

# THE RESEARCHERS' SURVIVAL GUIDE



**Getting a better deal for research staff**

# THE RESEARCHERS' SURVIVAL GUIDE

**Foreword by Ronnie Kershaw**  
**UCU national organiser**

UCU has published this guide to help you by giving you practical advice on a wide range of issues relating to your career. It has mainly been written by researchers for researchers and we would like to thank everyone for their contributions. Inside, you will find advice on what to expect when you start in your first post, planning your career, getting a permanent contract, publishing, being treated the same as permanent members of staff, knowing your basic rights and networking. Although the guide is primarily aimed at researchers who are just starting their careers, we hope that it will prove useful to all whose primary work is in research. It can be challenging when starting your first job and you often need plenty of advice. Some of the best pieces of advice come from experienced colleagues. We have aimed to use this knowledge and put it together to form this guide.

Nationally, 85% of research staff are employed on fixed-term contracts. Researchers play a vital role in our institutions and their skills and commitment should be rewarded. UCU campaigns for the majority of researchers to be made permanent. Researchers already make a massive contribution to education and wider society. The stability and security that permanence brings will allow researchers to become an even bigger success story.

This guide will be updated and we welcome your comments and suggestions so that we can improve it. Please email us at [researchers@ucu.org.uk](mailto:researchers@ucu.org.uk)

We hope you find it useful and look forward to hearing from you.

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## INTRODUCTION

There are around 40,000 researchers currently employed in higher education institutions, staff whose primary role is research activity. British academia, society, culture and the economy all benefit enormously from the knowledge creation and scholarly activity undertaken by researchers like you. But this value is not always reflected in the way universities and the government allow researchers to be treated.

Some researchers are on permanent contracts at their university. For some, it is a career in itself. For many more it is, in theory at least, a step on the road to building a traditional teaching and research academic career. Most researchers are on the lowest grades and are typically on some form of fixed-term contract. Some research assistants are even paid by the hour.

Despite these varying experiences and expectations, researchers do form a community of practitioners with many common features and common pressures. These common features and pressures shape a distinctive experience of the working world that sets researchers, to some extent, apart from their other academic colleagues. They face a common set of problems.

For example, researchers typically face acute instability of employment, being on various forms of short-term contract. Even those who are permanent find themselves at risk of redundancy every time they fail to secure new funding. For many, many more, particularly postdoctoral researchers, the contract ends and they are simply dispensed with by their institution.

Instability of employment brings with it other problems. There is an inherent temptation for universities to view short-term contract staff as second-class employees. If a member of staff is employed for three years and spends the last of those three years applying for jobs, it is tempting for universities to view them as transients who need less attention than their permanent colleagues. Such 'second-class' status permeates through institutions, to be felt at faculty and department level too. Researchers often find they don't have budgets to go to conferences, don't have adequate workspaces and aren't informed about department meetings. This can create a feeling of isolation and a sense of not being valued that is particularly acute among researchers.

Although some of these problems are recognised by institutions and funding councils, it is only UCU that really addresses them, understands where they come from and is acting to try to improve things. This is because our members who are researchers are making this happen. They speak up, organise among themselves, recruit their colleagues and they campaign in their institutions to win change. And they campaign in the union to win change. As a result, UCU is fighting to end the use of fixed-term contracts and to ensure that researchers receive equal treatment in every aspect of their lives as employees of universities and as professional academics. This guide is part of that fight. It is produced by researchers, for researchers.

Its aim is simple. It is produced to help you to know what you should expect from your institution and from your direct research manager or supervisor. If you don't know what you should expect, you can't know that you are being unfairly treated and you can't begin to change things.

It is also designed to give you advice on how to change things. Some of the standards it sets down are established by law, such as the regulations that establish an employer's duty not to treat fixed-term staff any less favourably than comparable permanent employees or health and safety legislation. Other parts of it are not regulated by law, however, and here the standards are those set by widely recognised 'best practice' in the field of academia.

Knowing the standards and identifying unfairness is one thing, but the point is to change it. In the guide, we also suggest ways in which you can improve things for yourself and other research staff in your institution. We hope you find it useful.

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## **PART 1: YOUR EMPLOYER'S DUTIES AND YOUR RIGHTS**

As a researcher, it is easy to imagine that you are employed by your principal investigator or research supervisor, or even by the external body that funds your project. But that is not the case. This is vitally important. Unless we know who is responsible for our welfare and our fair treatment in the workplace, we can't recognise or redress unfair treatment. Your institution, whichever university the project is based at, is your employer and that means that the university has duties towards you and that you have rights in law.

The evidence shows that contract staff have traditionally been treated as second class citizens and in many places they still are. This can manifest itself in many ways. For example, research staff are often provided with inadequate workspaces, encouraged to work from home or not encouraged to view themselves as full members of the academic team or their department.

But you don't have to accept this.

There is new legislation on the rights of fixed-term employees, which came into effect in 2002. Perhaps the most powerful aspect of the new legislation is the stipulation that such staff must be treated 'no less favourably' than other comparable staff.

### **What does the law say?**

The law says that fixed-term employees, and therefore most researchers, should be treated no less favourably than comparable permanent employees unless the employer can objectively justify the less favourable treatment. Therefore, your employer has to be able to objectively justify any less favourable treatment for staff. Although the regulation

doesn't state what defines objective justification, it is now up to the employer to justify any instances of less favourable treatment and that marks a significant shift.

