

Employment contracts in Higher Education

In what proportion are different contracts used in HE?

Academic staff (including researchers) and professional service staff contracts are counted in the HESA staff collection as either open-ended or fixed-term and either salaried or hourly-paid. Academic 'atypical' contracts are counted separately and tend to also be hourly-paid. These are counted in the hourly-paid figure below.

↻ Open-ended → Fixed-term ⌚ Hourly paid

Academics 184,681

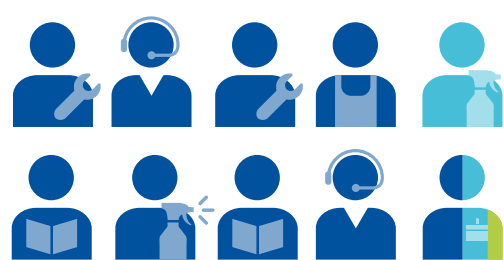


↻ 71.5%

→ 23.7%

⌚ 4.7%

Professional services 170,438



↻ 86.4%

→ 13.0%

⌚ 0.6%

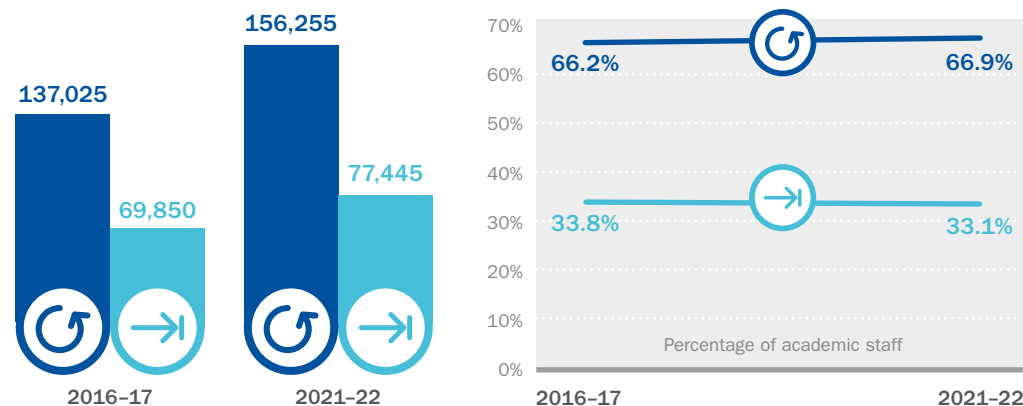
Note: Academic, Atypical contracts are reported separately. They account for 5,587 FTE. Contracts converted to full-time equivalent (FTE) to allow comparison. Due to the change in reporting requirements for the HESA staff return, the number of professional services staff members is no longer the total for the sector and is instead the total reported by approximately 70% of HEIs.

Source: HESA, 2021–22. Based on full-time equivalent (FTE).

Is the balance between fixed and open-ended academic contracts changing?

The total number of fixed-term contracts increased 10.9% since 2016–17 compared to a 14% increase in open-ended contracts. This means that the proportion of academic staff on open-ended contracts has increased over this period.

↻ Open-ended contracts → Fixed-term contracts



Source: HESA, 2016–17 and 2021–22. Based on 'head count' numbers.

How do the contracts in HE teaching differ between subjects?

All teaching 84,255



→ 5.6%
Atypical

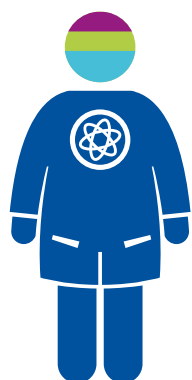
⌚ 8.4%
Hourly-paid

→ 11.3%
Fixed-term

↻ 74.7%
Open-ended

The majority of teaching (74.7%) is done by staff with open-ended salaried contracts and only 5.5% by staff with atypical contracts. There are relatively small differences between the main subject groupings, although the numbers of staff employed on hourly-paid and salaried fixed-term contracts are highest in the arts, humanities and social sciences grouping.

STEMM 35,160



→ 5.3%
Atypical

⌚ 5.1%
Hourly-paid

→ 10.8%
Fixed-term

↻ 78.7%
Open-ended

Arts, humanities and social sciences 37,710



→ 5.3%
Atypical

⌚ 10.6%
Hourly-paid

→ 12.2%
Fixed-term

↻ 71.9%
Open-ended

Business and administration 9,515



→ 6.6%
Atypical

⌚ 12.7%
Hourly-paid

→ 8.8%
Fixed-term

↻ 72.0%
Open-ended

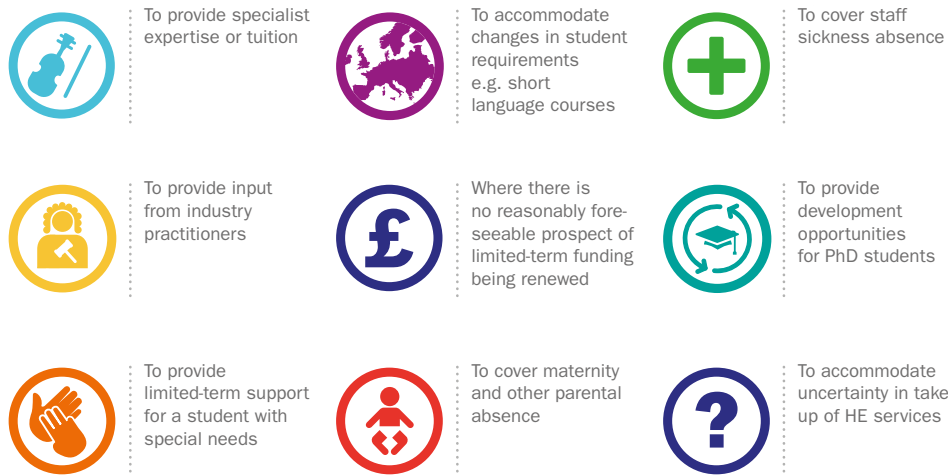
Note: Figures are the full-time equivalent (FTE) for Academic staff designated as Teaching or Teaching and Research (T&R). For T&R staff, 40% of their contract time is assumed as Teaching. 2% of teaching staff are allocated to other functions (e.g. central administration and academic services).

