE defines the Education sector as covering a range of educational activities across various levels. It includes pre-primary, primary, secondary, higher, tertiary (e.g. university) and other education, e.g. sport, music, arts, driving, vocational and adult education.

- The Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974, which establishes legal responsibilities for employers to provide and maintain safe working environments, and for employees to take reasonable care of their own and others' safety, and to co-operate with the employer on health and safety.
- The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999, which require suitable and sufficient risk assessments for all significant hazards, including work-related stress.
- The Working Time Regulations 1998, which supports the prevention of work-related stress by promoting safe working hours, adequate rest, and recovery.

The obligations are enforced by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) which defines stress as 'the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressures or other types of demand placed on them' - employees feel stress when they are unable to cope with pressures and other issues. The HSE require employers to assess, record and act on risks related to work-related stress in the same way they would any other work-related hazard.

HSE Management Standards

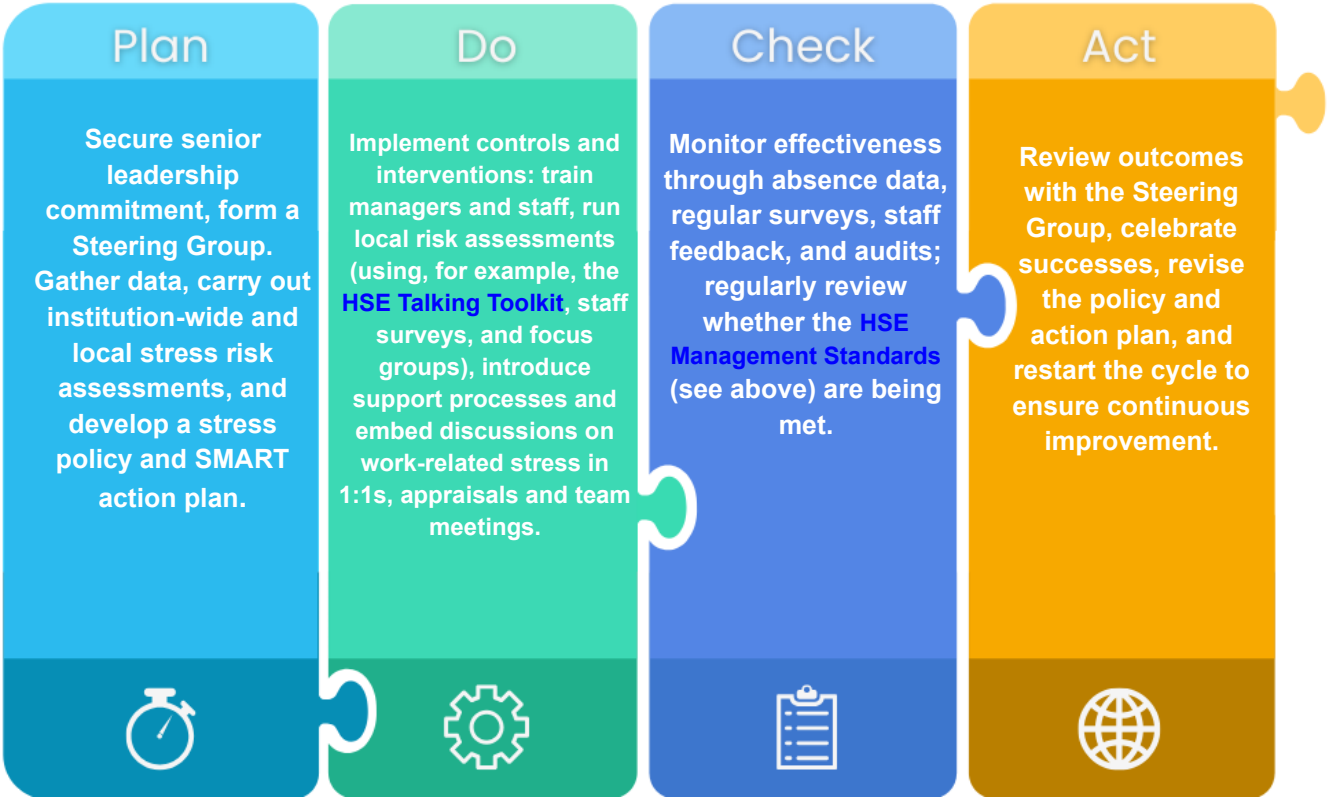
Through its Management Standards, the HSE provide guidance on six key areas of work design that, if not properly managed, are associated with poor health, lower productivity and increased accident and sickness absence rates, and if followed correctly, will ensure the employers approach is "suitable and sufficient". The HSE Management Standards provide a practical framework to identify, prevent, and manage stress at work as follows:

1. Demands – this includes issues such as workload, work patterns and the work environment
2. Control – how much say the person has in the way they do their work
3. Support – this includes the encouragement, sponsorship and resources provided by the organisation, line management and colleagues
4. Relationships – this includes promoting positive working to avoid conflict and dealing with unacceptable behaviour
5. Role – whether people understand their role within the organisation and whether the organisation ensures that they do not have conflicting roles
6. Change – how organisational change (large or small) is managed and communicated in the organisation (See section below on **Organisational change within the HE sector**).

USHA Guidance on the Management of Work-related Stress

In October 2025, the Universities Safety and Health Association (USHA) published updated guidance on the Management of Work-related Stress Within the Higher Education Sector, in partnership with UCEA. The Guidance has been developed as a key tool in supporting governing bodies, senior leaders, managers and practitioners in effectively addressing work-related stress within the HE sector.

The approach is based on the ISO 45001 standard, which utilises the Plan-Do-Check-Act model as follows:



The USHA Guidance will enable HEIs to apply the HSE Management Standards in a Higher Education context by helping them identify stress risks, carry out structured risk assessments, implement sector-appropriate control measures, support managers, and embed stress management into wider wellbeing and health and safety strategies.

Work-related stress and equality considerations

The consideration of equality in relation to managing stress in the workplace could help to identify whether certain groups are more at risk of work-related stress than others, and to plan and take mitigating actions. EIAs, where appropriate, can help to identify and align actions so that they address both work-related stress and equality issues.

Organisational change within the HE sector

Whilst restructuring and transformation programmes may lead to improvements in the way work is managed, they could, for example, increase pressure on academic and professional services staff at different levels in the short-term, particularly when work is redistributed or vacancies create gaps in capacity. These changes can lead to additional duties, heavier administrative loads, conflicting deadlines, and longer working hours, all of which heighten the risk of work-related stress and reduced wellbeing.

By proactively assessing the risk of work-related stress and providing a range of support to staff, HEIs can help mitigate the potential negative consequences of organisational change. Existing control measures such as workload allocation models, appraisal processes, wellbeing resources/initiatives, and regular line-management contact may not be sufficient during periods of transition. Strengthened controls, such as the following examples, may be needed:

Workload Management

- Conduct a department level workload review before implementing new duties
- Apply Work Allocation Model adjustments realistically and transparently
- Prioritise essential tasks; pause or defer less critical work
- Temporarily redistribute tasks with clear time limits
- Recruit interim cover where vacancies exist where possible

Communication & Consultation

- Provide weekly updates on project progress
- Offer clear explanations of new responsibilities and timelines
- Provide opportunities and a clear process for staff to raise concerns

Support & Wellbeing

- Encourage a psychologically safe means for staff to raise concerns (e.g. a Staff Network)
- Promote the HEI's wellbeing resources/initiatives (e.g. EAP)

Ongoing monitoring of sickness absence trends, the use of pulse surveys, and regular reviews of potential risks/hazards can help to ensure that issues are identified early and addressed promptly, supporting staff wellbeing throughout the change process.

A list of Stress and mental wellbeing resources for Higher Education Institutions is available on UCEA's website together with a range of case-studies.

7. Conclusion

The framework described in this Guidance brings together the key elements that will enable HEIs to review their approach to workload management within their own institutional context. By setting out clear workload principles, outlining routes for raising concerns, providing examples of measures that can be taken at different levels to manage work; and recognising the importance of equality considerations and the potential impact of work-related stress, it offers institutions a practical basis for creating sustainable and fair levels of workload across all staff groups. Throughout the Guidance, the importance of a supportive culture where staff wellbeing is prioritised, is emphasised. A range of tools, which include good practice examples, are provided to illustrate these elements. UCEA will continue to engage with its members to identify emerging good practice in this challenging area of workforce management.

