

Precarity and the pandemic:

an inquiry into the impact of Covid19 on the working lives of non-permanent educators in, and across, higher and further education in Ireland.

Camilla Fitzsimons, Sean Henry and Jerry O'Neill

Oct 2021.

Acknowledgments

Thank you to the research participants who gave generously of their time in preparing this report. Also, thanks to the Irish Federation of University Teachers (IFUT) for providing funding towards its creation.

Suggested citation:

Fitzsimons, C., Henry, S. and O’Neill, J. (2021) *Precarity and the Pandemic: an inquiry into the impact of Covid19 on the working lives of non-permanent educators in, and across, higher and further education in Ireland*. Project Report: Maynooth University.

Available at: <https://mural.maynoothuniversity.ie/14925>

Contents

Figures and Tables	4
1. Introduction.....	5
1.1 The wider world of precarious employment.	6
1.2 Research methodology and design	7
1.2.1 Research design	8
1.2.2 Recruitment	9
1.2.3 Participants	9
1.3 Overview of the report	10
2. Precarious work in higher and further education in Ireland	11
2.1 Government action to date	13
2.2 Collective action and representation	15
2.2.1 Higher Education.....	15
2.2.2 Further Education and Training (including Community Education).....	16
2.3 Precarity and the pandemic	17
3. Findings (part one): degrees of precarity	19
3.1 Place(s) of work	19
3.1.1 Questionnaire respondents’ place of work	19
3.1.2 “Not seen as staff” - working everywhere, existing nowhere	20
3.2 Working arrangements and patterns.....	21
3.2.1 Length of service, contract status, hours worked (questionnaire respondents)	21
3.2.2 Regular work, irregular contractual arrangements (focus group).....	24
3.2.3 Communication exclusion	26
3.3 Qualifications, professional and union membership and prior experiences.....	27
3.3.1 Qualifications, professional and union membership (questionnaire respondents) ..	27
3.3.2 Highly qualified and experienced (focus group)	29
3.4 Gender and precarity	29

3.4.1 Gender, care and precarity	29
4 Findings (part two): impact of the pandemic	33
4.2 Pandemic-related impacts on working life	36
4.3 Workload	37
4.4 Challenges of the new workspace	40
4.5 The financial toll of the pandemic	42
4.6 Remuneration	44
4.7. Contact with fellow employees	46
4.8 Care and Covid19	51
4.9 Workplace relations	52
5. Discussion and conclusion	55
5.1 Isolation and invisibility	55
5.2 Workload	57
5.3 Care responsibilities	57
5.4 Trade unions	57
5.5 Conclusion	58
6 Recommendations - what is to be done?	61
Bibliography	63
Appendix 1 Survey to participants	67

Figures and Tables

Figure 1– Where people worked.....	19
Figure 2 - Length of service.....	21
Figure 3 - Payment/contractual conditions of employment.....	23
Figure 4- Qualification levels	27
Figure 5 - Trade union membership.....	28
Figure 6 - Pre-pandemic working hours/weeks	33
Figure 7 - Pandemic working hours/weeks.....	34
Figure 8 - Factors that impacted people’s capacity to carry out their occupational duties.....	36
Figure 9 - Reduction in pay.	44
Figure 10 - Communication with employers since the pandemic.....	52
Table 1 - Comparison between FE and HE relating to length of service	22
Table 2 – Comparison FE and HE contract type.	24
Table 3- Change in working situation HE and FE comparison.	35
Table 4 - Pandemic working patterns by sector.....	35

1. Introduction

On the 12 March 2020, the Irish government announced the closure of all pre-schools, schools, and colleges for a set period of three weeks to support national efforts to contain the spread of the coronavirus. Back then, nobody could have imagined this unprecedented move or that in the Autumn of 2021, things would be far from back to normal for higher education institutions (HEIs), further education (FE) colleges and other sites for Further Education and Training (FET). Through the academic year 2020-2021, most classes continued online, aside from a short window from September-December 2020 for groups of less than 50 people. Most staff were forced to establish makeshift workspaces in their homes.

Although everyone working in tertiary education (a term we use to describe both higher education and further education), have been affected, the purpose of this research is to explore the impact on educators who are employed on a non-permanent basis. We attempt to capture changes in their working conditions such as any reduction of their hours, increase in outputs demanded of them, or even a sudden cessation or termination of their employment. Overall, we endeavour to explore the impact of these changes on people's lives including loss of income, their sense of professional identity, and future prospects. We attempt to gain a sense of clarity on the extent of inclusion or exclusion in terms of communication flow and practice between casual workers and the institutions where they are principally employed.

Our interest in this topic grew from our own experiences of working (and, for two of us, continuing to work) on non-permanent contracts throughout the course of our own employment history. But we also turned to this research based on a shared sense that those of us, and around us, who were still on non-permanent contracts were faring worse during Covid19. Although some of us were receiving regular updates from our employers, this wasn't the case for others whom we often shared teaching and research spaces with and who, instead, relied on the thoughtfulness of colleagues to forward updates from HR. Although the cancellation of our classes was inconvenient and a worry in terms of our students' capacity to progress, we were very conscious of the significant impact on paycheques for many non-permanent colleagues on hourly-paid contracts.

1.1 The wider world of precarious employment.

There has been, in the last ten years or so, both a growing awareness in public and political discourse and increased scholarly activity around the various dimensions, understandings and impact of the casualisation of work across occupational fields within global, national and regional contexts (Jaffe, 2021; Standing, 2011). Much of the public discussion and scholarly work centres around a fundamental incongruence between what the United Nations (UN, 2015) and International Labour Organisation (ILO, 2019) frame as a right to ‘decent work’ with the values, aspirations and practices of labour markets in late capitalism (Finnegan, Valadas, O’Neill, Fragoso, & Paulos, 2019; Mercille & Murphy, 2015).

These changing working conditions are undoubtedly linked to the broad global dominance of neoliberal policies that seek to transfer economic risk onto the shoulders of workers through flexibilization, casualisation, self-responsibility and financial insecurity (Lopes & Dewan, 2015). Ireland is no exception. In 2019, a report by Research for New Economic Policies found extensive evidence of the growth of unstable working conditions in Ireland. The researchers describe a decline in the share of ‘typical’ employment for employees in Ireland i.e., full-time and permanent work replaced by “growth in the share of several at-risk categories of precarious work, including in part-time work, underemployment, marginal part-time work, part-time temporary contracts and involuntary temporary contracts” (Nugent, Pembroke, & Taft, 2019, p 3). Similarly, Bobek, Pembroke and Wickham (2018) also found evidence in a growth of what they call ‘non-standard employment’ which they see as part of the “culmination of a broader conservative offensive that began with the neoliberal turn of the 1980s” (p. 9). They also point to the growth of casualisation amongst university-educated workers.

Although much of the initial attention on casualised work focused on low-paid, low-status work that was often done by the most economically marginalised members of society, there has been increasing focus on the precarious work in so-called professional occupations such as education. Maybe not surprisingly given the research skills of the field, a lot of scholarly and union activity in the last ten years or so has reflected inwards on its own occupational spaces to explore and expose the prevalence and impact of precarious working culture and practice in higher education (Courtois & O’Keefe, 2015; UCU, 2016).

Whilst the global pandemic has affected the working conditions of all employees, research by Matilla-Santander, et al. (2021) has shown that, worldwide, workers trapped in precarious employment are amongst those most affected. Their research predicts things will only get

worse for these workers as their jobs become more unstable. Many will be laid off without being officially made redundant, will be exposed to serious stressors and their precarious work may even contribute to the ongoing spread of the virus because, as Matilla-Santander, et al. (2021, p. 227) put it “without paid sick leave, they will be forced to work while sick to avoid losing income or a job”. For the cohort under consideration in this research, claiming government supports, such as the pandemic unemployment payment (PUP) in Ireland, has been littered with hurdles and has often been impossible for many as they continued to work. This is just one way in which this report will show that the coronavirus pandemic did not impact all workers equally.

As stated at the outset, this particular study focuses on the experiences of educators employed across HEIs and FET providers. It analyses the experiences of 70 people who, as of 12 March 2020 self-identified as being employed on a casual, occasional or temporary basis by a tertiary education provider (i.e., higher education, further education, community education, training service, etc.). These participants completed an online, anonymous questionnaire (appendix 1) and their experiences will be shared most explicitly in chapter 4. This research also draws from a focus-group with ten people solely employed within Higher Education (HE) which allowed a more in-depth engagement with the impacts of precarity more broadly on their professional identity.

1.2 Research methodology and design

The research looked at the express impacts of Covid19 on already precarious working conditions. More specifically, we aimed to explore the impact of the pandemic on people working in higher education, further education, community education, prison education and other formal adult education learning contexts who are employed on a non-permanent basis.

The objectives of the research were to:

- Capture changes in working conditions such as the immediate or short notice cancelation of courses, reduced hours, or termination of working relationships.

- Explore the impact of these changes on affected people's lives including the impact of loss of income, their sense of professional identity, and future prospects.
- Gather a sense of inclusion or exclusion in terms of communication flow between casual workers and the institutions where they are principally employed.
- Identify opportunities for participants and stakeholders to engage.
- Capture the things employers are doing well, and are not doing well, in the context of Covid19.

In order to get a broad sense of occupational status and experiences and to allow us to delve deeper into some people's experiences, a sequential mixed-method approach was used that drew from qualitative and quantitative methods as appropriate to the way in which the study unfolds (Tashakkori & Teddie 2010). The research was grounded in the ethics of the humanist and critical reflexive and participative practices associated with adult and community education as well as guided by the ethical principles and processes of Maynooth University and that of the European Commission (EC, 2018).

1.2.1 Research design

The research followed, at times overlapping phases.

1. We reviewed national and international literature on precarity in tertiary employment with a particular focus on the Irish experience.
2. We designed and circulated an anonymous in-depth questionnaire (appendix 1) comprising of open and closed questions. The online questionnaire was designed using the Jisc-based '*online questionnaire*' platform which is GDPR-compliant and complies with strict information security standards (ISO27001). Where questions were closed, participants were invited to say more about their answers.
3. We drew from two focus-groups that probed deeper into the experiences of working precariously for a university within the context of the pandemic.
4. Findings were collated and analysed through a series of recursive and reflexive steps which were attentive to both the emerging themes within the data, and the externally defined research objectives (Silverman, 2011).

1.2.2 Recruitment

Participants for the questionnaire were recruited through a variety of networked and snowballing methods. We used a variety of gatekeepers within the educational field (e.g., programme coordinators, professional network associations, communities of practice, representative and union organisations etc.) as conduits to distribute the link to the questionnaire within their own networks. We also distributed the questionnaire link to an alumni list of graduates qualified to work in further education settings. Recruitment was also conducted on social media via Twitter.

Participants were asked to self-identify their inclusion criteria by the consent statement:

I confirm that I am, or was recently, employed on a casual, occasional or temporary basis by a tertiary education provider (i.e., higher education, further education, community education, training service, etc.)

The focus-group participants consisted of women working across a range of university departments and programmes and were involved in a wider piece of research exploring women, leadership and precarious work in higher education. Selection criteria for this cohort stipulated they needed to be employed on an occasional/casual basis; in other words, only contracted for the hours they teach. Consent was sought and obtained from focus group participants to use relevant data emerging from that wider research project for this research.

1.2.3 Participants

Questionnaire respondents

The online questionnaire garnered responses from 70 workers employed, as of 12 March 2020, on a casual, occasional, or temporary basis by an Irish tertiary education provider (i.e., higher education, further education, community education, training service, etc.). The majority of respondents use, in terms of self-identification, a female pronoun (76.5 per cent), ten use a male pronoun, with 6 respondents preferring 'they'.

Focus group participants

Of the ten people who participated in semi-structured interviews, the longest term of service was 21 years with the same university, the shortest was one year. The average timeframe was

c5-7 years. All participants were or had within the last year delivered lectures on behalf of the university. Two were also engaged in research and three were involved in other non-lecturing duties that involved face-to-face time with students.

1.3 Overview of the report

This introductory chapter has introduced the research topic and the rationale for carrying it out which has been contextualised within a wider neoliberal-led erosion of working standards not only in Ireland but worldwide. It also presents the methodology behind the work.

Chapter two provides a review of precarity in tertiary education more broadly, a phenomenon that also pre-dates Covid19.

This is followed by two finding chapters which present, largely thematically, the dimensions and extent of precarity (chapter three) experienced by participants and, more specifically then, the impact of the pandemic on their working lives (chapter four).