### **What does this cover?**

The right not to be treated less favourably applies to all terms and conditions including pay and pensions, as well as training opportunities and the opportunity to apply for permanent posts. It doesn't only apply to contractual terms and conditions, but to any benefit offered to employees – for example the right to staff development and to attend conferences.

### **Who are comparable staff?**

A comparator is someone employed by the same employer, and is defined in the regulations as someone 'engaged in the same or broadly similar work having regard, where relevant, to whether they have a similar level of qualification and skill'. It doesn't have to be someone with the same job title or someone on the same salary scale. It can be someone with a similar level of qualifications, skills and similar work role.

So the law is quite helpful in making it harder for institutions to justify treating you less favourably. But that doesn't mean they won't do it. Firstly, you have to know you are being treated less favourably.

Here are some things you should check that your employer is doing for you.

### **You should have a contract with terms and conditions**

You have the right to a full statement of your terms and conditions at the beginning of your contract. Make sure you've got it. It's an important aid for you and your principal investigator, telling them what each of you expects of each other and what you can expect from your employer, the university.

### **You should have an induction**

Make sure you have had an induction. This is your formal orientation around your institution and your way of meeting your immediate colleagues. It's a really important opportunity to make friends, meet your colleagues and build networks that will help your scholarly work and assist you in building your career. Inductions are perhaps more important for research staff than any other staff group. Unfortunately, institutions don't always behave that way. You can't assume that you will have one set up for you, but make sure it happens as this is standard practice for other staff groups and you are no different.



## You should have a safe, healthy and adequate workspace

4 I work in an open-plan office which is shared by people doing administrative work and is often too noisy to concentrate. This matter has been raised in management meetings etc but the answer has been for us to work at home which can lead to exacerbating feelings of isolation if one is working alone from home a lot of the time.'

Laura Banks, Brighton University

4 When the team I was working with was relocated to another building, my academic colleagues were allocated a room each, and I was, temporarily I was assured, allocated a 'hot desk' space in the room shared by a large number of research students. Would this have been offered to an academic colleague?'

Jackie Goode, Nottingham University

Your employer has a duty to provide an adequate work space, taking into account your seating, ventilation, temperature and lighting. However there can be problems with poor facilities, such as inadequate access to computer systems, email, storage space, having your own workspace. Second-class status has meant that not enough attention is paid to providing the same access to facilities as other staff groups. Some researchers find that they are hot-desking in noisy areas and find it difficult to work. Some managers think it's acceptable to encourage researchers to work from home as an alternative, but this can heighten the isolation felt by research staff.

Your employer has a duty, according to the Workplace Health, Safety and Welfare Regulations 1992, to provide eating facilities, something to heat up food and the means to make a hot drink.

Your employer has a legal responsibility for your health, welfare and safety. They must take pre-emptive action, including the following:

- ▶ conduct a risk assessment on your workspace – will it cause back pain or damage to your eyes, for example?
- ▶ ensure the temperature in your workspace is at least 16° C
- ▶ pay for regular eye tests
- ▶ take appropriate action when health and safety concerns are raised.

### **You should have the same access to work facilities as other members of staff**

Researchers can often find that their employers are slow to give them the same access to libraries as other staff. They can find that they are not seen as full members of a department, and subsequently don't enjoy the same access to secretarial support or any budget for photocopying or other stationery. This is not acceptable.

Your rights at work are the same as those of other staff groups and adequate to fulfil the employment responsibilities. This includes access to the following facilities:

- ▶ libraries
- ▶ computing and audio-visual facilities
- ▶ car-parking
- ▶ photocopying
- ▶ email
- ▶ telephone
- ▶ stationery
- ▶ social, technical and secretarial facilities
- ▶ office or desk space
- ▶ staff common areas.

### **Your employer should ensure that you are not overworked or stressed**

With all the competing pressures on research staff to publish, teach, complete projects on time, account for funding, not to mention applying for new jobs, it is not surprising that workloads can get out of control, producing stress and health damage. When you are working on a project, and especially when a deadline is approaching, or as a result of the constant insecurity of your job, you can find yourself working excessive hours which are way above what could be considered an appropriate amount. For researchers, who are often working alone and have to be self-motivated, it can be hard to know when you are over-working.



We all know that some stress is acceptable and comes with the work. However, when it gets out of hand it can be dangerous to your health. All education institutions have a legal responsibility for the health, welfare and safety of their staff. Your employer's responsibilities extend beyond your physical environment. They should also ensure that workloads and working hours are such that you do not become at risk of stress or stress-related illness.

How do you know if you are stressed?  
Signs of stress include: physical symptoms, such as headaches or rashes; emotional changes, such as over-reaction or sleep problems; and behavioural changes, such as substance abuse or high blood pressure. If left unresolved, prolonged stress can be potentially life-threatening. If you feel you are at risk, please see your GP

### You should be able to take breaks

The European Directive on Working Time, implemented in the UK by the Working Time Regulations 1998, introduced a provision that requires employers to allow workers a break of a minimum of 20 minutes after six hours at work. Guidance to regulations governing display screen equipment (DSE) recommends regular breaks away from the screen. We recommend that best practice is 15 minutes every hour, so that DSE users should be able to undertake other tasks away from the screen.

### You should have access to facilities to take breaks, rest and eat meals

Implicit in the Workplace Health, Safety and Welfare Regulations 1992 is that employers should provide breaks, given that they have a duty to provide facilities for workers to rest and eat meals. The associated approved code of practice says that employers must provide eating facilities, something to heat up workers' own food, and the means to make a hot drink. In order to enjoy these facilities, workers must be able to take a break. While there is no specific piece of law that puts a direct duty on employers to give workers breaks during the working day, it should be perfectly possible in the 21st century for any reasonable employer to ensure that staff are able to have a break after a reasonable period during a long working day.