8. Resources

- Management Standards, HSE
- Guidance on the management of work-related stress within the Higher Education sector, USHA
- Stress and mental wellbeing resources for Higher Education Institutions – jointly developed with the trade unions through the HESH Forum.
- Managing organisational change resources, UCEA
- Managing work-related stress, ACAS
- Stress in the workplace, CIPD
- Developing an Equality Impact Assessment Framework for the HE sector, Advance HE

9. Appendices

APPENDIX 1

Practical steps to address workload management issues

This checklist outlines practical steps that can be used as appropriate to support the active management of workload at organisational/institutional, managerial and employee level. The institutional context will be important when considering the implementation of measures to address workload concerns. At organisational/institutional, and managerial level, there may be a necessary overlap between these steps.

1. Organisational/Institutional level

Organisational strategic priorities and objectives

☐ Clear organisational priorities are defined and consistently communicated
☐ Competing initiatives are monitored and reduced where practical
☐ A culture of risk-based decision making and learning is actively supported

New work/changed ways of working

☐ Governance arrangements are in place for new or changed ways of working
☐ Workload implications are understood before launching new initiatives or restructures
☐ Workload impact assessments are included in approval processes (e.g. committee papers)
☐ Impact on other teams is assessed and considered as part of the approval process
☐ Adequate time, resources, and training are built in to support transitions

Systems and tools

☐ Investment in technology (including AI) to reduce administrative and workload burden
☐ Technology is used to reduce repetitive or low-value work
☐ Training is provided to ensure systems and tools are used effectively

Processes

☐ Transparent systems exist for distributing work (e.g. teaching, admin, student services)
☐ Workload models are fair and reflect complexity, not just time spent
☐ Processes, forms, approvals, and reporting are standardised where possible
☐ Unnecessary, duplicative, or low-value procedures are simplified or removed

Data and metrics

☐ Workload, overtime, sickness, and turnover trends are monitored
☐ Data is used proactively to identify pressure points and inform resource planning
☐ Surveys, forums, and feedback loops are used to identify systemic issues

Capacity and resourcing

☐ Team capacity is reviewed against organisational demands
☐ Recruitment or redeployment is used where persistent overwork is identified
☐ Predictable peak periods are identified and resourced in advance

Healthy working practices

☐ Leaders model sustainable working behaviours
☐ Senior leaders actively manage expectations
☐ Clear expectations exist around reasonable working hours and boundaries
☐ Workload and wellbeing objectives are cascaded through appraisal and development reviews
☐ A culture exists where constructively raising workload concerns is safe and encouraged

Equality and inclusion

☐ Workload distribution is monitored across different staff groups
☐ Action is taken where hidden, undervalued, or uneven workload patterns are identified

2. Head of Department/Line manager level

Priorities and timeframes

☐ Workload reset discussions are used to surface concerns and reprioritise locally
☐ New work is discussed before allocation, with impact on existing work considered
☐ Priorities, deadlines, or responsibilities are adjusted when needed
☐ Regular (e.g. weekly) RAG-rated capacity reviews identify pressure points and available support

Clear expectations

☐ Expectations are clear about what needs to be done and in what order
☐ Regular check-ins confirm shared understanding
☐ Performance management ensures work is aligned to role and level

Capacity management

☐ Team capacity is regularly reviewed
☐ Recruitment, restructuring, or redeployment is considered where appropriate
☐ Annual leave is taken and spread across the year
☐ Absence management supports timely and safe returns to work
☐ Temporary or internal support is used during peak periods
☐ Skills gaps that increase pressure are identified
☐ No single points of failure exist i.e. more than one person can cover key tasks
☐ Processes identify and reduce duplication of work
☐ Process improvements are implemented, including small, high-impact changes

Job functions

☐ Job descriptions are up-to-date and accurate
☐ Roles are reviewed periodically to reflect workload expectations
☐ Roles and responsibilities are clearly defined

Professional development

☐ Staff are empowered to suggest improvements and innovate incrementally
☐ Training supports efficiency and confidence in managing work
☐ Development plans reduce single points of dependency