Chapter five provides analyses and discussion about what the study uncovers and considers areas of priority for non-permanent educators in higher and further education, institutions, unions and other stakeholders.

Finally, chapter six offers recommendations on what is to be done.

2. Precarious work in higher and further education in Ireland

As O’Keefe and Courtois point out in their most recent paper on precarious work in higher education in Ireland, it is difficult to estimate the full extent of casualised labour in Irish universities although a conservative estimate, based on Cush (2016) and Loxley (2014), would suggest that nearly half of lecturing staff and up to 80 per cent of researchers are employed on a non-permanent basis (O’Keefe & Courtois, 2019).

The phrase ‘non-permanent’ is instructive here as it suggests the heterogeneous nature of precarious or casualised work in education – even within precarious work, there is a kind of hierarchy: from the occasional, paid-per session teaching staff through to those on fixed-term contracts.

Furthermore, as much as there may be different degrees of precarity, it is clear that different groups have very different experiences within the world of casualised work in education. Again O’Keefe & Courtois draw particular attention to the gendered dimension of precarious work in universities:

As non-citizens of the academy, precarious women are subordinated and controlled by webs of power that strip them of respect and recognition in relation to work and legal status, decision-making and social realms. They stand outside the academic family, yet this family could not function without their labour. In turn, these working conditions mean increased vulnerability to harassment in the workplace, lack of salary progression, repeated career disruptions and risk of financial dependency. The feminization of academic precarity thus widens structural inequality and serves to ensure the university remains a site of privilege (ibid, p. 475).

The very challenging personal realities of precarious working conditions and cultures on women in higher education in Ireland can also be found in the reflexive writings of Flynn (2019) and Whelan (2021) who reveal the prolonged and damaging psycho-social impact of their precarious academic careers. What is striking, but not unfamiliar, in Flynn’s (2019) account is the sense of invisibility of precarious and casualised staff in the decision-making spaces in their own workplaces:

Precarious and hourly-paid representatives need to be at departmental meetings, union meetings, network meetings, research meetings. We can’t be locked out of funding, of contributing to the organisation we play a vital role in supporting. And while

departmental meetings might be boring to some, to us the invite feels like inclusion, it feels like acknowledgement, it feels like we are seen (Flynn, 2019, p. 54)

O’Keefe & Courtois (2019) recognise the highly visible work that universities have done through programmes like Athena SWAN in addressing gender inequality amongst established staff in terms of promotions and professorships. However, given the disproportionate representation of women in precarious conditions and the significant impact of such conditions on their lives in many ways, they strongly argue that “any calls for gender inequality in the university to be addressed must start, we believe, with precarity” (ibid. p. 475). Some research participants in this research voiced feeling left-out of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion structures including Athena SWAN.

One UK study by Lopes & Dewan, (2015) identified four key themes relating to the rights of HE staff employed on casual contracts: precarity, exploitation, lack of support, and lack of career progression. The research also identified poor levels of communication between employees and their bosses. As they put it:

Respondents spoke about feeling isolated and not being part of the teaching teams in which they worked. For the most part, they were not invited to department meetings and were excluded from decision- making processes and planning of the curriculum (ibid, p. 36).

This exclusion from the spaces of everyday power, not to be seen or heard, while at the same time doing the work spoken of in those spaces has an obvious impact on the excluded worker. However, it also renders such discussions and decision-making as only ever partially-informed and, as a consequence, reducing the efficacy and quality of work by the department and institution.

As is evident above, there is a growing number of studies on the casualisation of employment within higher education, but what is less visible in public discourse or research is the nature and extent of precarious work within further education. Non-permanent, unsatisfactory working conditions have been a feature of Further Education and Training (FET)^[1] in Ireland for many years. Research by Murtagh found that most staff employed in 1997 were working on a part-time basis (Murtagh, 2015, p. 22).

Although it is clear that the increased casualisation of work has, and will continue, to have a range of differentiated work and career-based impacts, there are also wider concerns about the effect of such work more widely for individuals and society more generally. The impact of

non-permanent work on workers in tertiary education has a number of social, psychological, educational and career impacts. Research conducted by Pembroke (2018) and Bobek et al. (2018) into the experiences and impact of precarious work across a number of occupational groups in Ireland including educators and lecturers, highlighted the negative social and health impact of sustained casualised work for participants.

2.1 Government action to date

In 2016, the government commissioned 'Report to the Minister for Education and Skills of the Chairperson of the Expert group on Fixed-Term and Part-Time Employment in Lecturing in Third Level Education in Ireland'. The 'Cush' Report, as it is more commonly known, confirmed an over-reliance on precarious, zero-hours contracts for employing lecturing staff at many HEIs with as many as two-thirds of some lecturing staff not on full-time or permanent contracts in some institutions. Both the Irish Federation of University Teachers (IFUT) and the Teachers Union of Ireland (TUI) immediately welcomed the findings and the report's recommendations.

These recommendations included: a reduction in the waiting period for Contract of Indefinite Duration (CID) eligibility from 3 years to 2 years; that additional hours should be allocated to existing part-time lecturers; and that there should be a dedicated process to address disputes relating to the recommendations of Cush. The Irish Federation of University Teachers (IFUT) have been proactive in advancing workers entitlements through Cush. They have developed resources for all IFUT branch committees that outline the process they have developed for taking a case under 'Cush' and have settled a number of cases through this process.^[2]

In terms of further education, there were no clear policies on adult education in Ireland until the 1990s and even then, this was on foot of European directives on lifelong learning. *The Green Paper: Adult Education in an Era of Lifelong Learning* (Department of Education and Science 1998) and *The White Paper Learning for Life*, (Department of Education and Science 2000) were both heavily influenced by consultations with practitioners, and both identified significant precarity for staff in tertiary education. For example, *The Green Paper* articulates

“the sector compares poorly with the other education sectors in terms of the stability of employment, career options and structures for ongoing development of practitioners” (p. 109).

Both The White and Green papers supported career progression and the formal recognition of qualifications in adult education. In 2013, the Teaching Council of Ireland extended its reach and began regulating Initial Teacher Education (ITE) for those working in public sector further education provision. Also in 2013, a new government body called SOLAS emerged with responsibility for funding and organising FET nationally. In relation to staffing, their most recent FET strategy (2020-2024) claims that “...there remain numerous legacy design matters that need to be resolved. As we enter a new phase of development for FET, these matters need to be addressed along with a clear sense of how ETB staffing and structures need to evolve to deliver on the Future FET goals...” (p. 56). The strategy, which is the foundational strategic document for the further education sector, goes on to assert that,

It is important to agree an appropriate future staffing framework, which breaks down the barriers between different FET settings and programmes and facilitates more flexible deployment of staff to meet evolving needs. Such an approach would also improve the ability for co-ordinated strategic planning across all FET provision within ETBs and help to reduce the overly programmatic approach that exists at present. It must look at the role of the teacher and the instructor and how these roles can evolve and be effectively deployed across FET settings, and brought together within an integrated FET college of the future. It will require constructive discussions around the long-term staffing approach between SOLAS, the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science, ETBs, unions and other key stakeholders (SOLAS, 2020, p. 56).

Despite hints in recent documents such as this that regularising working conditions are part of future plans, and over twenty years after the Green and White papers, precarity remains endemic within FE provision in Ireland (O'Neill & Fitzsimons, 2020). One reason for this lack of development is the relatively low profile of the FE sector, and its workers, in the public imagination or political discourse.

Yet, although FE doesn't have the same status as HE in Ireland, its profile is on the rise not least through the recent appointment of Ireland's first government Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research and Innovation. A once near-hidden pathway to tertiary education has, in the last two years or so, been included in the vernacular of a number of political leaders

and there has been a significant allocation of funding into the creation of pathways into higher education and apprenticeship programmes in particular (DES, 2020).

2.2 Collective action and representation

The obvious recourse for both the individual and wider body of workers who are struggling with the consequences of ongoing precarious work in higher and further education is to seek support as a collective through organisation and action. Such activity is usually identified and performed by unions.

Everyone has the right to join a trade union and each union's right to engage in collective bargaining is protected in the *The Universal Declaration on Human Rights*, which recognises "The right to join trade unions and the right to collective bargaining" (Article 23.4). Collective bargaining is the process where people working together with a shared grievance negotiate their concerns through their trade union who enters into discussion with the employer on their behalf. Trade unionists believe collective bargaining is crucial to a fair and equitable workplace. The reality however is that precariously employed staff often fall outside of collective bargaining agreements and, as this report will testify, many are not members of a trade union.

There have also been some criticisms of trade unions themselves and there is no denying trade union membership has shrunk across the board more broadly. Kieran Allen (2013, pp 134-136) cites a gap between ordinary trade union members and union officials and is critical of a bureaucratisation of unions that has left officials out of touch with the realities of its members and co-opted by the lure of social partnership arrangements that ultimately failed to deliver for most workers.

2.2.1 Higher Education

Although there are a number of unions that academic and research staff can join in HEIs, IFUT is the only union in Ireland exclusively dedicated to supporting and defending the rights of academic workers in higher education. Unlike primary and second-level unions, IFUT represents a broad range of education workers in universities including lecturers, researchers, tutors, library staff, and those in IT and administrative posts. However, SIPTU (Services

Industrial protection and Technical Union), Fórsa and the TUI also represent workers in a number of HEIs.

2.2.2 Further Education and Training (including Community Education)

Due in no small part to the heterogeneous organisational and professional structure of the field, it is much harder to get a coherent overall sense of union organisation and membership in further education. Re-styled Post-Leaving Certificate colleges, now more commonly called FE colleges, have always sourced labour from secondary school sector who typically bring their unions with them. As a consequence, the TUI is one of the largest unions in that sector. But educators working in more community-orientated further education contexts are much less likely to come from a formal secondary teaching background and, as a consequence, may be, in another union or, possibly more likely, not in a union at all. SIPTU has been the most active union within Community Sector organisations and was central to the 2012-2015 *Communities against Cuts Campaign* that sought to respond to a downsizing of the Community Sector that resulted in many job-losses (Harvey, 2012).

It is also important to note that the struggles faced by further education staff in securing decent working conditions, remuneration and some sense of career security are not dissimilar to the ongoing, and probably more public, plight of early years educators who are represented, in terms of unions, mostly by SIPTU.

2.3 Precarity and the pandemic

It is not difficult to comprehend that the working realities for the thousands of precarious educators across the tertiary sector in Ireland have not been enhanced since the advent of the Covid 19 pandemic. The research that is emerging, again, draws attention to the gendered nature of inequality associated with precarious work in education.

Overall, women are 1.8 times more likely to lose their job during the pandemic (Madgavkar, White, Mahajan, Xavier, & Krishnan, 2020) and many of those on the frontline of education also shouldered additional domestic chores such as home-schooling and care-work.

In her autoethnographic account of being precarious in the pandemic, Whelan (2021, p. 581) draws attention, with full ironic awareness, to the constant flow of communication laced in the language of care from her university as the reality of working in Covid settled in. Such care-laden communications consoled staff on the difficulties of working in such 'uncertain' conditions,

[...] there is an irony in this acknowledgement of uncertainty too. For the precariously employed researcher or academic, uncertainty is part and parcel of existence and has merely been exacerbated by the pandemic. My personal uncertainty has been grinding, burrowing inward, tempering and infecting all my experiences, my small triumphs, my bigger successes and my failures too. This is because precarity itself feels like failure. I feel I have failed by still being precarious. Sometimes this takes the form of feeling undervalued, on other occasions it is simply a case of feeling that I must not be 'good enough' to warrant security. My precarity, therefore, is something I am always aware of, yet, it did begin to become more pronounced and raise new questions in the wake of ... COVID-19

^[1] FET is a relatively new abbreviation and categorisation for what many people consider the much broader work of adult and community education. For discussion on this change and its sectoral implications, please see O'Neill & Fitzsimons (2020). Although at times we use 'FET' as a term in this report, particularly in relation to specific policies (eg. 'The FET Strategy'), we, more generally, use the term 'FE' (further education) when talking about the broader adult, community and vocational education landscape.

^[2] Information taken from <https://www.ifut.ie/content/current-status-%E2%80%98cush%E2%80%99-agreement-may-2020> retrieved 13 July 2021.

3. Findings (part one): degrees of precarity

In this chapter we present the findings relating to the participants' working conditions and patterns prior to the pandemic. As will be seen from the emerging data there are significant, but varying degrees, of established precarious working conditions experienced across participants.