## Your employer has a duty of care toward you to ensure that you are treated properly at work

Principal investigators have tremendous pressures on them to meet project targets and justify their funding, while supervisors are under pressure to make sure their research students complete on time above everything else. Even the most well-meaning will have conflicting pressures and even those who are trying to help may not properly understand their duties or your rights and needs. Sometimes they can be a source of real problems. There is much more advice on working with your principal investigator or research supervisor in part 2, but here's some advice if you think you are being bullied.

### What can you do if you think are being bullied?

The first thing to do is to talk to your union rep. Sometimes the hardest thing can be to identify your treatment as bullying. We tend to associate bullying with physical or verbal threats. But bullying is far more than that. Some examples of bullying are setting unrealistic targets, consistently attacking a member of staff in terms of their professional or personal standing and unfairly allocating work.

If you feel that your principal investigator or supervisor isn't treating you properly, the employer, your institution, has a duty of care toward you. It should have procedures, agreed with UCU, for dealing with such problems. Have a look on your institution's website. If you think you are being bullied, some steps to take are:

- ❶ **Ask the person to stop.** If you are being bullied, in some circumstances you might be able to ask the protagonist to stop. If you wish, take a friend with you. This will prevent the person responsible for the offensive behaviour claiming that you did not complain personally, leading them to believe that you did not object.
- ❷ **Get support.** Talk about the problem with a friend, a colleague. Do not hesitate to contact someone even when an incident occurs only once. They may be able to suggest ways of resolving the problem. Contact the College and University Support Network (CUSN), a charity which provides a range of free support services confidentially by telephone and online. Tel: 08000 329952 [www.cusn.info](http://www.cusn.info)
- ❸ **Collect evidence of the bullying or harassment.** It is important to keep a note of all relevant incidents including dates, times, places. This will be invaluable in proving your case if you make a complaint. Wherever possible get witnesses to provide factual evidence. If there are no witnesses to an incident, tell a colleague or representative and make a note. Find out if the same person is bullying or harassing anyone else. Often someone bullying will have a history of such behaviour. You will gain confidence from discovering you are not alone. Make a formal complaint. This should then be investigated by management. If formal disciplinary proceedings are to be taken against the person responsible for the bullying or harassment, you will be required to give evidence. It may be difficult

for you to undertake this but it would not be in your best interests for the case to be considered in your absence.

## You could be entitled to permanent status

The unstable nature of short-term employment is a massive factor shaping the experience of research staff. Some find it a challenge they enjoy meeting. For the vast majority it is a cause of anxiety and stress and they find that applying for new jobs consumes enormous amounts of time and energy that could be spent on their research projects. UCU has always argued that these contracts are an unfair and inefficient way of employing any staff and we have campaigned hard to win changes and improvements.

Under the new regulations on fixed-term employees, staff employed for four years on successive contracts may be permanent, in law. UCU is pressing for local agreements that transfer all fixed-term staff onto permanent contracts. Some universities are doing this, many others aren't. Our ability to campaign on this depends on the support of vocal research staff UCU members. Where we are strong, we tend to do better for researchers.

## What does the new law mean?

If you are offered a second contract, with the same employer or you have had your contract renewed and you have 4 years' continuous service then you could be eligible for permanence.

Under Regulation 8 of the regulations, employees have the right to regard their position as permanent if the following conditions are met:

- ▶ the employee is on at least their second contract with the same employer or the contract has been previously renewed; and
- ▶ the employee has at least 4 years' continuous service; and
- ▶ the use of a fixed-term contract was not justified on objective grounds.

The 4 years' service must be continuous with the same employer. It does not however affect your rights if you have worked in different departments or had changes to your contract in that period.

Some breaks in service may be regarded as a temporary cessation of service and not a break in contract. This will be determined on a case-by-case basis but seek advice from your branch or regional office if you think this may apply to you (for example, if you have had a very short break between contracts or if your contract terminates every June and a new one is issued every September).

Whether or not the use of the fixed-term contract is justified on objective grounds will be determined on a case by case basis. The regulations do not define 'objective justification' but there is joint employer/trade union guidance. If UCU has made a

collective agreement with your employer setting out objectively justified reasons for the use of fixed-term contracts then that will determine whether or not your post should be regarded as permanent or remain as fixed-term.

Whether or not your post is permanent after 4 years is a matter of fact in law - you do not have to do anything nor do the regulations require the employer to take any action.

However, if you believe that by virtue of Regulation 8 you are a permanent employee, you can request in writing from your employer a statement that your contract is no longer fixed-term and that you are now a permanent employee. Your employer must respond within 21 days of your request either:

- ▶ confirming that you are a permanent employee or
- ▶ providing a statement that your contract remains fixed-term including an explanation of any objective justification for such an assertion (Regulation 9).

If the employer asserts that your post remains fixed-term or does not reply you can apply to an employment tribunal (ET) for a declaration as to whether or not, by virtue of Regulation 8, your post is permanent. You must still be employed by the employer to apply to the ET.

You should seek advice from your local UCU.

What this amounts to is that some staff have permanence now. Universities are, in theory, signed up to making permanent contracts the norm and therefore you, as a contract researcher, have the right to be treated no less favourably than anyone else in the university.