Regular meetings and support

☐ Regular 1:1s include discussion of workload, capacity, and wellbeing
☐ Staff are encouraged to raise workload and wellbeing concerns
☐ Signs of stress are identified and acted on
☐ Appropriate support is offered, including HR or Occupational Health where needed

Role modelling healthy behaviours

☐ Boundaries are respected and breaks and leave are taken
☐ Overwork is not routinely praised or normalised
☐ Staff are supported to say no, discuss deadlines, and raise concerns early

3. Employee level

Raising concerns

☐ Clear examples of excessive workload are shared
☐ Volume, complexity, and time required for tasks are explained

Solutions and improvements

☐ Barriers to effective working are identified
☐ Practical suggestions for improving workflow are proposed

Priorities

☐ Current prioritisation approach is shared with manager
☐ Urgent vs lower-priority work is clarified
☐ Next steps and timelines are agreed

Timeframes

☐ Unrealistic deadlines are raised early
☐ Complex tasks are broken into manageable steps
☐ Achievable timelines are discussed and agreed

Development

☐ Skills gaps for new or complex work are identified
☐ Training requests are made to improve efficiency and confidence

APPENDIX 2

Example Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) 1: Introducing a revised academic workload allocation model

SECTION 1: POLICY/PRACTICE AND RESPONSIBITY

Title: Academic Workload Allocation Model (WAM)
Institution: Example University
School/Department: School of Social Science
Owner of Policy/Practice: A.N. Other
Date Policy/Practice approved: November 2025
Review Date: November 2026

SECTION 2: PURPOSE AND SCOPE

What are the aims of the Policy/Practice and who does it cover?

The purpose of this Equality Impact Assessment is to evaluate the potential equality implications of introducing a revised **WAM**.

The revised model seeks to:

- Ensure transparent, equitable and consistent workload allocation across teaching, research, and administration.
- Improve alignment between workload planning and academic promotion, wellbeing, and performance review.
- Provide a centralised, data-driven system for monitoring workloads by gender, grade, and contract type.
- Support flexible working arrangements and mitigate risks of workload inequity.

This policy applies to all academic and research staff within the school.

SECTION 3: EQUALITY GROUPS

Could there be any implications for a protected characteristic group (as defined by the Equality Act 2010)?

Yes, there are potential implications or barriers for a protected character group as the WAM applies to all Academic and Research staff and therefore it may impact a particular group differently depending on their needs and experience. This assessment applies to the following groups:

- Age
- Disability
- race (including ethnicity and nationality)
- religion or belief

- sex
- sexual orientation
- gender reassignment
- pregnancy and maternity
- marriage or civil partnership

SECTION 4: EVIDENCE CONSIDERED

What evidence do you have for this conclusion (potential implication for a protected characteristic group)?

- Consultation with academic and professional services staff (survey and focus groups).
- Analysis of historic workload spreadsheets (2022–24).
- HR data on gender, contract type, and grade distribution.
- University gender pay gap report (2023).
- Feedback from the School Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Committee.

SECTION 5: IMPACT ON PROTECTED CHARACTERISTIC GROUP

What impact, positive or negative, has been identified by the evidence?

Protected Characteristic	Potential Impact	Evidence / Rationale	Proposed Mitigation / Action
Sex (Gender)	Women more likely to undertake pastoral and administrative roles, risking higher unrecorded workload.	Consultation feedback; workload data.	Include EDI, pastoral, and outreach categories within WAM; monitor workload by gender annually.
Age	Digital platform may disadvantage less digitally confident staff.	User testing feedback.	Offer digital training and 1:1 support for system navigation.
Race/ Ethnicity	Contributions to EDI and mentoring may not be recognised equally.	Consultation feedback.	Include clear workload categories for outreach, mentoring and EDI work; annual monitoring by ethnicity.
Pregnancy/ Maternity	Risk of uneven workload on return from leave.	HR data on maternity return patterns.	Build in workload credit for reintegration and ensure equitable redistribution.
Disability	Potential accessibility barriers in the WAM interface.	Preliminary accessibility audit.	Conduct full accessibility review; offer alternative data entry options.
Religion/ Belief	Timetabled activities may conflict with observance times.	Consultation input.	Enable staff to record constraints; managers to respect observance requirements.

