

# Key factors shaping academic careers

Selected emerging lessons from an OECD evidence review

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YERUN Lunchtime conference – Funding and early academic careers

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# Evidence review on academic careers

*“There is a need to tackle in a systemic and comprehensive way academic careers, responding to the call of the Council to promote flexible and attractive career structures and improve working conditions.” European Strategy for Universities (European Commission, 2022)*

**1. Contractual status**

**5. Professional learning**

**2. Responsibilities and workload**

**6. Career paths**

**3. Career assessment**

**7. International collaboration**

**4. Diversity and gender balance**

**8. Academic freedom**

Two issues to touch on today

- A. A bias towards research in incentives
- B. Working conditions of academics



# Authority over academic careers varies

The extent of system-level policies varies substantially between countries

## A typology of academic career frameworks

Employer and level of authority over academic career framework

Academic career framework	Employer	
	Government	Institution
System-level	System level authority over career framework; government is employer	System level authority over career framework; institution is employer
Hybrid	Career framework determined by system and institution; government is employer	Career framework determined by system and institution; institution is employer
Institution	Institution has authority over career framework and government is employer	Institution has authority over career framework and institution is employer

Source: Adapted from Finkelstein and Jones, 2019 (<https://doi.org/10.1353/book.66182>)

**Greatest central regulation**

**Greatest institutional autonomy**

A

## Research bias in incentives





# A research bias in incentives?

Many factors incentivise academics to focus on research

The risk of a very strong focus on research is diversion of resources from other responsibilities of academic staff (teaching, engagement, etc.) and vertical institutional stratification.

## Global

International rankings are research driven

“Academic”, research-intensive institutions tend to be more prestigious

Research metrics more developed than for other responsibilities

## System

Pressure to have innovation and research advancements (geo-political competition)

**Institutional funding based on research outputs**

Pressure to perform well in research assessment and outputs (rankings)

## Institutional

**Pressure to generate income (competitive grants, performance-based funding)**

Hiring, promotion and rewards are based on research outputs

## Individual

Prospects for career progression

Academic status

Prospects for leading research, freedom to choose focus



# Diversifying incentive and reward mechanisms

## Possible policy implications

### Multi-dimensional career assessment

- Developing criteria for **teaching, engagement/service** (San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment, CoARA)
- Collection and development of **non-research metrics**

### Career pathways

- Create entry points to academic career track for individual coming from **non-academic role** (industry, professional, policy)
- Promote **movement between academic roles** – combined, teaching-only and research-only roles.

### Steering, regulation, funding

- Protected funding for **non-research or combined activities** (e.g., student guidance, curricula development, engagement)
- Promoting **institutional excellence** in teaching, engagement, and service

B

Working conditions of academics

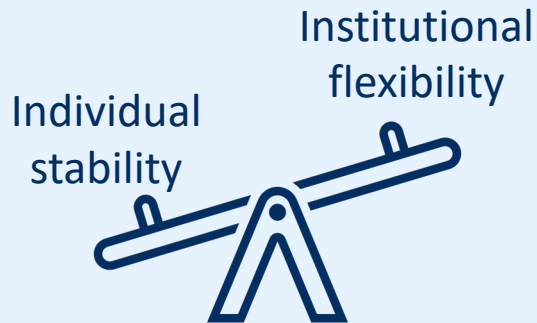


## Working conditions of academics

Poor working conditions threaten the attractiveness of academic careers, impact quality of education and reduce the capacity of academics to innovate and contribute to policy goals.

### Precarity

- Non-standard contracts (zero hours, casual contracts)
- Contractual instability (use of successive fixed-term contracts)