You can get detailed advice on this on our website at [www.ucu.org.uk/ftregs](http://www.ucu.org.uk/ftregs)

### **What can you do if you think you might be permanent?**

Your first stop should be your local union branch. You can find out if your institution has negotiated a policy on transferring fixed-term contract researchers onto permanent contracts, in line with the legislation and nationally agreed guidance. But your branch can only represent you if you are actually a UCU member. So make sure you join online now: [joinonline.ucu.org.uk](http://joinonline.ucu.org.uk)

### **What should you do if you think you are being treated less favourably?**

A fixed-term employee has a right to ask their employer for a written statement setting out the reasons for less favourable treatment if they believe that this may have occurred. The employer must provide this statement within 21 days. The statement must provide an objective justification for that less favourable treatment. If you are not happy with this justification, you should contact your union for advice, but they can only help you if you are a member, so make sure you join.

## How you can make a difference

It may be that you are unhappy with a reply to your complaint about less favourable treatment. What's your next step?

The best way of ensuring that you are treated properly by your employer is to win a good agreement from your employer that covers all research staff. The best conditions for research staff are won by strong UCU branches campaigning for researchers and this can only happen if you get involved.

UCU has lots of groups of fixed-term research staff growing up across the country and they are helping to focus UCU branches' attention on the plight of research staff and forcing universities to take their researchers more seriously.

Talk to other researchers. Give them this guide and urge them to join UCU. Together, why not contact your branch secretary and ask to meet them? People always take groups more seriously than individuals, so the more researchers you contact, the more who join and the more of you there are in your group, the better your chances of winning real change.

### Did you know?

There is a growing network of researchers active in UCU, trying to recruit more researchers and win changes in their institutions. You can be put in touch with them by emailing [researchers@ucu.org.uk](mailto:researchers@ucu.org.uk).

## PART 2: YOU AND YOUR RESEARCH MANAGER

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- ‘It’s important to know what is the best practice in the sector and talk to your supervisor about both your expectations. It can really help in pre-empting problems.’

Natalie Fenton, Goldsmiths College

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Your principal investigator, project leader or supervisor can be a great friend and advocate, always looking out for your interests. And now there is more guidance and more training available to ensure that principal investigators understand the role and responsibilities of managing research staff better. This section sets out some advice on current best practice to help you to know what you should expect from your principal investigator or supervisor.

### Your principal investigator/supervisor should help you find your way around and build your networks

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- ‘Finding out where everyone else is can be a really good way to combat feelings of isolation.’

Natalie Fenton, Goldsmiths College

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- ‘Making friends with the support staff can not only make life a lot easier but it’s the right thing to do. Like researchers, they often get treated as if they are not ‘real’ members of staff.’

Trina Dinnis, ex-Edinburgh University

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- ‘Find out who your subject librarian is and become best friends! He or she will not only help you to get to know “your bit” of the library and what resources, research tools and support are available but will also give your moral support and help you network with other scholars in your area in the college or university’

Denny Colledge, Information Skills Librarian, Edinburgh University

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- ‘Communicating with other people in your field or people who use similar research techniques is a good way to stimulate ideas in your own work and there are often opportunities to cooperate and collaborate which would not be apparent otherwise.’

Kieran Brickley, School of Pharmacy, University of London

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‘Ask for stuff. It’s a very lucky postdoc who has a line manager who anticipates their needs. Make it clear that you need business cards, filing cabinet and shelf space, use of meeting rooms, a lock on the door of the women’s toilets, experience in supervising students. Often you may need to keep at it, but keep the requests reasonable and polite.’

**Trina Dinnis, ex-Edinburgh University**

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Finding your way around and meeting your colleagues can be difficult, particularly for researchers, who are often off-site or sometimes work from home. The project-based nature of work can also insulate you from the work of a teaching-based department.

It’s really important that you get the facilities you need to do your job and that includes getting the opportunity to meet your colleagues and to get to know your way around the institution. The bigger your networks are, the better and these can stretch beyond your institution to people working within your research area or discipline across the country and around the world.

Building your networks is not only a way of combating isolation, it can be vital for your career development and helpful with your work.

Your principal investigator or supervisor should help you with this.

### **You should be treated as an equal in your scholarly community**

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‘There is a real issue of respect for researchers. It would help if we weren’t marginalised. We now have a new departmental structure which sets out that Contract Research Staff do not attend full departmental meetings. This is a really retrograde step.’

**Senior research officer, University of Oxford**

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‘Research staff should be regarded as members of the academic body and as such they should have access to all aspects of university governance and management structures.’

**David McKee, Strathclyde University**

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‘Researchers should insist on being allowed to attend staff meetings etc. It is important to be seen as part of the department and valued for your contribution.’

**Natalie Fenton, Goldsmiths**

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‘Find out what is happening in your research group, department, school or university... In my experience, the same building can hold people working on very closely related fields, but having no idea about each others existence. This can't be good. So, read departmental emails, go to departmental meetings and talks, take coffee breaks with your colleagues, organise meetings with people working in similar areas. This takes time, but if you can find someone who has already done what you are trying to do, or who can give you new ideas for your research, it can also save you time.’