3.1 Place(s) of work

3.1.1 Questionnaire respondents' place of work

As can be seen from graphic below (figure 1), there were 70 respondents who represented a fairly even distribution of workers in FE (n27) and HE (n33) with a further eight participants working across both sectors.

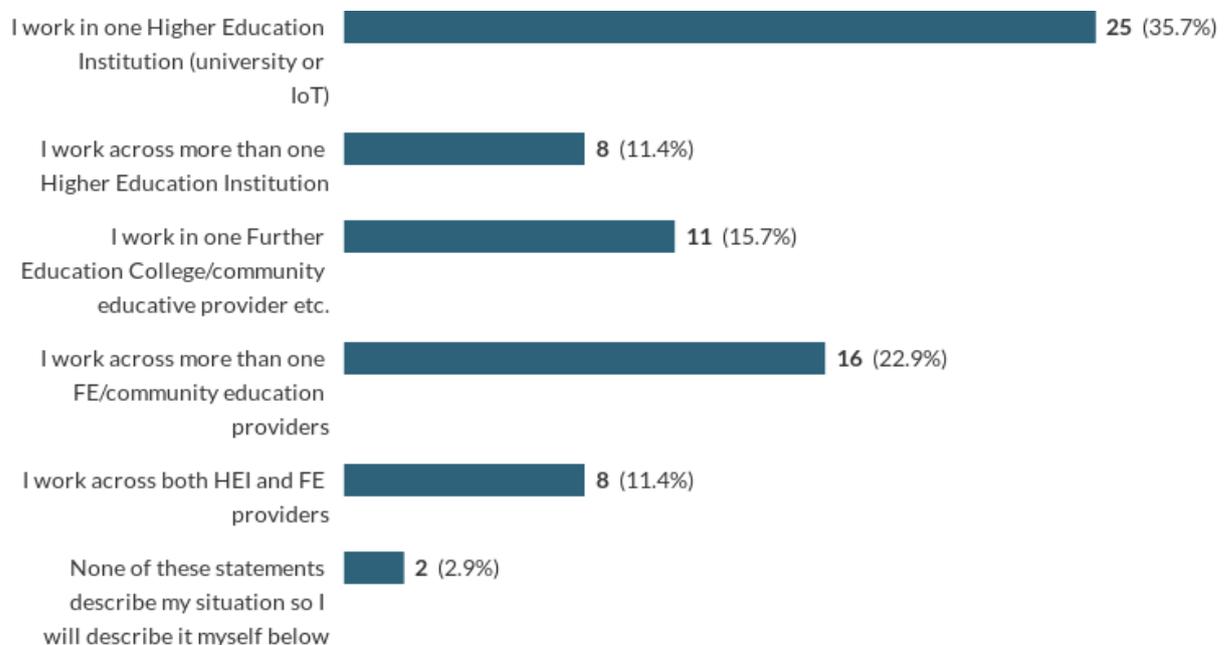


Figure 1– Where people worked.

In addition to what is reported in figure 1, one respondent stated that they worked in a private language school in the English Language Teaching sector, while a second stated that they were currently unemployed after her open-ended, full-time contract at a higher education institution was terminated in July 2020.

3.1.2 “Not seen as staff” - working everywhere, existing nowhere

Focus group findings allow for a richer excavation of how non-permanent employment affects people. Joyce’s work with the university is “across three departments” meaning, in her own words “I’m very precarious, very stretched”. She is not the only person working across more than one department. Ann describes her relationship with the university like this:

I lectured on the [names a full 5-credit module], I was also a guest lecturer with the same department on another module. I have also been a guest lecturer with [names a second department], and [names another department], and [names another department]. Gosh, I think for seven years or so. And I’m also on the [names an internal university committee].

Where others are confined within just one department, this can be across a range of programmes and often with a lot of responsibility, “I am actually coordinating three courses myself and facilitating on them” Jo explains, continuing “and there’s been a massive amount of work with the department over the last few years. I’ve rewritten courses, you know, but I still don’t feel part of the department as such, in a way, you know, which is, and it’s kind of strange”. Jo returns to this point later on in the research conversations to re-emphasise the point:

But I think the main issue is we don’t have a sort of, we’re not seen as staff as such. You know, we’re, we’re just occasional workers, and we come in and out. Really, we don’t really have that sort of, and I don’t really have a sense of being part of the department.

This sense of being on the margins has a significant impact on the relationship people have with their employer which is often one of resentment with different experiences and opinions about where the locus of change should be. Jo is very unhappy about her relationship, or lack thereof, with her Head of Department. As noted above, she has been working for the department for seven years, has coordinated full programmes and has also re-designed course work. She is unhappy that she has “never had a conversation” with her Head of Department continuing:

I have been, you know, facilitating courses for many, many years, but I would never have had a conversation with them. I met them once on a course and I don’t think they

even knew who I was even though I've been working there for seven years. And so, I kind of feel that because I am a part-time educator, I just don't have I don't have contact with them at all.

The only other reference to a relationship with a Head of Department is from Joyce; employed on a two hours per month contract but working significantly more hours on a regular basis. She tells us that one of the terms of her contract is that she must tell her Head of Department if she decides to take up other work outside of her contracted hours with another employer. This is despite the fact that she has no sense of what a typical workload might be from semester-to-semester. She explains.

I only know from semester to semester for the last three years, what I'm doing and where I'm going and like that. This has changed, each time. So, and I feel unseen because I work between three departments, I don't belong to any of them.

3.2 Working arrangements and patterns

3.2.1 Length of service, contract status, hours worked (questionnaire respondents)

Nearly 70 per cent of the respondents reported that they have been working for four years or more in their institutions with a not insignificant proportion of those, (n34), having a minimum length of service of seven years. Sixteen respondents' length of service exceeds ten years with five non-permanent workers reporting lengths of service exceeding twenty years.

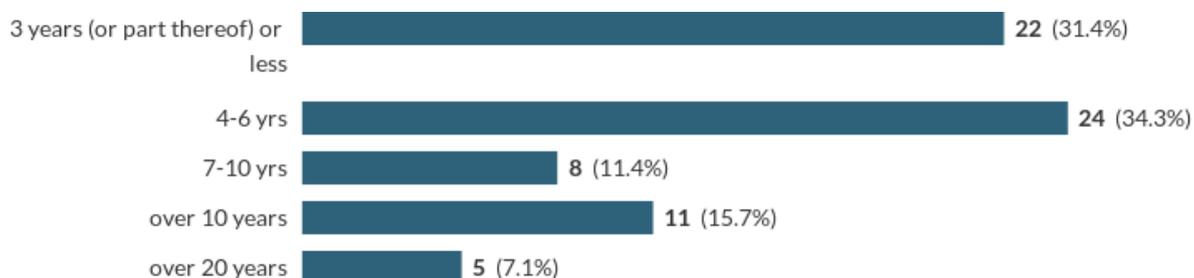


Figure 2 - Length of service

The cross tabulation below, compares length of service with type of employer.

Which of these statements best describes your situation? Please bear in mind HEIs refer to universities and Institutes of Technology (IoT); FE providers refer to FE colleges, community education providers, prison education, youthreach (typically those providers who use QQI awards).	How long have you been working in a non-permanent basis with these or other education providers?					No answer	Totals
	3 years (or part thereof) or less	4-6 yrs	7-10 yrs	over 10 years	over 20 years		
I work in one Higher Education Institution (university or IoT)	5	12	3	2	3	0	25
I work across more than one Higher Education Institution	3	3	0	2	0	0	8
I work in one Further Education College/community educative provider etc.	6	2	1	2	0	0	11
I work across more than one FE/community education providers	6	4	2	3	1	0	16
I work across both HEI and FE providers	1	3	1	2	1	0	8
None of these statements describe my situation so I will describe it myself below	1	0	1	0	0	0	2
No answer	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Totals	22	24	8	11	5	0	70

Table 1 - Comparison between FE and HE relating to length of service

As table 1 reveals of those working for more than 10 years, ten work within higher education and seven within further education. Twenty-seven people, (66 per cent of HE employees in this sample) have been employed within HE in the last 6 years and, significantly, in the period since the publication of the Cush report (discussed in 2.1). Fourteen people working in FE have been employed precariously since the first SOLAS FET strategy was published in 2013.

We also asked about details of respondents' payment and contractual arrangements with their employer(s) (figure 3). Respondents were given a series of statements and asked which best-described their current work situation. Respondents were able to choose more than one statement.

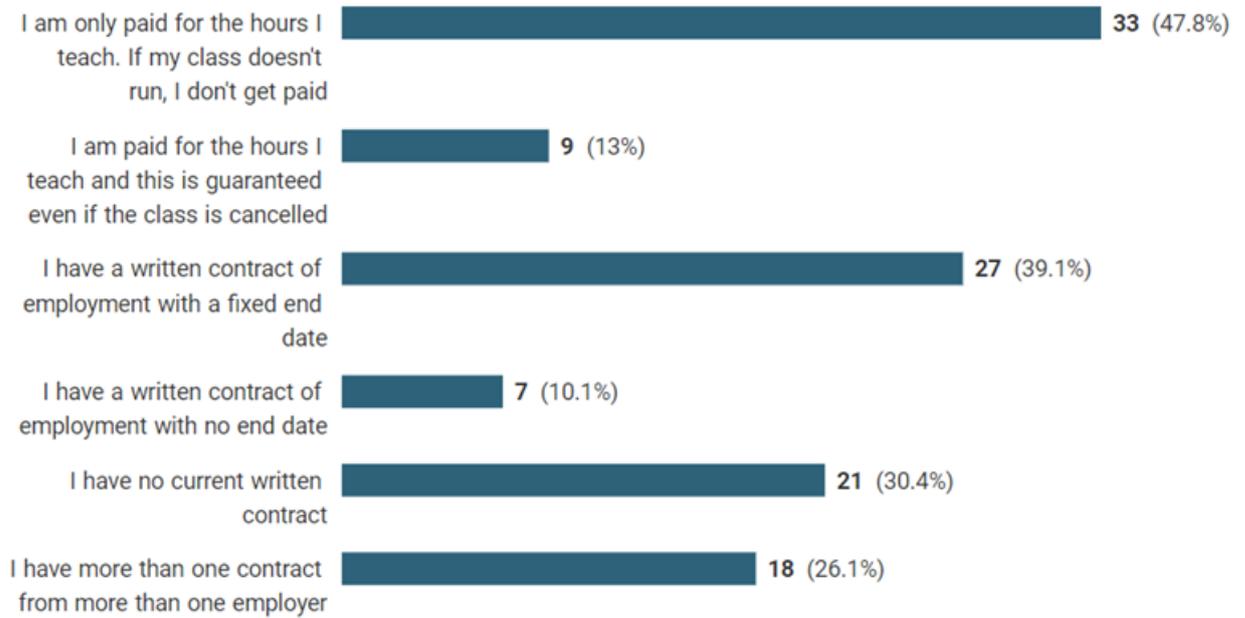


Figure 3 - Payment/contractual conditions of employment

As can be seen, nearly half of respondents (33 or 48 per cent) are only paid for the hours they teach with no guarantee of payment in the case of class cancellation. Fifteen of these work in HE and 17 within FE with one working across both HE and FE. Another nine (13 per cent) were paid on an hourly basis with guarantee of payment in the case of class cancellation. The majority (6) with this arrangement worked in HE. Further comparisons can be gleaned from table 2 overleaf.

Which of these statements best describes your situation? Please bear in mind HEIs refer to universities and Institutes of Technology (IoT); FE providers refer to FE colleges, community education providers, prison education, youthreach (typically those providers who use QQI awards).	Which, if any, of these statements describes your situation. Please tick as many as apply to you.						No answer	Totals
	I am only paid for the hours I teach. If my class doesn't run, I don't get paid	I am paid for the hours I teach and this is guaranteed even if the class is cancelled	I have a written contract of employment with a fixed end date	I have a written contract of employment with no end date	I have no current written contract	I have more than one contract from more than one employer		
I work in one Higher Education Institution (university or IoT)	8	4	9	3	10	2	0	36
I work across more than one Higher Education Institution	3	2	5	0	2	4	0	16
I work in one Further Education College/community educative provider etc.	4	2	3	1	2	0	1	13
I work across more than one FE/community education providers	13	1	6	2	3	7	0	32
I work across both HEI and FE providers	5	0	3	0	4	5	0	17
None of these statements describe my situation so I will describe it myself below	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	2
No answer	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Totals	33	9	27	7	21	18	1	116

Table 2 – Comparison FE and HE contract type.