Sexual Orientation/ Gender Reassignment	No specific adverse impact identified; potential indirect effects if EDI roles undervalued.	Internal review.	Value EDI contributions within workload model.
Marriage/ Civil Partnership	No adverse impact identified.	N/A	Continue to monitor through annual review.

SECTION 6. SUMMARY OF IMPACTS

Please summarise the outcome of the EIA.

Positive Impacts

- Transparent workload distribution enhances fairness and trust.
- Improved visibility of teaching and research contributes to career recognition.
- Strengthens the equality data available for annual EDI reporting.
- Supports flexible and part-time working.

Negative Impacts

- Risk of administrative burden if system not user-friendly.
- Risk of inconsistent data entry across disciplines.
- Initial resistance to system adoption.

SECTION 7. MITIGATION AND ACTION PLAN

How will the outcome of the EIA be addressed?

Action	Responsible	Timescale	Success measure
Accessibility audit of WAM system	HR & IT Services	Q1 2026	Audit completed; accessibility rating improved
Equality analysis of WAM data	EDI Committee	Annual	Annual report published and reviewed
Add EDI, pastoral and citizenship categories to WAM	Head of School	2025	Model updated before launch
Bias in workload allocation training for managers	HR Learning & Development	2026 rollout	80%+ completion rate
Monitor workload by gender, contract and ethnicity	HR Analytics	Annual	Data trends shared with School Council

SECTION 8: MONITORING AND REVIEW

How will the policy/practice be kept under review to ensure that it meets the requirements of current equality legislation?

- Review equality data annually and report findings to the School Executive and EDI Committee.
- Conduct full EIA review after one year of implementation or upon major system change.
- Integrate WAM data into institutional equality reporting cycles.

SECTION 9. DECISION AND AUTHORISATION

Following assessment, the School concludes that the revised WAM is likely to advance equality of opportunity and promote transparency and fairness. Implementation will proceed subject to completion of the identified actions.

Signed:

Head of School
HR Business Partner (EDI)
Date: 7 November 2025

SECTION 10: PUBLICATION

Return this form, once completed, along with copy of amended policy or practice and any relevant information, to the EDI Department for annual reporting and for inclusion on the University website**.**

APPENDIX 3

Example Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) 2 – Introducing a new system for allocating and tracking work

SECTION 1: POLICY/PRACTICE AND RESPONSIBILITY

Title: Implementation of an IT system to gather and model information relating to academic workload; teaching, administration and research.
Institution: Example University
School/Department: Faculty of Arts & Sciences
Owner of Policy/Practice: A. N. Other
Date Policy/Practice approved: 27 October 2025
Review Date: 27 October 2026

SECTION 2: PURPOSE AND SCOPE

What are the aims of the Policy/Practice and who does it cover?

The purpose of this EIA is to evaluate the potential equality implications of introducing an IT system to allocate, monitor and report on academic workloads in a fair and transparent way.

The system aims to:

- Ensure transparent, equitable and consistent workload allocation across teaching, research, and administration.
- Improve alignment between workload planning and academic development, wellbeing, and performance review.
- Provide a centralised, data-driven system for monitoring workloads by categories of staff e.g. grade, FTE, contract type, role description.
- As the system monitors workload it has the potential to benefit the health and wellbeing of staff by, for example, highlighting the inequitable distribution of workload within a team. It will support flexible working arrangements and mitigation of risks of workload inequity.

This policy applies to all academic and research staff.

SECTION 3: EQUALITY GROUPS

Could there be any implications for a protected characteristic group (as defined by the Equality Act 2010)?

Yes, there are potential implications or barriers for protected characteristic groups, as the IT system applies to all Academic and Research staff across the University, and therefore has the potential to affect all protected characteristic groups.

This assessment applies to the following groups:

- Age
- Disability
- Race (including ethnicity and nationality)

- Religion or belief
- Sex
- Sexual orientation
- Gender reassignment
- Pregnancy and maternity
- Marriage or civil partnership

SECTION 4: EVIDENCE CONSIDERED

What evidence do you have for this conclusion (potential implication for a protected characteristic group)?

- Consultation with academic and professional services staff (survey and focus groups).
- Consultation with staff networks e.g. Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Committee, Disability network.
- Consultation with trade union representatives.
- Analysis of historic workload spreadsheets (2022–24).
- HR data on protected characteristics, contract type, and grade distribution.
- Institutional equality reports.