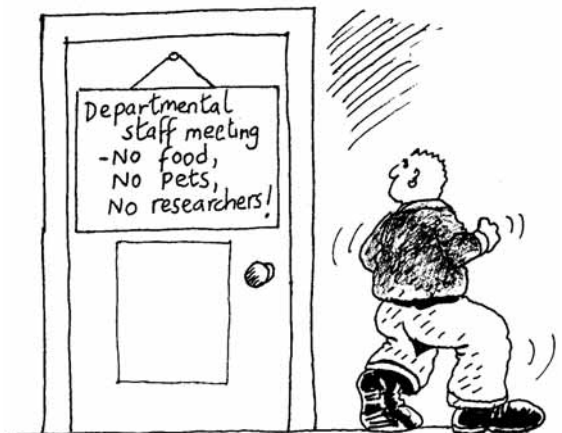
Trina Dinnis, ex- Edinburgh University

It is sometimes the case that researchers are not encouraged to go to department meetings, or play a full part in the democratic governing institutions of their institutions or their recognised trade unions. It is even the case that some departments or principal investigators have actively discouraged such activity.

But you don't have to accept this. You have the right to play a full part in the life of your institution and you should use it.

The Fixed-Term Employees (Prevention of Less Favourable Treatment) Regulations 2002, as well as nationally agreed guidance to which universities are signatories, says that staff on fixed-term contracts must be treated no less favourably than comparable members of staff unless less favourable

treatment can be objectively justified. This applies not just to contractual terms such as pay and annual leave, but also to any benefits accorded to permanent staff such as the ability to participate in university governance and committees.



We've all been to meetings that seem interminable and felt our lives ebbing away. But on the plus side, they can be a big help. Playing a full part in your institution's life will give you great experience, help you develop and assist you in finding valuable opportunities if you want to pursue either an academic career or a research career outside academia.



## You should have access to an independent mentor

‘It’s a good idea to have a mentor who isn’t your supervisor, particularly if you are new and on probation. Don’t be afraid to ask for one!’

**Natalie Fenton, Goldsmiths**

‘A mentor should be someone who understands personal and career development and derives satisfaction from developing people.’

**Lai Fong Chiu, Leeds University**

Another good idea is to establish a mentor outside of your project. It can help to talk to an experienced researcher or project leader independent of the project as it provides a perspective on the researcher’s career that isn’t constrained by the principal investigator’s need to meet project targets. The most far-sighted universities have formalised mentor schemes and it is widely recognised as best practice in the sector. This is recognised in national agreements such as the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers, signed by Universities UK and Research Councils UK, together representing most higher education funding bodies and all the research councils. There is no reason why this should not be available to you. Check with your principal investigator whether this is the case.

## You should have support with managing your project and your workload

The time pressures on researchers these days are acute and you may feel it necessary to schedule in time to plan your project, dedicate time to networking, attend career development training, publish, teach and then there is the time-consuming task of looking for a job at the end of your contract.

There are some simple tips for effective project management below:

- establish your objectives at the outset.
- establish deadlines and aim to stick to them
- devote time to planning – this is often the hardest thing to do when you are under pressure, but that’s also the time it will pay off most
- use a calendar or diary and timetable key activities
- make sure your priorities are agreed and clear to your research manager – this will prevent unnecessary diversions, misunderstandings and the generating of unrealistic expectations.
- try to establish a clear sequence of tasks in your work so that you are not trying to do too much at once

- ▶ keep reviewing your work so that you are able to carry your reflection forward into later practice
- ▶ establish rewards for yourself. With self-motivated and sometimes isolated work such as research, this kind of thing is more important.

A really good idea is to establish a timeline for the project with your research manager early in the project. A basic project plan might look like this:

- ▶ 3 months: initial scoping of the project with training in relevant research techniques
- ▶ 6 months: survey existing literature and establish more specific research goals
- ▶ 12 months: review research goals, reflect on project as a whole, begin next phase of research
- ▶ 18 months: at the halfway stage you are probably engrossed in research
- ▶ 24 months: begin to pull together data, plan final phase of the project and discuss future funding bids.
- ▶ 30 months: begin writing up, reviewing recent literature
- ▶ 36 months: completion of project

Your principal investigator should be setting regular meetings with you to review progress, monthly at least. These meetings should not be used to put pressure on you, but should be a way of ensuring that you have the support you need in the work you do.

You can get much more help with this through project management training. If you are a postdoctoral employee, you should have access to staff development training from your employer including project management courses. If you are a postgraduate student, you can get help from UKGRAD here: [www.grad.ac.uk/cms/ShowPage/Home\\_page/pl/ecddL](http://www.grad.ac.uk/cms/ShowPage/Home_page/pl/ecddL)

### **You should get recognition for all your work**

‘One over-riding piece of advice that I have heard time and time again from different research levels and backgrounds is to publish. Keep writing and keep pushing to get your name printed on reports and articles. Try to make time for this area of personal development as it’s key to progression and often gets sidelined by doing the legwork for large projects.’

**Sioned Pearce, Sheffield Hallam University**

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‘In many ways I feel I’ve been very lucky as my line manager (who was also a contract researcher) and others made sure that I was well aware of what was needed for a successful academic career - publications. I would recommend that anyone starting out on their career checks that their employers have a protocol for authorship, and that they have opportunities to write, and to lead on papers... This needs establishing at the outset.’

G Windle, Bangor University

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Ever since the advent of research assessment in the 1980s, the public funding and auditing of universities’ work has been tied to the assessment of research output. UCU has always said this is a bad way to fund universities and has been highly critical of the ways in which research has been assessed.

Because so many of our members were willing to campaign on this issue, we won some changes for the better over the years, but for the time being research assessment in some form or another will stay with us.

What this means is that your institution – any institution, will have its eyes firmly on your publication record when considering you for a renewed contract or for a new job. So, you should receive recognition for all the work you do on a project.