As many as 30 per cent have no written contract at all with their employer. It is also worth noting that over a quarter of respondents' report having more than one contract across more than one employer.

3.2.2 Regular work, irregular contractual arrangements (focus group)

Again focus-group findings give us insight into the experiences behind the numbers. For example:

I have zero hours contract I basically have a contract that says, like, 'two hours a month', ... Now I have far, far more hours and two hours, but that's the contract, guaranteed two hours a month ... 12 hours a year. It actually was upsetting to read it; I really was upset when I read it.

Everyone worked regularly for the university. Jamie had successfully interviewed for a 3-year contract after 5+ years working precariously. She explains,

I have a contract until, at the moment I've one until July 2022 ... and that's the most security I've had in years I actually, I think I've actually can't remember the last time I've had a contract that's how long it's been ... for the last seven years, I've done a lot of sort of ad hoc work and sort of, you know bits and pieces and teaching and, and things like that so at the moment I feel like I have a permanent job, because I've, I've never, you know, it's still a luxury having a monthly salary.

At the other end of the spectrum, Fiona has no contract at all. She explains “I don't have a contract at the moment. I hope that post PhD I will get one again [...] Now I have more education, but almost more precarity as a result”. This sense of being more qualified than ever before but worse terms and conditions of employment is not an isolated one. Joyce tells us she “came into academia and did my PhD just a few years ago” continuing “so I'm the most qualified, but with the least employment security now, because I'm on a contract in August, that's an occasional lecture.”

Sandra is very unhappy with how she has been treated by the Human Resources office (HR) and describes a lot of resentment that has built up over time “when you're being treated a particular way when you don't see yourself, actually as that”. Part of her concern is a recategorization of her role from ‘associate’ to ‘occasional’ explaining “I've been very resistant to that shift, but I might as well be idle, to be honest with you because that shift is, it's, it's a fast-moving train”. There is no resentment from Toni, who has only recently begun working for the university and describes her relationship with her new employer very positively. Most of her current paid work is within social care, so she sees her work with the university as in addition to this and not as her principal source of income. Gloria also works within the FE sector. For her, the biggest problem is navigating complex systems of payment where there is more than one employer or, in her case, where she has been reliant on social welfare for income parallel to piecemeal work with the university. She explains “there is a lot of confusion with social welfare payments, that was my experience” and explains how some staff working with social welfare have no understanding of the workings of a university and rather struggle to comprehend the reality of Gloria's day where she might work two hours on one day and two hours on another day. This clashes with a system set up to engage with people working 8-hour days. She describes a typical encounter like this:

They say to me ‘okay, you're working with the University’ and I told them ‘No, they call me once in a while to come give some lectures’. And they say ‘no, you're working with them, we have to do this’. Oh my god, it's so confusing for me. 'The university wasn't paying me' I said ... I have two children I have my bills, you know, and we are always working, I have to do care work to supplement my efforts was, so I was confused, really, really confused.

This was not an isolated experience. Jamie described similar difficulties:

it's so challenging to be on social welfare and working in a university because they're at odds with each other and they don't know where to put you in social welfare, if you're, you know, highly educated, and working in a university you don't fit into there. So, you know, and being in that position of having, having the handout and that went on for me for absolute for years. And, you know, and I also becoming very resentful as well of the piecemeal hours being given by the university. Very resentful of, you know, come in and do a 'special session’.

There are also challenges in getting paid from the university itself with reports of misinformation about how that module code should be used, who is to sign off on a particular payment, and when payment is supposed to be submitted.

3.2.3 Communication exclusion

A big part of the problem for focus-group participants was a sense of being left out of significant communication pathways. This was a recurrent theme not only in terms of feeling part of the department where people had worked for some time (in one instance for over twenty years), but also in terms of losing out on potential work. Both Jamie and Joyce believe that they have missed out on opportunities because they were left out of information sharing. Jamie explains “the information is not being shared” continuing:

And finding out about jobs afterwards and being kind of surprised that people who I would think might have flagged something with me, haven't. Yeah, I've experienced that quite a lot over the last six, seven years and it's, yeah, it's, you know, and you'll wonder, you know, is it that there's somebody else lined up for it? Is it that they don't think you're able for it? Is it that you are valuable in that marginalised position to be drawn on?

What Gloria and Fiona share validate this experience, with Gloria making the point that she believes part of the problem is that someone else is already lined up for the role. For Fiona this isn't the first employer who has behaved in this way. She explains:

I've experienced that here and in other places where you're simply not notified or you find out during or after the process, or 'or oh sure it would have been great'. 'Oh, we didn't realise that you had those skills or background' or 'you were interested in that?' I would have been saying that all the time, and then there's some doubt that comes that comes up personally like 'did I not communicate? Gosh I thought I was communicating'.

Joyce adds another dimension to the discussion when she broaches the subject of the benchmarks that are required for academic employment in terms of the importance of publications.

3.3 Qualifications, professional and union membership and prior experiences

This section returns, principally, to questionnaire findings to get a sense of the qualification levels, and union or other professional membership that is evident amidst non-permanent staff in the research.

3.3.1 Qualifications, professional and union membership (questionnaire respondents)

With respect to the highest level of qualification held by respondents we uncover the following:

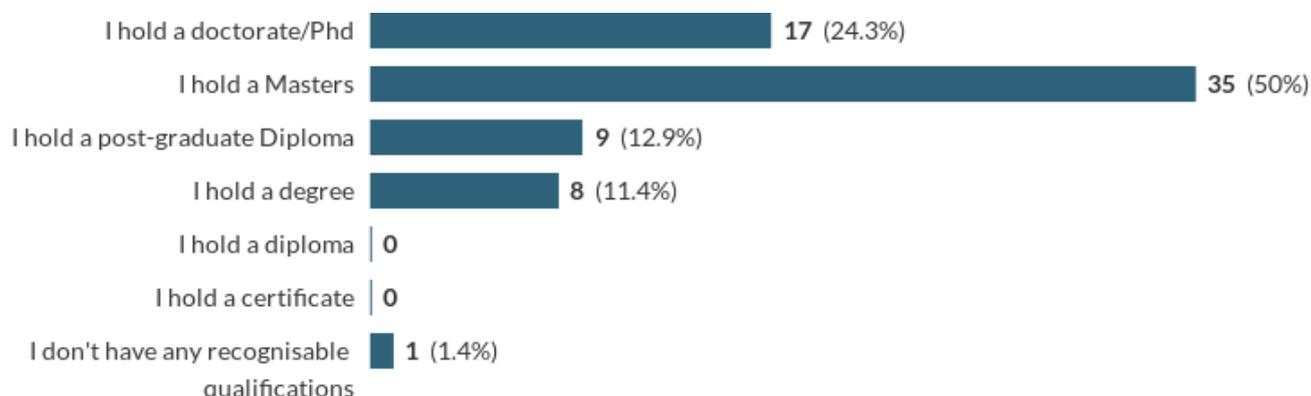


Figure 4- Qualification levels

The majority of those with a recognised teaching qualification trained in Ireland. One respondent trained in both Ireland and Argentina, one in both Ireland and Nigeria, one in the United Kingdom, and one in the United States. As might be expected, the seventeen respondents who have PhDs are working in HEIs exclusively. Twenty-four respondents (34.3 per cent) stated that they were members of the Teaching Council of Ireland and of these, twenty work in either FE or in the case of four respondents, across FE and HE. Ten respondents (14 per cent) stated that they were members of professional bodies other than the Teaching Council. A majority 36 (51 per cent) stated that were not members of any professional body and most of these (n23) work in HE.

Figure 5 reveals the level of union membership across respondents.

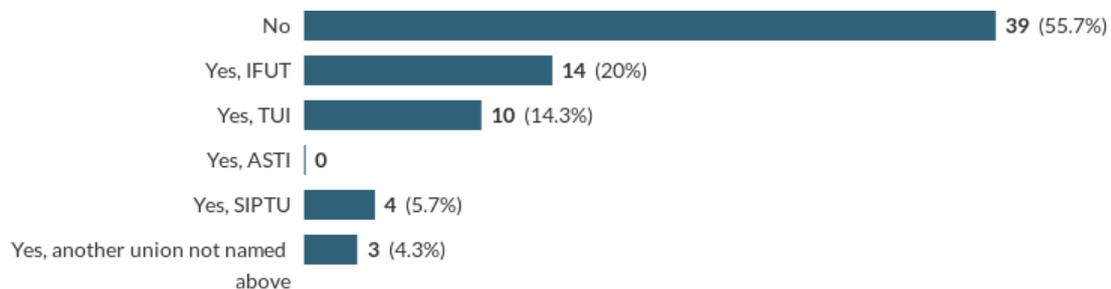


Figure 5 - Trade union membership

We note the high level of respondents who are not a member of any union.

- The majority of respondents (n 39) are not members of any union.
- Seventeen (n17) of the respondents who stated they were not in a union worked in one or more HEI.
- Similarly, eighteen (n18) of those working in FE setting are not in any union.
- Of those in a union and working exclusively in HE settings, 12 are in IFUT, two in SIPTU and one in the TUI.
- For those in a union and working exclusively in FE settings, eight are in the TUI and one is in SIPTU.
- For the eight respondents working across HE and FE settings, five are not in any union, one is in IFUT, one in the TUI, and one in SIPTU.
- Two HEI-based workers stated that they were in UNITE and Forsá.

None of the respondents were members of the secondary-school teachers union ASTI.

3.3.2 Highly qualified and experienced (focus group)

Again focus-group discussion allows us to get a sense of the lived experience behind the figures. A common theme across the profile of all these participants was the high levels of qualifications. Two held doctorates as their highest qualification, and one was in the final stages of completing a doctorate. One of those who hold a doctorate believes the university sector is “devaluing their own programmes by devaluing the graduates of those programmes”. All remaining participants held a post-graduate qualification. Many held significant employment-related experience before joining the university. Joyce had worked at a senior level within the public sector, Marie describes a background in “leadership and management” and Jo describes work in the “corporate sector” before joining the university. Ann, Toni and Jo all work for other education providers outside of the university and Gloria works within the social care sector as well as her work within the university. Jamie and Sandra did not refer to work other than that with their current university employer.

For some, there was a strong sense that these previous skills and experiences were not appreciated, or information about their past-working life even retained in the memory of those they now worked for. To illustrate,

I mean, like I ran a business, and, you know, before a PhD and before teaching and, but none of that, you know, you're in this sort of learning being mentored role that puts you in a position of, not inferiority, but of the students you know in this. (Jamie)

Equally Joyce believes this sort of attitude “kind of relegates my pre-PhD experience into the dustbin”.

3.4 Gender and precarity

3.4.1 Gender, care and precarity.

As reported on earlier, at least three-quarters of our questionnaire respondents identified as female, with some preferring not to say. We did not delve into gendered experiences within the

questionnaire. The gendered dimension most strongly emerged from the focus-group which was made up, exclusively, of women (and all working in HE). Many had left full-time jobs with previous employers when their children were young, to “enable me to have a better quality of life.” As Jo puts it,

I was working for a large multi-national company, and I had two small children. And actually, I had to make a decision to change, really to change careers because of that [...] I felt I needed to change careers, from the corporate sector myself, to enable me a better quality of life and to my caring roles with my family.

Fiona definitely sees a link between gender and precarity “for me and my experiences [of precarious employment] there's definitely been a link. Part of that because was due to the fact that I was moving around a lot, for someone else's job, and also having a child raising the child.” Ann and Jamie concur. Ann suggests:

I think, for women, it takes so much longer for women to “do what we want, because obviously, we are responsible for the children, culturally, and also it depends, probably on the culture of the family, not only the culture of the societies.” so. So, being in education, I obviously have to be a mom, as well, which is less of a problem.

A consistent theme was of women having left behind previous careers, often at a senior management level but having to leave the workforce for care responsibilities and then re-enter without the recognition of their previous work noted in section 3.3.2. Women who were now on the margins of the university had previously been business owners, senior management within other public sector organisations, senior levels within other education providers. For example, Jo shares:

I kind of found myself because of my gender, you know, leaving the corporate sector actually, when my kids were very young, I felt that it was my responsibility. It wasn't really a conversation I had around, maybe my, my spouse should consider doing that. Instead, we never had that conversation, there was just, I suppose, silently presumed that there would be me that will do that.