Source: HESA, 2021–22.

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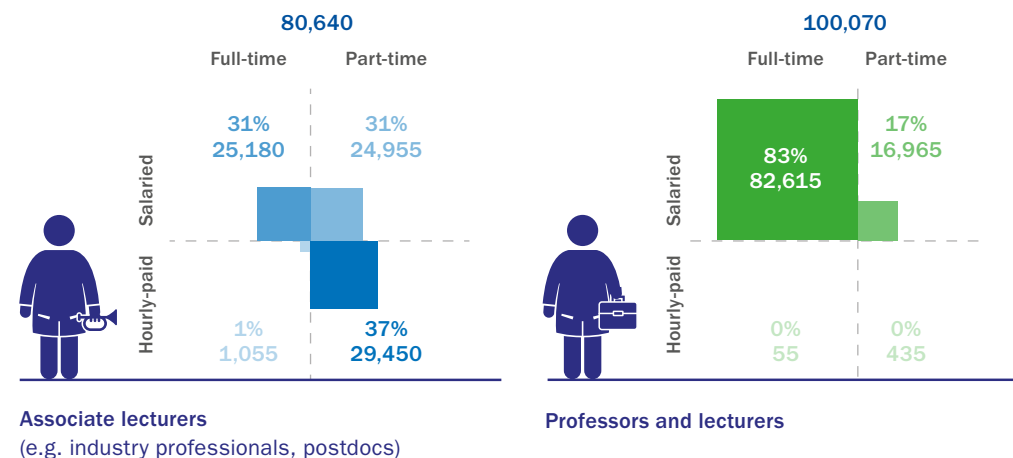
Why are fixed-term contracts used for teaching?

HEIs, like any employer, operate with part of their workforce in a flexible mode to adjust and respond to changes in student and staff needs. Variability in student enrolments on programmes and features of academic life such as sabbaticals and research leave for permanent staff create fixed-term opportunities to teach. Likewise, some staff request to work flexibly to suit a range of personal circumstances. HEIs also reserve some teaching opportunities for their graduate students; an important part of their professional development.



How do contracts vary for different types of lecturers?

The largest group of associate lecturers (e.g. industry professionals, postdocs) are part-time and hourly paid (37%). 62% are salaried with 31% being part-time, salaried and 31% being full-time, salaried. For professors and lecturers the vast majority are salaried and full-time (83%) with the remainder mostly working on part-time salaried contracts (17%).

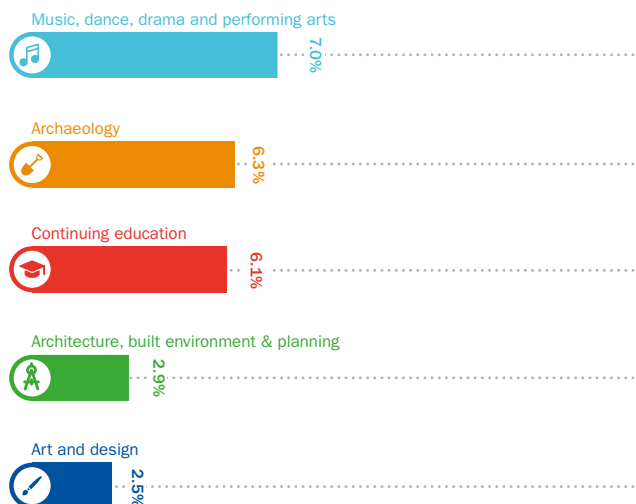


Source: HESA 2021–22. Based on 'head count' numbers. Percent rounded.

Which academic disciplines used zero hours contracts most?

In 2021–22 there were 22,705 zero hours contracts used for academic staff to undertake work equivalent to 3,185 full-time staff. This represents 1.7% of all academic work carried out in the sector.

Zero hours contracts are most commonly used to engage individuals delivering continuing education (short courses and evening classes), archaeology and in creative arts subjects.



Source: HESA, 2021–22. Based on full-time equivalent (FTE). Proportion of contracts by discipline.

Does the source of the funding influence the prevalence of fixed-term or open-ended contracts?

Many research posts and research fellowships are funded by external sources on a time-limited basis. Researchers are often therefore employed on a time-limited research project or awarded a fixed duration research fellowship.

Approximately two-thirds of researchers (66%) have a fixed-term contract. Most researchers' contracts (71%) are externally funded. For professors and lecturers a lower proportion of their contracts (7%) are fixed-term. Almost the same percentage (8%) are externally funded.

Source: HESA, 2021–22. Based on 'head count' numbers.