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‘Academic papers should name the researcher as first or at least second author as this is vital in helping academic careers.’

Lai Fong Chiu, Leeds University

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‘There should always be acknowledgment of work done, even if it is just data collection. So sometimes you have to fight to make it known that you wish to be an author.’

Barbara Harrington, Durham University

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‘Be prepared to fight for authorship... you have a right to authorship wherever you did the work. These arguments can be difficult and you won’t always win. Don’t push the point too far and hurt a good working relationship, but if you never raise it, you’ll continue to be taken for granted.’

Chris Wallace, Queen Mary University of London

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### You should have time for your own work

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‘Fight for your own time for your own work. I wish I had done this more.’

Sarah Johnson, ex-University of Hertfordshire.’

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‘Discuss with your manager study leave time for your research – one of the big problems is difficulty in finding time to really capitalise on one’s research through publications.’

Senior research officer, Oxford University

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If you are working on someone else’s project, it can be hard to fit in your own work. You may not want to carry on with the work you did at PhD level, but if you do, you’ll find it’s an important part of building an academic career. If you want to carry on and publish from your own work, you’ll need time to devote to your own work. Some contracts allow for this. Many principal investigators understand the importance of your work and will allow for it, even if the contract doesn’t. But some don’t.

If your contract says you have stipulated time for your own work, use it! The institution may well benefit if it’s far sighted enough to keep you on. If not, try to get agreement from your principal investigator to allow some time for this. Research shows that this is one of the biggest motivators to academic recruitment and retention and that the frustration associated with not having any time for their own work is one of the biggest sources of disappointment among research staff.



Try using the above arguments with your principal investigator.

## If you teach, you should be properly remunerated and supported

Some researchers are required to teach within their contracts. Many research students have to teach to supplement poor grants.

For others, there is the option of teaching within their contract or funding but no necessity to do so and opinion among researchers is divided as to whether it is a good idea to do so.

If you are in this situation, your decision over whether to teach will depend on your financial situation, what you want to do and on a judgment you make about the time it will take. Some future employers will look at your teaching experience favourably. Others will look exclusively at your publications profile and given the number of pressures on researchers' time, it can sometimes be a choice between publishing and teaching.

If you are a research student and you do undertake teaching, you should receive the appropriate salary as well as a proper contract. Often, teaching which is paid by the hour stays unseen by personnel or human resource departments. This is not acceptable.

Best practice in the sector says that research students undertaking hourly paid teaching should receive:

- a fair rate of pay  
Pay calculated as a fraction of the academic and academic-related salary scales at a point on the scale consistent with qualifications and experience and subject to annual incremental progression.
- pay for all employment responsibilities and hours of work  
This should include hours of teaching, preparation, marking, attendance of meetings and lectures etc, office hours, communication with students, invigilation, administrative responsibilities, and training associated with the job.
- access to university and departmental resources, facilities and support on a par with other academic and academic-related staff and adequate to fulfil the employment responsibilities including access to library, computing, audio-visual, car-parking, photocopying, email, telephone, stationery, social, technical and secretarial facilities and to office or desk space and staff common areas.
- parity in terms and conditions of employment with other academic and academic-related staff.
- clear and regular procedures for assessment and review
- opportunities to participate in staff meetings and events
- formal representation on appropriate departmental and university committees.
- an allowance for travel time and expenses when travelling in performance of duties for the employer.

- ▶ a letter of appointment
- ▶ a job description
- ▶ a written statement of terms and conditions of employment

Postgraduates should have a clear indication of their rights and responsibilities as employees. Together the letter, the job description and the statement comprise most of the contract of employment. They should set out the employment responsibilities, hours of work, an estimate of the time to be allocated to different responsibilities, the rate or rates of pay, the intervals at which remuneration is paid, the duration of the contract, the member of staff responsible for supervising the work, and employment details required by law.

There is much more on the expectations that researchers who teach should have in the Postgraduate Students' Employment Charter, agreed by UCU, NUS and the National Postgraduates Convention. While this is aimed at postgraduate students who teach, some of the best practice it establishes can be used to cover postdoctoral researchers who teach.

### **You should have access to career development activities**

Under legislation that forbids 'less favourable treatment' of contract staff, and under the national agreements universities are signed up to, all employers have the responsibility to provide you with opportunities to advance and develop your skills, career advice and the opportunity to apply for any vacancies at the institution.

Universities are also signed up to national agreements establishing best practice in the sector such as the concordat to support the development of researchers. This commits them to providing staff development courses and you should have the same rights to these courses as anyone else at the university.

With the range of skills that researchers are expected to have now, the range of useful courses is very wide:

You should be given time and access to courses on:

- ▶ writing and publishing
- ▶ presenting your research
- ▶ intellectual property
- ▶ project management
- ▶ writing research bids
- ▶ applying for jobs and interviewing
- ▶ writing CVs

In addition to training, your employer and your principal investigator or supervisor have a responsibility to give you opportunities to undertake scholarly activity that will develop your career and your employability.

As it currently stands, the concordat says, 'as well as the necessary training and appropriate skills and competencies to carry out a funded project, researchers also need support to develop the research, subject-specific, communication and other professional skills that they will need to be both effective researchers and highly-skilled professionals in whatever field they choose to enter.'\*

This is a wide definition that can encompass many scholarly activities such as attendance at conferences, presenting at seminars and undertaking teaching. You should therefore have access to these activities as well as a budget to support any necessary expenditure.