There was also a sense that the world of education they were coming into was, as Marie put it “gender friendly or, gender equal” when she compared the environment to her previous work in business. For example, “I think the issue is the precarious nature of our work. And the fact

that we're all dipping in and out of different things. None of us are, have full time contracts.”
(Jo)

In summary, it is clear that the deep impacts of precarity in terms of quality of life, professional identity and job security were evident long before Covid19 hit. These employees were therefore starting from a low base in relation to the terms and conditions of their employment when their places of work dramatically and suddenly pivoted online in March 2020. This will be the focus of the next section of our report.

4 Findings (part two): impact of the pandemic

In this chapter we present the findings emerging from the participants across both questionnaire and focus groups participants in terms of the impact of the pandemic on their working and personal lives. We have themed these findings and synthesized data across the two cohorts as appropriate.

4.1 Pre- and pandemic working hours

Two questions from the online questionnaire, when taken together, provided a sense of the changes between pre- and pandemic working hours across a week, term and calendar year (figures 8 and 9).

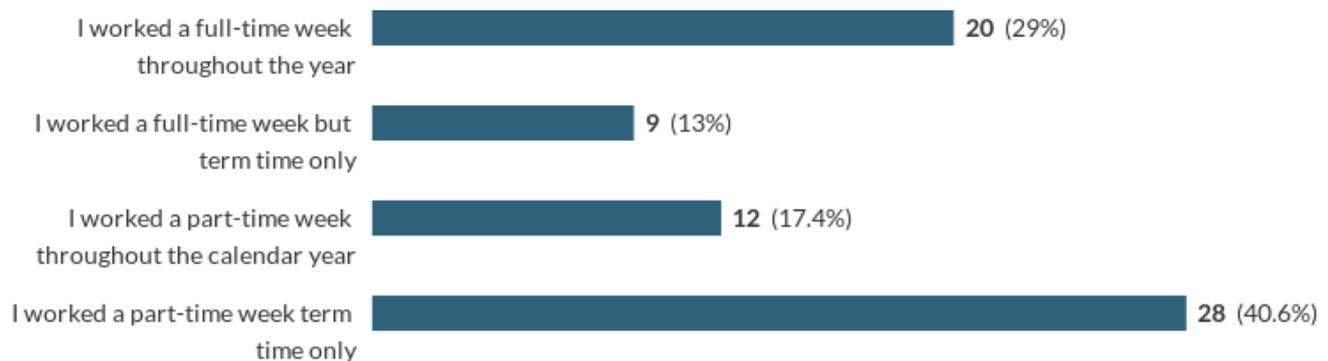


Figure 6 - Pre-pandemic working hours/weeks

Post March 2020, in other words during the Covid19 pandemic,

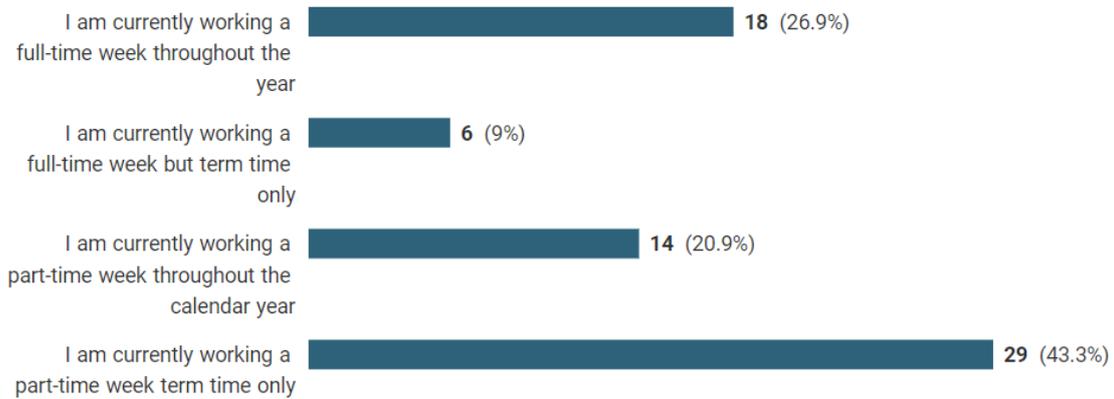


Figure 7 - Pandemic working hours/weeks

We note, when looking across the tertiary sector as a whole, that the patterns of employment conditions for these non-permanent workers seem to remain more or less consistent into the pandemic. Although, a close look at this data, reveals a slight shift towards part-time employment in the pandemic period.

Furthermore, when we look at the shifts in the working arrangements in the sector contexts (tables 3 and 4 below), certain patterns emerge. The pandemic has had little impact on the working arrangements for those exclusively working in a single HE institution. However, there seems to be more disruption to the working lives for those working across more than one HE, or those working in both HE and FE contexts and, especially, for those working exclusively in FE settings.

Which of these statements best describes your situation? Please bear in mind HEIs refer to universities and Institutes of Technology (IoT); FE providers refer to FE colleges, community education providers, prison education, youthreach (typically those providers who use QQI awards).	Prior to the Covid19 pandemic, how much did you typically work? (For the purpose of this question, we are interpreting 'part-time' worker "... as an employee whose normal hours of work are less than the normal hours of work of an employee who is a comparable employee" [ref: Citizen's Information]).				No answer	Totals
	I worked a full-time week throughout the year	I worked a full-time week but term time only	I worked a part-time week throughout the calendar year	I worked a part-time week term time only		
I work in one Higher Education Institution (university or IoT)	10	3	4	8	0	25
I work across more than one Higher Education Institution	2	1	1	4	0	8
I work in one Further Education College/community educative provider etc.	1	1	2	6	1	11
I work across more than one FE/community education providers	2	4	4	6	0	16
I work across both HEI and FE providers	3	0	1	4	0	8
None of these statements describe my situation so I will describe it myself below	2	0	0	0	0	2
No answer	0	0	0	0	0	0
Totals	20	9	12	28	1	70

Table 3- Change in working situation HE and FE comparison.

The same cross-tabulation, below, is presented for post-March 2020.

Which of these statements best describes your situation? Please bear in mind HEIs refer to universities and Institutes of Technology (IoT); FE providers refer to FE colleges, community education providers, prison education, youthreach (typically those providers who use QQI awards).	Since the Covid19 pandemic, how much did you typically work? (For the purpose of this question, we are interpreting 'part-time' worker "... as an employee whose normal hours of work are less than the normal hours of work of an employee who is a comparable employee" [ref: Citizen's Information]).				No answer	Totals
	I am currently working a full-time week throughout the year	I am currently working a full-time week but term time only	I am currently working a part-time week throughout the calendar year	I am currently working a part-time week term time only		
I work in one Higher Education Institution (university or IoT)	10	3	4	8	0	25
I work across more than one Higher Education Institution	3	0	2	3	0	8
I work in one Further Education College/community educative provider etc.	0	2	2	5	2	11
I work across more than one FE/community education providers	4	1	1	10	0	16
I work across both HEI and FE providers	1	0	4	3	0	8
None of these statements describe my situation so I will describe it myself below	0	0	1	0	1	2
No answer	0	0	0	0	0	0
Totals	18	6	14	29	3	70

Table 4 - Pandemic working patterns by sector

It is important to note that what might be lost in looking at the pre-pandemic and pandemic data are the two respondents who lost their jobs as a result of the pandemic.

4.2 Pandemic-related impacts on working life

The greatest impact reported by respondents on their working lives (figure 8) was an increase in workload (60 per cent) with the more psycho-social impact of much-reduced contact with fellow employees coming a close second (55 per cent).

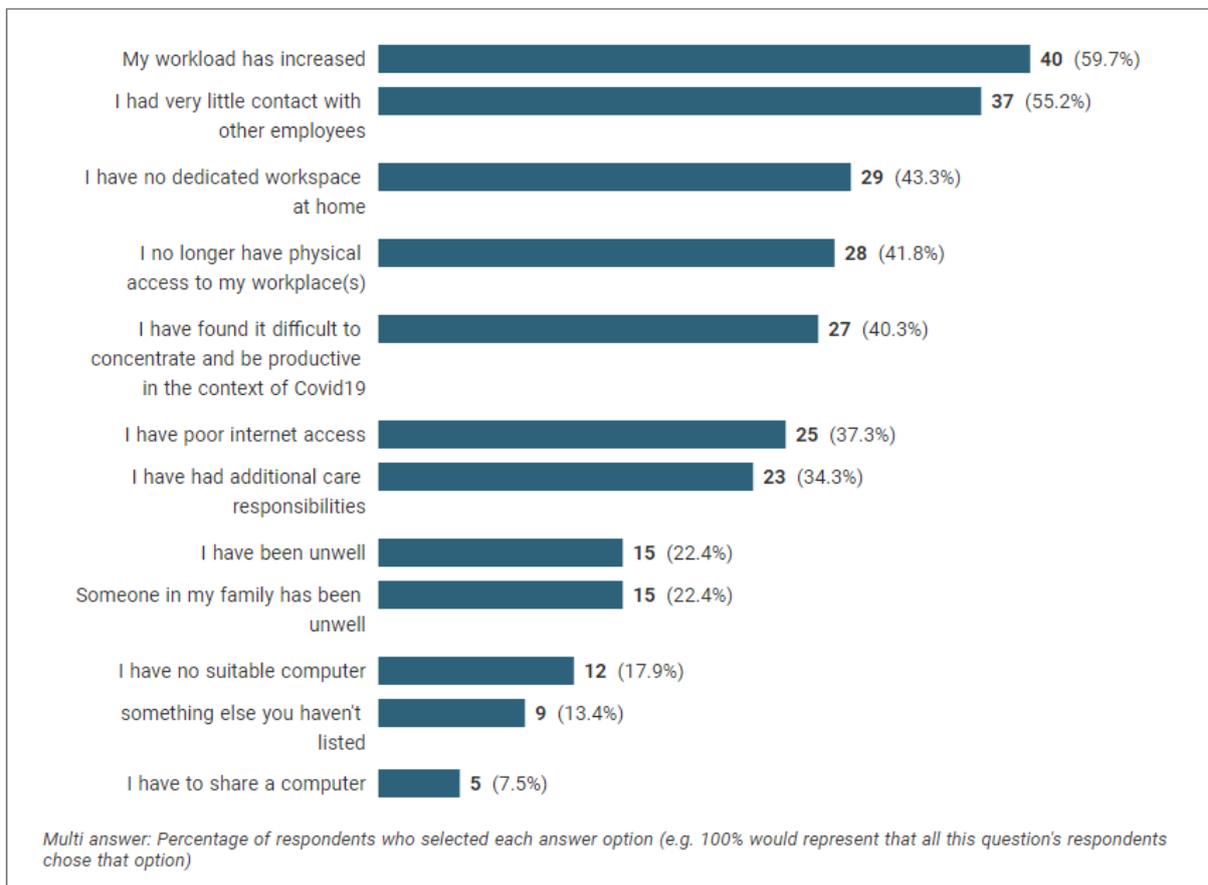


Figure 8 - Factors that impacted people's capacity to carry out their occupational duties.

The comments made in response to 'something else you haven't listed' related to issues such as lack of childcare, dealing with non-Covid illness, increased planning, and, for one respondent, "no sense of belonging".

4.3 Workload

The most obviously recurring theme across the questionnaire data, and as suggested by the response data in figure 8 above, was the respondents' sense of increase in workload brought about by the pandemic. Disproportionately high workloads for precarious education workers is not a new phenomenon. Research by Lopes & Dewan describe as "a highly contentious issue" discrepancies between the time and effort casual HE employees spent preparing for classes and the hours they were paid for (2015, p. 33). They also reported participants' feeling a sense of extreme pressure to take on work despite this concern, and a culture of workers having to "say yes to everything" for fear of missing out on future work (ibid.).

For one respondent, this occurred against the backdrop of a feigned normality, where institutions failed to recognise the adverse effects of the pandemic on people's lives:

There was a 'business as usual' approach that I found very unhelpful. I think a message that it is not business as usual would have been most welcomed. I found a continued pressure and increased pressure to get work done regardless of the situation people found themselves in. The programme I worked on was targeting the most hard to reach, disadvantaged communities and many of these communities were and are high risk categories in terms of health. I feel it was almost unethical to be approaching them, in the early months of the pandemic, about educational prospects when they and their communities were facing such a huge and unprecedented health threat.