### Workload

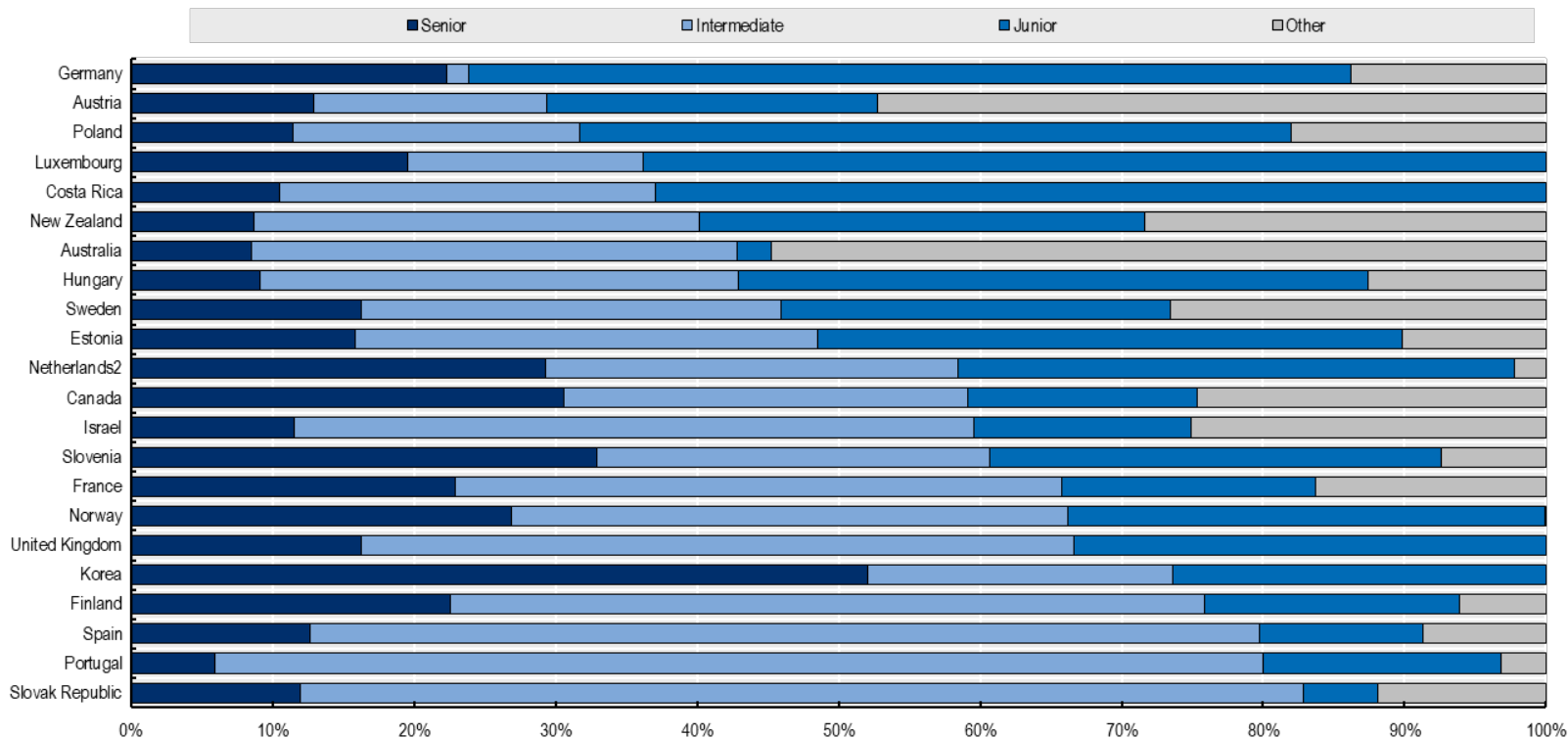
- Long working hours – accepted norm
- Little protected time for additional responsibilities
  - external engagement
  - internationalisation
  - professional learning
  - collaboration with industry
  - student support
  - administration and management roles





# A proxy measure of stability in academic employment?

## Distribution of instructional and research academic staff, by seniority level (2020)



**Note:** 2. Data cover only academic institutions

**Source:** OECD, Education at a Glance 2022, (<https://doi.org/10.1787/3197152b-en>)



# Precarity – a challenge across advanced higher education systems

OECD publishing

## REDUCING THE PRECARIETY OF ACADEMIC RESEARCH CAREERS

OECD SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY AND INDUSTRY POLICY PAPERS  
May 2021 No. 113



## Precarious work in higher education

Insecure contracts and how they have changed over time




Stapling av tidsbegränsade anställningar i högskolan  
Hur vanligt är det och vilka orsaker finns?



Casualisation in Dutch Academia  
*Testimonials from the Margins*

## The Plight of Adjunct Faculty on America's Campuses

More colleges are prioritizing adjunct professors over tenure-track positions, but these paying gigs often lead to burnout and long-term instability.

by Mark J. Drozdowski, Ed.D.

Updated February 7, 2022

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WISSENSCHAFTLICHER NACHWUCHS

## BMBF macht Vorschläge zur Reform WissZeitVG

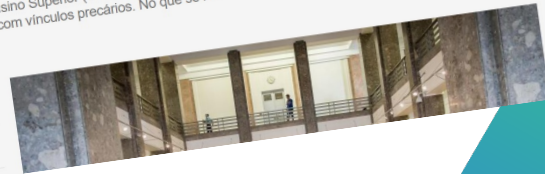
Kritik am WissZeitVG gibt es schon lange. Das Bundesforschungsministerium möchte für eine "frühere Planbarkeit" von Wissenschaftskarrieren sorgen.

17.05.2023

## Ensino Superior: aumenta o número de docentes e investigadores precários

Estudo do Sindicato do Ensino Superior (SNESup) conclui que, no ano letivo de 2018/2019, 43% dos docentes exerciam a sua atividade com vínculos precários. No que se refere aos investigadores, o número aumenta para cerca de 80%.

Cynthia Valente  
12 Dezembro 2022 — 07:00





# Improving working conditions for academics

## Possible policy implications

### Labour protections

- Interpretation of existing labour regulation in academic context (e.g., EU Directive on Fixed-Term Work)
- Collective commitments on stable employment

### Predictability

- **System-level resourcing (multi-annual budgeting and personnel planning, balance between core and competitive funding)**
- Academic career model with clear progression

### Incentives for academics

- Protected time for activities beyond research and teaching
- Recognition in career assessment of service, external engagement, professional learning, student support, international collaboration, administrative and management roles.

# Questions?

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