\* The concordat is currently being revised and will be republished in June 2008

### You should have support in preparing for your next contract

- Start preparing for the next contract from day one. Don't just assume that something will turn up'.

Phil Edwards, University of Manchester

At UCU, we think that tying employment to project funding is an inefficient and unjust way to employ researchers. UCU believes that researchers can thrive and develop their careers best within a permanent contract, as with other academic staff members. UCU continues to campaign for changes that will transfer staff onto permanent contracts and that will enable continuity of employment even after the end of specific funding.

However, for too many researchers the daily reality is that you will need to prepare for your next contract, so it's important that you know what you should be doing and what you can expect from your employer.

Talk to anyone in the field and they will tell you it's a really good idea to schedule in time that you will use to prepare for the time when your contract ends. When



you're under pressure to finish a project and get research outputs published, you will have less time to think and less time to plan. So make sure you browse the job pages and the research council sites as well as ensuring you know about vacancies at your institution.

But your employer and your research manager both have a responsibility to ensure that you know about any vacancies at your institution.

According to national agreements negotiated by employers and trade unions, your employer must do the following:

- ▶ up to four months before expiry of the contract, all the alternative options should be considered, eg renewal, redeployment, etc
- ▶ up to three months before the expiry date, consultation should take place with the post-holder on the prospects for alternative options, taking account of the post-holder's aspirations
- ▶ the post-holder should be given information about other positions in the institution
- ▶ where the expiry of the contract is a redundancy (which it usually will be in the case of research staff), consultation should take place with the recognised union(s) in accordance with statutory requirements
- ▶ further consultation should take place with the recognised union(s) and the post-holder as required.

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‘I went for a one-year teaching job recently. I didn't get it, but it had the interesting effect of forcing the principal investigator on the project to consider that I might leave in the middle. He offered me some teaching and offered to write a research funding bid.’

**B.E. Harrington, Durham University**

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If you're being interviewed for another research job, you will of course, do everything much better this time round.

Here's a checklist of things to find out about:

- ▶ find out as much as possible about the project in advance and beyond the job advert; talk to people in the department or lab.
- ▶ think about the project; is it realistic?
- ▶ who will be your principal investigator? What's their attitude toward researchers?
- ▶ ask about facilities, support for researchers, recognition of independent research time and all the things that show an institution values its researchers. This should help you make your decision if you're offered the job.
- ▶ what salary are you being offered and does it reflect your experience and skills?



- look for a supervisor who has helped previous researchers to develop their careers and be mindful that this is not necessarily the same as the most prestigious lab. Maybe ask where previous staff are now at interview.
- research the project carefully and independently, don't just accept the description outlined in the advert/interview.

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4 Try to get a sense of how researchers are viewed at the institution. Make sure your initial contract/salary is in keeping with your credentials/education and national salary standards (see the salary survey on [jobs.ac.uk](http://jobs.ac.uk), for example)\*.

Sarah Johnson, University of Hertfordshire

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## What can you do?

Some universities adhere to some of this best practice. Many do not. If you feel you are being unfairly treated and you want to do something about it, what are your options?

The first thing you might do is talk to or write to your supervisor and ask for the changes you want. You can use the material in this guide and cite it as best practice in the sector.

However, arguments over unfair treatment are much better if they come from groups of people.

Do you have colleagues in your department or research area who might feel the same way?

Talk to them and find out. If you all feel the same, you could write a joint letter to the head of department or the head of research asking for changes.

The best way of making real and lasting changes, however is to persuade the university to change its policy toward the employment of researchers. Even if you are all funded by a research council or private funding, how you are treated and your working conditions are determined, ultimately, by your employer. The best thing you can do is argue for a policy that ensures that every principal investigator, research manager and every department head knows the standards of appropriate conduct toward researchers: what they should be paid, their entitlement to staff development, recognition for their work, time to work on their own research.

How can you do this? Negotiating a policy is best done through your local UCU branch, as they are recognised to negotiate collectively with your employer. But they will listen much more closely if you are a UCU member, so make sure you join and encourage your colleagues to join.

You can join by going online to: [joinonline.ucu.org.uk](http://joinonline.ucu.org.uk)

Then you could start to talk to other researchers. Form a group who will help the branch campaign and negotiate for researchers. Maybe conduct a survey of researchers' feelings about their work and what changes might help? Draft a policy that you would like to see in place and talk to your branch about how to take it forward. As always, it's numbers that count. If you have a group and can say that you have talked to and represent large numbers of research staff, your employer is more likely to listen.

If you want to talk to researchers actively campaigning now and find out what they are doing, just email us at [researchers@ucu.org.uk](mailto:researchers@ucu.org.uk)

### **How you can get more involved**

Contact your union branch first of all and say you are interested in helping them campaign for research staff.

You can also be put in touch with other researchers active in the union by emailing [researchers@ucu.org.uk](mailto:researchers@ucu.org.uk)

#### **JOIN UCU NOW**

We hope you found the researchers' survival guide useful. Remember, the first thing you should do is join UCU. You can do this online right now, by going to this web address: [joinonline.ucu.org.uk](http://joinonline.ucu.org.uk)

#### **TELL US WHAT YOU THINK**

Then send us your comments. The researchers' survival guide is for researchers and by researchers so if you think we've missed something or you have something you wish to contribute, just email us at [researchers@ucu.org.uk](mailto:researchers@ucu.org.uk)

## APPENDIX

### Advice for principal investigators and supervisors

‘A good PI is primarily interested in your career development, trying to make researchers permanent if eligible under legislation and building a team that is happy to work hard for you as they know that you have their best interests at heart. Make sure researchers are appointed at the right scale and are rewarded financially. Allow them the same conference and travel allowance as everyone else, and the rest of the terms and conditions. Immediately put researchers in touch with other researchers at the institution and national networks too. Encourage them to attend staff meetings.’