Institutional attempts to perform 'normality' was also expressed in several participants' concerns over what would have happened to their positions or their pay if they had gotten sick over the course of their duties.

The rise in respondents' workloads occurred for a variety of other reasons too. For one respondent, for example, the increased demands on their time were directly related to the time-consuming and multifaceted nature of health and safety protocols expected of staff in the context of face-to-face teaching: "There are so many new challenges since the Covid19 pandemic - mask wearing; ensuring that learners clean their work area; motivating learners who are scared."

This latter point on responding to the emotional well-being of students was identified as a contributing factor to increased workload by another respondent:

students constantly needing and wanting feedback and support online ... ended up working extra hours and at weekends... at times felt some burn out.

Similar experiences were had by other participants in the study, with one writing of how they felt more pressured to 'push' students through the module. Those who didn't have access to technology were disadvantaged and ignored. Emails from work and students were sent outside of work hours.

The need to be constantly 'on' in supporting students was an experience others had too. One participant recalled:

As the lockdown progressed into April and May, my workload continued to be heavier than before, as I found myself preparing additional resources and activities ... for those students who couldn't make synchronous classes. The number of emails I received from students seeking assurance/clarification around course material also increased at an unanticipated rate at that time.

Significantly, some of those who spoke of the increase in student demand also referred to the lack of supports that they availed of or received in completing this work: "A difference was that we were expected to extend our care of students. I felt concerned that students may be unable to participate fully from home but I did not have contact with pastoral staff." One respondent directly attributed this increase to part-time tutors having to remedy the shortcomings of their permanent colleagues' engagements with students in the context of Covid19:

But ever since the pandemic, the workload has increased too much. Students email out of working time and I try to ignore them when they email after 5 or during the weekends but then they accumulate for another moment ... Not enough instructions are given to students so they are lost and contact me with basic questions that should have been solved earlier. Some senior teachers/lecturers are not taking much responsibility in the work. In my experience, they send simple emails trying to answer people's questions but still unclear and tutors have to deal with much of the workload. They are also not adapting the lectures to these new dynamics which is irresponsible and lazy.

This idea that inequalities exist in the distribution of work between part-time and permanent staff was repeated in another comment to be found in the data, when a respondent wrote:

Very bad decision to leave the live interaction with students to PhD students and teaching assistants. This includes online and on-campus. Faculty in my department are not (as far as I am aware) required to go on campus at any stage of the semester. Effectively, faculty will not be exposed to Covid while we, PhD students and teaching assistants, potentially will be.

Related to this increase in student demand is the additional hours questionnaire respondents had to expend in preparing teaching materials and resources for online learning (indeed, one participant claimed that they often do twenty hours preparatory work for two hours of online teaching). One of the questionnaire respondents wrote of the negative effects this kind of work has had on their health: “I feel overwhelmed by the amount of preparation that's involved in these online classes. I haven't felt like this since my first year as a secondary school teacher 22 years ago. My weekends are taken up by preparation and I feel physically ill because of the stress of the past number of weeks.”

Other participants spoke of the time-consuming challenge of adapting their pedagogical practices to online contexts, claiming that online learning depends on a more “traditional” approach at odds with the kinds of resources and materials they have used in the past:

A disproportionately large amount of my time has been spent planning online sessions and preparing new materials (PowerPoint presentations, finding images, finding videos, scanning reading material etc) to teach subjects that I've facilitated in interactive, activity-based ways in groups. If I was a lecturer who traditionally presented information and readings, I'd have all of this from before. Unfortunately, my methods are not suitable for online delivery, so I have to change everything to another, more traditional method. The extra workload has meant I've no time for my other work.

The time-consuming nature of adapting previous classroom practices to virtual forms “due to the altered state of class delivery” was noted by another participant in the study, alongside observations around the blurring of roles between part-time teaching staff and other colleagues:

There was a significant increase in staff meetings (remote) and expectation of contact with students. This checking in with and information gathering from students would normally have been the administrator's job.

This last point speaks to the earlier comment around part-time tutors compensating for communication failures on the part of permanent lecturing staff: the pandemic seems to have increased the workload of some precarious employees in the tertiary sector by blurring the nature, scope, and limits of their (ill-defined) professional responsibilities. This is further showcased in the anecdotal comment made by one respondent that it is often part-time and precariously employed staff who have spent the most time initiating permanent colleagues into the use of different online platforms since the pandemic began.

4.4 Challenges of the new workspace

Across the questionnaire, several respondents commented about the transition to working from home, and the challenges and possibilities that this brought. One spoke of the difficulty of this transition, writing on their desire to return to a physical (rather than virtual) workspace:

This shift to working from home took quite some time to get used to and personally I would prefer to do at least some of my work in the building.

Indeed, 29 respondents (43 per cent) stated that they had no dedicated workspace at home whatsoever.

The difficulty of acclimatising to working online was articulated by another questionnaire participant, who wrote about the effects the move to online working has had on their capacity to take on work:

I have had to make drastic changes to the way I work. To give one example, lack of office spaces. In the past I often used a shared space or relied on the generosity of colleagues who regularly offered me use of their personal spaces when they were out. As I travel a large distance to work, this allowed me to take on work that was spaced out throughout the day, often first thing in the morning and late into the evenings.

Knowing I had a space to work in between classes allowed me to take on this work. Covid has changed this for me.

What is perhaps most significant here is how the closure of physical workspaces exposed for this respondent the already contingent nature of their working conditions: their capacity to conduct their work was largely reliant on the benevolence of others. The same respondent expanded on this further, writing of how their dependence on the “generosity of others” workspaces brought to the fore their marginal status across the various institutions for which they worked:

I no longer want to impose on colleagues and feel like my only safe space would end up being in my car, I feel like an outsider. I have had to turn down work as a result and it will have a major financial impact on me this year. It has made my situation worse rather than improved anything. More generally, the pandemic has exposed the systems that we reluctantly accept and get by with under normal circumstances, Lack of basic terms and conditions, lack of office spaces, etc. It has also driven home the fact that I am not a full staff member of any place I work. I feel very insecure and disposable.

This was also true for those who had to transition to a blend of online and face-to-face work, with full-time and permanent staff being granted priority over part-time colleagues in relation to limited classroom space:

Since covid we have become invisible, considered part-timers (working 22 hours) we were not invited back for the first day of school. It is now October and we have been told there's no room for us as classes rooms have been allocated to other courses. It feels like despite all we worked over the years now we are an inconvenience. We do not have hours or courses.

In this sense, the change in workspace conditions brought about by the Covid 19 pandemic can be seen as rendering visible inequities already at play in tertiary education, though perhaps not explicitly recognised.

4.5 The financial toll of the pandemic

In addition to difficulties experienced in connection to status, the shift to blended and fully online workspaces had a significant effect on the finances of many of the questionnaire respondents. Several spoke of the financial toll online working has had, both in terms of the financial hit caused by the cancellation of summer programmes, as well as in terms of the cost of internet access and access to appropriate technologies like laptops. One of the respondents noted how they did not have the resources needed to create a suitable workspace for themselves at home:

I am not set up properly to work at home and do not have available resources to create a suitable office with updated equipment (computer tech, office furniture, etc.). As a result, I have been making do with a very old laptop and non-ergonomic equipment. This is not an ideal and not sustainable long term.

Indeed, out of the 70 respondents questioned, 12 (18 per cent) stated that they had no suitable computer to complete their work, five (7.5 per cent) said they had to share their computer with others, and a significant 25 (37 per cent) cited having poor internet access. Another respondent, working in FE, wrote of the specific anxieties they experienced with regard to issues like these:

Initially working from home until the ten-week contracts I was on all finished. None were renewed and I missed out on income from summer programs and other classes that would have run. I had to replace a laptop battery to continue to work because I couldn't afford to replace the laptop. I was never offered a device to work on from the ETB. I had to pray the internet was working so I could teach remotely.

Another respondent commented that “There was no recognition of our homes being used as our workplaces - happened to everyone but I really think that it's kind of different when you are not on a salary.” This latter point on the discrepancies in treatment between permanent and precariously employed staff in terms of working online was repeated by another study participant: “I think there should have been an assessment of how set up people were to work from home. We were allowed to take chairs/screens etc, but I had no desk/chair/printer.” The financial implications of this inequity were reiterated by a third respondent in relation to part-time workers:

HEIs also made no allowances for costs associated [with working from home]. I have had to upgrade my broadband, buy a desk, chair and AV equipment in order to pivot. Fulltime staff were offered laptops/access to their offices to collect equipment, no such arrangements were made for PT staff. Furthermore, [Named university] has made Microsoft Office access online only from September 2020 for PT staff, which again levies an extra unexpected cost ...

As one participant, also working in HE made clear:

The expectation is that I have access to the necessary technology (and know how) to run tutorials from home. I have had to buy a webcam because I use a large TV screen as a monitor and the TV has no camera. I have also bought noise cancelling earphones as a neighbour is building and it would be impossible to conduct online tutorial with the noise. Somebody from the university should have been in touch to ensure I had both the technology, know how, and physical space to run the tutorials. There should be a link person to contact in case of problems.

This respondent's comments about cost implications of going online were echoed by other participants in the questionnaire, with one person writing about the anguish they felt at the prospect of losing their job on the basis of internet and laptop access issues. The same respondent, who works in FE, recalled how their personal laptop and tablet both broke during the pandemic, but that they could not afford to replace either given the money they lost as a consequence of the closures. They wrote of how they became 'really anxious' about this, especially around whether their job would be at risk:

if I didn't have the up-to-date equipment. I felt like another tutor would be preferred over me if I didn't have access to an up-to-date laptop, a printer etc.

These costs were propounded further by the inequities experienced by students, with many of the respondents paying for additional resources to compensate for this out of their own pocket like this FE educator who commented that

I had to post work to students who couldn't access or use digital or online materials and so was down money because of this as I couldn't access petty cash.

While a significant number of participants wrote of how they were granted temporary access to their physical workspaces in order to collect materials necessary for working from home, this was a relative minority overall. Furthermore, a small number of respondents spoke of how their place of work recompensed them for the financial cost of working from home (though this varied from a once-off, ten-euro contribution to broadband bills, to an additional twelve hours' pay). Issues of remuneration are developed further below.

4.6 Renumeration

Another impact of the pandemic on non-permanent education workers relates to pay. Participants of the online questionnaire were asked if there had been a reduction in their take home pay that would not have happened if it wasn't for Covid19. As can be seen from the responses below (figure 11), there was a fairly even split in responses. However, it is important to read even a holding of pay within the context of the widespread reporting of increased workload which emerged strongly in both the questionnaire and focus groups.



Figure 9 - Reduction in pay.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, for the vast majority of questionnaire respondents this increase in workload was not recognised in terms of workers' pay, or in changes to the terms and conditions of contracts, etc. Indeed, many respondents wrote about the invisible labour that often comes with teaching precariously in higher and further education, from session planning during non-term times, to not being able to claim for certain social welfare supports (like the pandemic unemployment payment) in spite of their minimal hours. In the context of the pandemic, expectations on part-time staff to attend training around online learning without getting paid for this attendance emerged as a particularly significant theme.

One respondent working in FE wrote about their mixed, but intensive, experiences of completing online CPD:

THE AMOUNT of webinars was outrageous. The Teaching Council ran webinar of particularly low quality of content or usefulness. Ahead had some excellent content and NALA were hit and miss. I felt pressure to educate myself on pedagogy for teaching online and completed a 20+ hour Open University course. We also had to attend ETB-run CPD on using TEAMS.

And while some participants valued this kind of input (“I have learned so much about technology through a lot of CPD during the summer”), it is also clear that the majority felt it should have been recompensed. The following observation from a HE educator is incisive in this regard:

It is not only the prep of pre-recorded materials, but the need to do more in terms of engagement is not being recompensed. Additional pay should have been offered for casual teaching. I have asked [University A] or additional pay but haven't received a response. Training for casual staff remains a significant problem. [University B] for example have an incredibly complex system of instructional videos (as do University C) with the assumption that ALL users of their systems are full time staff members who have the time to watch 20 x 20 minute videos to work out how to do one task.