SECTION 5: IMPACT ON PROTECTED CHARACTERISTIC GROUP

What impact, positive or negative, has been identified by the evidence?

Protected characteristic	Potential impact	Evidence/ rationale	Proposed mitigation/action
Sex (Gender)	IT system may not accommodate flexible working patterns/ non-standard working hours e.g. for those with childcare responsibilities (may have a different impact on males and females).	Consultation feedback; workload data.	Ensure IT system accommodates/records different patterns of work and it is clear how to access IT support if needed.
Age	IT system may assume high digital literacy. It is expected that there will be staff who are digitally confident to varying degrees across the staff population (there may be patterns according to staff age).	User testing feedback.	Inclusive design. Ensure staff have access to training and support (which includes options for staff who are less digitally confident). E.g. Offer digital training and optional 1:1 support.
Race / Ethnicity	IT system is provided in English only.	User testing feedback.	Monitor whether any language barriers cause accessibility issues and put in place actions to mitigate any negative impacts.

Pregnancy / Maternity	IT system may not accommodate flexible working patterns or non-standard hours of work such as those for women returning from maternity leave with childcare responsibilities or on a phased return.	Consultation feedback and HR data.	Inclusive design to ensure flexibility in how working patterns are recorded with reference to the allocation of workload.
Disability	Potential accessibility barriers using the system (e.g., lack of screen-reader compatibility, poor colour contrast, rigid task timings) could disadvantage disabled staff, such as those with visual or cognitive impairments), and in relation to the use of assisted technology.	Preliminary accessibility audit and consultation with Staff Disability Network.	Conduct full accessibility review; consider whether reasonable adjustments are necessary to ensure the system is user-friendly.

Religion / Belief	IT system may not take account of / allow for flexible scheduling around prayer times, fasting periods, or religious holidays.	Consultation feedback.	Inclusive design to ensure flexibility in how workload is recorded.
Sexual Orientation / Gender Reassignment	Potential confidentiality breaches if monitoring systems inadvertently expose personal information (e.g., through linked HR data).	Consultation feedback.	Ensure GDPR special category data / privacy safeguards are in place.
Marriage / Civil Partnership	No adverse impacts identified.	N/A	Monitor through annual review.

SECTION 6: SUMMARY OF IMPACTS

Please summarise the outcome of the EIA.

The EIA has identified the following positive outcomes:

- Transparent workload distribution enhances fairness and trust.
- Improved visibility of academic contributions supports career recognition.
- Facilitates reporting and metrics on academic workload comparisons across the institution and strengthens equality data available for strategic planning.
- Supports flexible and part-time working.
- Supports wellbeing of staff by identifying inequitable workload distribution.

No negative impacts have been identified for which potential mitigations are unavailable. Actions to address potential negative impacts will be monitored as detailed below.

SECTION 7: MITIGATION AND ACTION PLAN

How will the outcome of the EIA be addressed?

Action	Responsible	Timescale	Success measure
Accessibility audit of IT system	HR & IT Services	Q1 2026	Audit completed; accessibility rating improved
Annual equality analysis of workload data	EDI Committee	Annual	Annual report published and reviewed
Bias-aware workload allocation training	HR Learning & Development	2026 rollout	80%+ completion rate
Monitor workload by protected characteristics and contract type	HR Analytics	Annual	Data trends shared with Faculty Executive

SECTION 8: MONITORING AND REVIEW

How will the Policy/Practice be kept under review to ensure that it meets the requirements of current equality legislation?

- Review equality data annually / bi-annually and report findings to the Faculty Executive and EDI Committee.
- Conduct full EIA review after one year of implementation or at major system revision.
- Integrate workload system data into institutional equality reporting cycles.

SECTION 9: DECISION AND AUTHORISATION

Following assessment, the Faculty concludes that the system is likely to advance equality of opportunity and promote transparency and fairness. Implementation will proceed subject to completion of identified actions.

Signed:

Dean of Faculty: A. N. Other
HR Business Partner (EDI)
Date: 27 November 2025

SECTION 10: PUBLICATION

Return this form to the EDI Department for annual reporting and publication on the University website.

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