Natalie Fenton, Goldsmiths.

As a supervisor or principal investigator, you are responsible for the career development of your research staff. If you are a principal investigator, you will have the added pressure of completing your project in the timescale demanded by your funding. These are difficult pressures.

The casualised nature of research careers leads to a series of problems:

- ▶ your staff may feel undervalued, anxious, marginalised and isolated
- ▶ you may lose valuable staff to alternative jobs at a key point in the project
- ▶ you waste time and resources looking for replacements
- ▶ your project’s timetable is jeopardised as a result of the above

If you supervise postgraduate researchers, your student may feel competing pressures to get teaching experience, to publish work, attend conferences and complete their work within the timescale demanded by funding bodies. Like other researchers, they may well feel isolated and marginal to their workplace.

#### How can you help ensure that your staff remain motivated?

It’s really important to make sure your research staff don’t feel marginal and isolated. They must feel and be equally treated and have the same opportunities as other staff groups. The Fixed Term (Prevention of Less Favourable Treatment) Regulations of 2002 stipulate that staff on fixed-term contracts must be treated no less favourably than comparable permanent members of staff unless less favourable treatment can be objectively justified. This applies not just to contractual terms such as pay and annual leave, but also to any benefits accorded to permanent staff such as the ability to participate in university governance and committees.

Universities are also signed up to national agreements with UCU that commit them to equal treatment in all aspects of employment between fixed term contract staff and those on indefinite contracts.

Best practice in the sector establishes that employers should provide support and training to ensure that research managers can properly look after and help develop their staff. The current Concordat signed by universities and research funding bodies says:

‘Employers should ensure that research managers are made aware of, and understand, their responsibilities for the management of researchers and should provide training opportunities, including equality and diversity training, to support research managers in doing this. Institutions will wish to consider how research leaders’ performance in these areas is developed, assessed and rewarded, and how effectively this supports good research management.’

### So what should you be doing?

- ▶ Ensure that your researchers are able to play their full part in the life of the university.
- ▶ Make sure they have the opportunity to play their part in the institution’s structures.
- ▶ Be proactive in ensuring they have access to subject area or disciplinary networks as well as networks and groups that are specific to the institution.

A big part of sustaining motivation among research staff is making it clear that their job is part of a developing career and not just a hire and fire deal.

One major way to help with this is to agree with your researchers that they will have access to independent research time. Research shows that this is one of the biggest motivators to academic recruitment and that the frustration associated with not having any time for their own work is one of the biggest sources of disappointment among research staff. (DfES research report: Recruitment and retention of academic staff in higher education, NIESR 2005, p203) Having a policy of independent research time will help when recruiting new staff and also in the retention of current staff

If possible, write this into any research project. At least agree it informally with your researchers and allow adequate time within the research plan.

Ensure that researchers have access to budgets for conferences and research visits outside of the confines of the project.

Make sure that researchers know about staff development opportunities, training etc.

Guidance agreed by universities says staff on these contracts should be given:

- i the same opportunity as other staff to use services to assist better performance, such as staff development, training, appraisal, careers advice for research staff
- ii similar terms and conditions of employment to those in comparable jobs with indefinite employment in the institution unless the difference can be justified, in accordance with the legislation, for necessary and appropriate objective reasons

- iii information on, and the opportunity to apply for, more secure positions
- iv a regular review to consider, as appropriate, indefinite employment on full-time, fractional or hourly-paid contracts.

What must you do when your researcher's contract is nearing termination? National guidance on fixed-term and casual employment states that the procedure for terminating a fixed-term contract should, wherever possible, include the following components:

- ▶ up to four months before expiry of the contract, all the alternative options should be considered, eg renewal, redeployment, etc
- ▶ up to three months before the expiry date, consultation should take place with the post-holder on the prospects for alternative options, taking account of the post-holder's aspirations
- ▶ the post-holder should be given information about other positions in the institution
- ▶ where the expiry of the contract is a redundancy, consultation should take place with the recognised union(s) in accordance with statutory requirements
- ▶ further consultation should take place with the recognised union(s) and the post-holder as required.

Branches should ensure that these steps are included in local procedures.

The ending or expiry of a fixed-term contract is regarded as a dismissal in law. In most cases, the dismissal of a researcher at the end of their contract will be a redundancy and the provisions relating to redundancy, such as:

- ▶ consultation with the individual and the recognised trade unions
- ▶ fair selection for redundancy
- ▶ offers of suitable alternative employment
- ▶ redundancy payments

must be followed. If they are not, the dismissal may be unfair (a member of staff must have completed at least 12 months with the same employer (but not necessarily in the same post or department) to be able to claim for unfair dismissal in an employment tribunal).

If the dismissal is for another reason – such as conduct or capability – then the necessary procedures again must be followed. If they are not the dismissal may be unfair.

Also, if you lead a research team, you can get general advice on supporting researchers' career development, as well as on project management and managing finances, on the website of a project developed by HEFCE's Leadership Foundation, Cambridge University, Loughborough University and Leicester University: [www.le.ac.uk/researchleader](http://www.le.ac.uk/researchleader)

# THE RESEARCHERS' SURVIVAL GUIDE

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