In another example,

I believe we should have had some kind of training to help us cope better with the abrupt change. Planning for online lessons means creation of own material, which is extremely time consuming, and which is not contemplated [sic] in our working hours, therefore not paid. (FE sector)

And again,

I believe that equipment or some sort of fee towards all my additional costs outside of the hourly rate should have been provided to me by all these public sector bodies. Also, time for all the additional training - there was no allowance for learning to use MS Teams or zoom by any of the establishments except for one. (Working across both HE and FE)

A sizeable minority of respondents related to their workload and pay conditions more favourably than those above. One part-time tutor who was also completing a PhD saw reductions in their teaching hours due to Covid-related shifts as opportunities for reducing their workload, therefore allowing them to devote more time to their studies. Another wrote of how they “felt supported and treated well in some areas in terms of extra pay and extra time to get courses ready online”, while others embraced the reduced class sizes that physical distancing necessitated in face-to-face spaces: “They have reduced class sizes to meet social distancing criteria. This is allowing some good, focused work to happen in small groups.” These varied experiences point to the complex, and at times conflicting, dynamics at play in relation to precarity and the pandemic. In what follows, we signal how this ambiguity has also played out for our respondents during the pandemic in the context of their workplace relationships.

4.7. Contact with fellow employees

The circumstances of the pandemic largely exposed and intensified respondents’ sense of isolation from their colleagues and institutions. Indeed, in the questionnaire, 37 respondents (55 per cent) stated that they had very little contact with fellow employees since the pandemic began. One respondent recounted feeling disregarded by their department altogether:

Poor communication from department to casual employees, not getting some important information or training until too late. Not invited to virtual coffees with department despite teaching 2.5 modules, more than several members of department. I’m at home with poor internet connection. (Higher Education)

This feeling of being ‘out of the loop’ was expressed by several other participants in the questionnaire too. Indeed, one person described how their receipt of a notification about staff training was their “first interaction with members of the wider organisation. I never received an induction.” A second respondent situated this loss of community within the wider loss of a scholarly community experienced by universities since Covid began:

One condition of my work that has worsened significantly is a sense of community. I miss the conversations in the corridor, the insightful comments in seminars, the

shared, in-person sense of struggle and opportunity - these aspects of my work buoyed me prior to the pandemic and kept me going in a way that screen time can never replace! (Working across more than one HE setting)

Another made a similar point in relation to teaching, reflecting on how they:

... feel more isolated in my work, I don't feel like part of a team. This is particularly hard when trying to move to remote teaching - I don't know where to direct questions. I feel bombarded with short, frequent and optional training sessions on different elements of online teaching and I am at a loss as to where to start, what is necessary, how all the bits fit together. We have had very little communication from the senior staff and head of department outside the standard updates on public health guidance. It feels like everyone is doing their own thing. Everyone is making their own decisions about how to deliver their teaching, the format etc. (Higher Education)

Building on this latter point, communication (and the lack thereof) was arguably one of the most influential factors in shaping precarious employees' relationships with colleagues and their wider sense of institutional belonging. This is evidenced in the fact that so many respondents identified a lack of communication to part-time staff as a central failing of workplaces during the pandemic.

One respondent, for example, spoke of their experience of losing work after months of silence from their employer:

There was zero communication throughout the summer - so I had no idea if I would be going back to work or if I would get a contract and it was very stressful. I contacted them several times but never received a reply. The first I heard from my employer was the week before our normal start back in September, I lost my teaching hours (Further Education)

Similar experiences were shared across the questionnaire, with another respondent frustrated with having to 'chase' their employer down for answers on whether their contract would be renewed for the year ahead. Others reflected on the power imbalance between themselves and their employers, with their employers often not consulting with them on decisions directly affecting their teaching, or inviting them to virtual social events:

We haven't been offered a chance to communicate about what we would plan, what we would solve and how we could save our hours. (Further Education)

Much the same pattern emerges in higher education.

I would expect and like to hear from my department directly in terms of how we proceed/ interpret information and guidance. As non-permanent staff we are not privy to this information until it is deemed so. (Higher Education)

And,

I would like to have been consulted about how I could offer face-to-face work while adhering to safety and COVID guidelines. Instead, it was assumed my classes could never work. (Higher Education)

And again,

With regard to both the tutorials and the evening class I deliver, I was pretty much left out of all communication. Some lecturers would forward emails to me when they thought of it. I was included in the training classes in preparation for online delivery, but some decisions were made and communicated in department meetings and I was not informed of them. (Higher Education)

In one last example,

We only met up once or twice (on Teams) from March to June which I thought was poor. We were all new to Teams, but we work with a wide variety of people and I think a regular check in with everyone should have been arranged. (Higher Education)

Extending this further, several respondents noted inconsistencies and double standards in terms of who would communicate with them and when. One participant, working across FE and HE, but not distinguishing, here, her experiences, wrote

Communication wasn't great - I felt that there was communication for an inner circle and we got the information that was allowed to us. Staff meetings continued - maybe if there were meetings, we would have had to be paid for them!

However, it was not only the lack of communication that eroded respondents' sense of belonging to their institutions. Some of the participants referred to the alienating effects of when they were *in* communication with colleagues during the pandemic, with one observing the anxieties they experienced at feeling micro-managed by a senior member of staff:

During the early phases of the pandemic, my Head of Department [...] had a tendency, from my perspective, to micro-manage our work somewhat, which created undue stress for me. This no doubt came from a good place, but I felt it heightened my anxieties at an already difficult time. (Higher Education)

Difficulties with colleagues came to the fore again in this respondent's reflections on the carelessness of some permanent staff members when making requests for work to be done:

Full communication about what was happening, and why it was happening would have taken the edge off. It would also have been more appropriate that permanent academic staff looking for help with teaching/grading/research did not email precarious colleagues without any mention of our difficult situation. Being treated like a simple resource to lighten their load might be an honest reflection of working conditions, but it will make it difficult to consider these individuals as possessing any degree of solidarity with early career colleagues. (Higher Education)

This instrumentalization of precarious employees is captured perhaps most succinctly in one respondent's observation that

I am an available and experienced resource but unrecognised within the organisation. We don't receive information or communications that permanent staff receive. (Further Education)

While a sobering picture has been painted of non-permanent employees' relationships with their institutions, comments are evident across the data on the approachability and inclusiveness of individual employers and line managers that can be read in a variety of ways. One participant made the point that:

There were a couple of moments when a more humane face of a large institution showed particularly in the email communication from one particular senior manager who seemed to recognise the stress and challenge of working during the pandemic. (Higher Education)

Similarly, another respondent emphasised the discretion some senior staff had taken around workload to recognise the challenges of working during a pandemic:

Unofficially, there is an understanding with some senior staff that we are doing our best, and that courses can be approached in a way that might minimise workload if that suits. (Higher Education)

Simultaneously, however, the same respondent was cautious around this kind of discretionary management style, on the grounds that such an approach individualises the working conditions of precarious staff, rendering these a matter of individual choice over contractual obligation: “However, this puts the onus on me to come up with a way to run a course in a way that doesn't eat into unpaid hours.” The ambiguity of individual relationships at work was recognised by another questionnaire respondent, who noted the following:

For the most part, [individual employers] have been open and honest with me about expectations around work going forward under the current pandemic situation. I want to make it clear though, I credit these individuals rather than the institution.

Indeed, as another respondent bluntly stated: “My line manager is kind and supportive, but nothing has come out of it.”

Again, discussion within the focus-group, allows for a deeper understanding of the impacts of the phenomenon. One comment by Marie, who is frustrated about the absence of evaluation opportunities believing this has a negative impact on the student experience and the potential to implement change, sums up the general mood. “Feedback is not required from me ... it's often required from the students but not from me so how do you improve that system in terms of policy if you are not getting any feedback from the ground”.

4.8 Care and Covid19

Coupled with the perhaps expected challenges of getting used to online teaching and learning (and the upskilling required for this), a large contingent of respondents noted how the move to working online posed significant problems in relation to childcare and family life. One respondent, who worked in further education, wrote of how their childcare issues were such that their children often had to be in the same room as them while they were teaching. One wrote of the challenge of juggling working from home, childcare, and the care for elderly relatives living in other counties, while another spoke of the difficulty of working in close proximity to potentially noisy neighbours.

Indeed, of the 70 respondents, 23 (34 per cent) cited additional care commitments as having impacted their capacity to conduct their duties (across the questionnaire, several women wrote on the challenges of childcare while precariously employed, given the high cost of childcare in Ireland). As well as this, 15 (22 per cent) referred to family members being ill as having directly impacted their ability to complete their work.

At the same time, however, some questionnaire respondents were able to identify some potentially positive changes to their workspaces as a consequence of the pandemic. One participant, for instance, wrote of how working from home provided a greater work/life balance, particularly in relation to the demands of commuting and childcare: "I have a child and much prefer to work at home. I am personally much happier and have a better work/life balance. I am more productive and less tired from commuting." This sentiment was echoed by a second respondent who wrote of how they expended "far fewer resources overall when working remotely (e.g., time, travel, etc.). I was already very familiar with remote working/teaching platforms so the shift online wasn't too difficult overall." A third participant also saw dimensions of their online working life as valuable, claiming that the pandemic "helped me to recalculate my work/life balance while working from home."

4.9 Workplace relations

The questionnaire prompted respondents to respond to the following statement ‘Since the Covid19 pandemic began, I have been kept up to date with changes at my workplace(s) through regular communications from my employers.’ The following emerges from the responses:

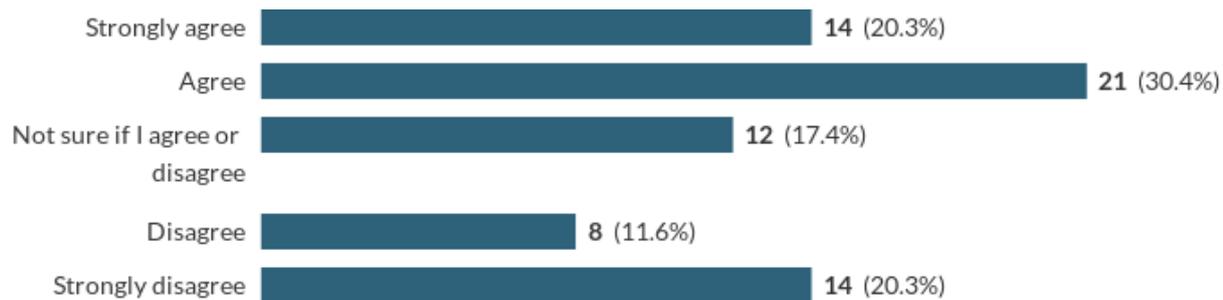


Figure 10 - Communication with employers since the pandemic

Relationships between respondents and their institutions emerged as an important theme across the questionnaire data. With a small number of exceptions, there was an almost unanimous frustration with, and even anger towards, Human Resource departments, with many respondents describing their relationship with them as non-existent at best, and hostile and fearful at worst (owed largely to poor communication, cultures of surveillance, changes in contractual terms and conditions, and dismissiveness towards the idea of union membership, among other points).

For the focus group participants, overall, there was a sense that there was little or no supports for people who fell outside of the realm of having a fixed-term or permanent contract with the university. Instead, there is a sense that a deficit model prevailed despite these workers often being in the front line in terms of the student experience. There was little hope that this would change. Or as Jo puts it

Education is so precarious and it's so hard to get a permanent position. Or is there such a thing anymore? And all the years you have to do before you get to CID and all of that. So? Yeah, I think it's very difficult.

This takes its toll on people. Sandra's point, echoed by other participants, stresses the dehumanising dynamic of institutions' treatment of non-permanent workers:

They need to be aware of the impact that the legalistic approach to treating people, is having on us. And work from a resource and benefit model and not a deficit model. maybe just focused on the HR department it seems to me like, you know, that they're very powerful within the university. They're not there for the employees at all, they're there for the legalistic outcomes.

One participant describes how Covid19 had a direct impact on her capacity to create the publications required to seek a more permanent academic job. She elaborates "that pivotal online learning has taken up so much time, and I have gotten myself in a situation where I get lots of teaching work, but it leaves me no time at all."

In summary, the onset of the Covid19 pandemic brought with it increases in workload for those precariously employed in FE and HE. Such increases were often invisible, unrecognised, and unremunerated, occurring in tandem with an increased sense of alienation from colleagues, as well as an ongoing sense of awareness around inequities experienced prior to the pandemic (for example, in relation to workspace availability and involvement in institutional decision-making). In the next chapter, we discuss these further and posit some conclusions, before turning to appropriate recommendations.

5. Discussion and conclusion

What is striking when we look across the data of the many experienced and highly qualified participants involved in this research is that Covid did not, in any great sense, create new problems for non-permanent workers in higher and further education. Instead, what is disturbingly clear is how the pandemic has served to expose and accentuate long-standing inequalities in the working lives of educators who are at the centre of the teaching and research activity of Irish universities and centres of adult and further education. We might recall from chapter 2 with reference to higher education, that this isn't just a few people here and there - but up to half lecturing staff and up to 80 per cent of researchers represent a clearer picture of the HE academic workforce (O'Keefe & Courtois, 2019).

We have synthesised our reading and analysis of the data into four themes which we will discuss in turn below:

- Isolation and invisibility
- Workload
- Caring responsibilities
- Trade unions

5.1 Isolation and invisibility

It is hard to ignore just how invisible and unrecognised many precarious staff felt during the early days of the pandemic. A sense of isolation and invisibility was exacerbated by particular problems with communications between HE institutions, in particular, and these staff. This failure to keep employees in the loop compounded an inequitable reality where not only is their current work often unseen, but also aggravated the sense to which their prior experience, qualifications and skills are airbrushed out of the consciousness of their employers.

This sense of isolation didn't emerge so strongly with those working in further education. This could be likely because of strong industry-based relationships and an established employment pathway from industry into FE. Although, this absence in the findings may also be methodological as this sense of isolation and invisibility emerged very strongly from the HE-

only focus group dialogues. Further dialogue-based inquiry with FE practitioners would be important to explore the prevalence of such alienating working cultures in that sector.

But across HE and FE, there is a sense of disconnectedness from institutional communications systems and, in particular, planning and evaluation processes associated directly with their work. As well as feeling ‘out of the loop’ in terms of evolving institutional and departmental policies and responses to the pandemic, many workers in our research also felt isolated from their peers and colleagues on a more social level which, at times, was distressing for them. Although there were instances of individual kindness and humanity from some managerial staff, the system remains unfair and damaging to the health, well-being and career prospects of non-permanent educators.

There was, it seems, in institutional responses to the pandemic, almost a presumption that all staff were permanent – or, at least, enjoyed the resource privileges of permanent and secure work. One of the many logistical challenges of precarious working lives is not having the access to dedicated space, technology or training. Many, if not most, non-permanent workers use their own computers, find (or fight for) their own spaces to work and are, very often, excluded from any communication on training not directly related to their teaching or research duties. As such, while permanent staff were supported in their transition to a remote working context, our research seems to confirm that there was very little institutional support provided for non-permanent staff, many of whom (43 per cent) had no dedicated workspace at home and, largely, had to self-fund additional technical and connectivity resources required to work.

As was clear from the first part of the findings, and is clear across the literature, there is a strong sense that precariously employed educators are much less institutionally and professionally visible than their permanent colleagues. Although there were aspects relating to flexibility that suited some participants, the pandemic has deepened that sense of non-permanent workers’ invisibility. The positive aspects of new working arrangements will benefit permanent or the least precarious workers who are being given institutional support to work remotely.

The poor nature of institutional relationships is apparent as most participants report, at best, unhelpful or poor relationships with the human resources department of their institutions.

5.2 Workload

The most significant impact of the pandemic, according to respondents, related to an increase in workload. Although there has always been an 'unseen' additional workload associated with precarious work, again, it is the degree to which this has increased that serves to draw light on the enduring inequalities for non-permanent educators in higher and further education.

It is also significant to note that the differentiated impact of the pandemic across pedagogic approaches. Although there is much anecdotal discussion about the degree to which an online lecture, with the possibilities for interaction, may provide a more beneficial learning experience for very large classes, there has also been a more detrimental impact on the more participative and dialogic pedagogic spaces in the move to the 'flat' spaces of online teaching and research.

There is also a concern about the extent to which the move to online teaching during the pandemic has deepened education inequality more broadly in Ireland.

5.3 Care responsibilities

Given the gendered nature of caring responsibilities and the high proportion of women respondents in the research, it may be no surprise that our research highlights the extent to which the pandemic had increased caring responsibilities and impacted on participants capacity to work.

5.4 Trade unions

Given the poor working conditions reported, in one aspect or another, we might hope that there would be a significant engagement with unions. However, it is striking to see the low levels of union membership. It is unclear, from this research, why membership is so low. It may be that the lack of institutional communication and isolation from colleagues does not enhance opportunities for information and conversations around the benefits of union membership to

occur. It may be that the many workers who don't feel part of the institutional culture where they work carry this sense of alienation into thoughts about union membership – that they don't see that the unions are there for them. Many of the respondents are working across different institutions (n32) and eight of the participants worked across FE and HE. There is, it seems, work to be done in and across unions in working out how best to serve the most marginal and invisible of educators in the country. For a start, there may be alliances that could be forged with unions that represent similarly exploited workers in the early childhood education sector.

5.5 Conclusion

Higher education and further education institutions not only benefit hugely from the dedication and efforts of the many staff they have who are employed under the terms and conditions described throughout this report, they fundamentally rely on these workers if they are to deliver the programmes they advertise. Yet education providers repeatedly avoid embracing these benefits or remunerating people as they should. Instead, they relegate these employees to a continual cycle of uncertainty and to significant stressors that have very real impacts on a person's capacity to earn a decent wage, engage in meaningful professional development, borrow money to pay for their housing and transport, and other essential features of everyday life (Bobek, Pembroke, & Wickham, 2018; Courtois & O'Keefe, 2015; Cush, 2016; Lopes & Dewan, 2015; Nugent, Pembroke, & Taft, 2019; O'Keefe & Courtois, 2019; O'Neill & Fitzsimons, 2020; Pembroke, 2018; UCU, 2016; Whelan, 2021).

Our analysis shows that the ongoing Covid19 pandemic has had a unique and ambiguous effects on the working conditions of non-permanent workers in tertiary education in Ireland, some positive and others negative. Significantly, the impact of Covid19 has also exposed the unequal working conditions already experienced by non-permanent staff prior to the pandemic. The Covid19 pandemic hasn't created the unsatisfactory working conditions, rather, it has both exposed and accentuated existing shortfalls and further proved, if such proof was needed, that short-term actions compound the many problems with precarity.

The Cush report offers a pathway for improved employment for higher education workers and internally, unions continue to push for greater use of university tutor contracts (Cush, 2016).

However, the situation is less clear for those working in further education where trade union membership is underdeveloped. The TUI has a strong record in collective bargaining and with a dedicated focus on FET and are well placed to take on the concerns of these staff.

Furthermore, the evolution of a professional, and high-quality further education with clear pathways into higher education has increasingly accumulated political and policy priority (DES, 2020; DFHERIS and HEA, 2021). There is much to applaud in such policy developments and promises. However, without an unambiguous commitment to the development of a sustainable HE and FE workforce which are at the forefront of researching, developing and delivering programmes and pathways, the evolution of an interconnected, high quality further and higher education will remain as just that – a political promise.

6 Recommendations - what is to be done?

It is clear that work needs to be done to guard against the further deterioration of the rights, conditions and general health of non-permanent workers in, and across, higher and further education. As is clear from this report, a pervading sense of invisibility for these workers doesn't just impact on positive institutional relationships and development, but it also means that many precarious workers are invisible to each other which, in turn, makes collective organisation difficult. Instead, the onus must be on institutions themselves and representative bodies such as unions to create spaces, processes and opportunities for the enhancement of non-permanent working conditions, career opportunities and rights in general. This work to be done needs to happen at a range of levels within and across the institutional spaces of higher and further education.

- Institutions and departments need to create opportunities for meaningful awareness-raising of the work of non-permanent educators.
- Institutions and departments need to examine their communication, evaluation and planning processes and ensure that such processes do not exclude, explicitly or implicitly, non-permanent staff who contribute to their programmes.
- Institutions and departments need to ensure equity in visibility on their internal and public-facing platforms for staff (permanent or non-permanent) who are responsible for contributing to the work of that institution/department.
- Institutions need to make a commitment to allocate resources and supports to teaching and research staff without discrimination on contractual status.
- There needs to be more collaboration and unity across unions to ensure that fragmented community of non-permanent workers can be represented by a coherent and holistic pan-union movement.
- Particular work needs to be done by unions in the FE sector to increase the visibility and the benefit of union membership.
- Non-permanent educators working across institutions and sectors should be supported in building communities of practitioners which would allow for the development of networks for professional and career opportunities as well as creating an authentic space for emotional and occupational support and identity.

More broadly, permanent members of academic and teaching staff must turn the mirror on their own behaviour in perpetuating the prevalence of precarity in both HE and FE contexts. Staff must familiarise themselves with the agreed terms of Cush and ensure that their own practice in engaging non-permanent staff is in line with the report's guidelines.

Moving forward, permanent members of staff who are unionised need to stand up for their colleagues who may not be protected by collective agreement or are non-union and fight for better working conditions for those they teach alongside (Jaffe, 2021, pp. 117-118).

Finally, there is a need for a clear national commitment to the development of sustainable and meaningful resources to ensure that FE and HE can nurture the high-quality workforce that will be required to enact the aspirations of the many admirable and ambitious policy visions of tertiary education in Ireland.

Bibliography

- Allen, K., & O'Boyle, B. (2013). *Austerity Ireland: The Failure of Irish Capitalism*. New York: Pluto Press.
- Bobek, A., Pembroke, S., & Wickham, J. (2018). *Living with Uncertainty: Social Implications of Precarious Work*. Dublin: TASC.
- Courtois, A., & O'Keefe, T. (2015). Precarity in the ivory cage: Neoliberalism and casualisation of work in the Irish higher. *Journal for Critical Education Policy Studies*, 13(1).
- Cush, M. (2016). *Report to the Minister for Education and Skills of the Chairperson of the expert group on Fixed-term and Part-time employment in Lecturing in Third Level Education in Ireland*. Department of Education and Skills. Retrieved July 09, 2021, from <https://www.tui.ie/fileupload/Cush%20Report.pdf>
- DES. (2020). *Further Education and Training (FET) Progression to Higher Education (HE): Transitions Reform Working Group Paper*. Dublin: Department of Education and Skills.
- DFHERIS and HEA. (2021). *National Access Plan 2022-26: Consultation Paper*. Dublin: Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (DFHERIS) and the Higher Education Authority (HEA).
- EC. (2018). *Ethics in Social Science and Humanities*. Brussels: European Commission.
- Finnegan, F., Valadas, S., O'Neill, J., Fragoso, A., & Paulos, L. (2019). The search for security in precarious times: non-traditional graduates' perspectives on higher education and employment. *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, DOI: 10.1080/02601370.2019.1567613.
- Flynn, D. (2019). On being precarious. *The Irish Review*, 51-54.
- Harvey, B. (2012). *Downsizing the Community Sector*. Irish Congress of Trade Unions Community Sector Committee. Retrieved August 4, 2021, from <https://www.ictu.ie/download/pdf/downsizingcommunitysector.pdf>
- ILO. (2019, September 26). *Decent Work*. Retrieved from International Labour Organisation: <https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/decent-work/lang--en/index.htm>

- Jaffe, S. (2021). *Work won't love you back: how devotion to our jobs keeps us exploited, exhausted and alone*. London: Hurst & Company.
- Lopes, A., & Dewan, I. A. (2015). Precarious Pedagogies? The Impact of Casual and Zero-Hour Contracts in Higher Education. *Journal of Feminist Scholarship*, 28-42.
- Loxley, A. (2014). Measures and metrics and academic labour. In A. Loxley, A. Seery, & J. Walsh, *Higher Education in Ireland: Practices, policies and possibilities* (pp. 123–145). Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Madgavkar, A., White, O., Mahajan, D., Xavier, A., & Krishnan, M. (2020). COVID-19 and gender equality: Countering the regressive effects. *McKinsey Global Institute*. Retrieved August 3, 2021, from <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/future-of-work/covid-19-and-gender-equality-countering-the-regressive-effects#>
- Matilla-Santander, N., Ahonen, E., Albin, M., Barron, S., Bolibar, M., Bosmans, K., . . . Bodin, T. (2021). COVID-19 and Precarious Employment: Consequences of an evolving crisis. *International Journal of Health Services*, 51(2), 226-228.
- Mercille, J., & Murphy, E. (2015). The Neoliberalization of Irish Higher Education under Austerity. *Critical Sociology*, 1-17. doi:10.1177/0896920515607074
- Murtagh, L. (2015). 1973–2013: From Membership of the EEC to the Establishment of SOLAS and the ETBs. In M. Murray, B. Grummell, & M. Ryan, *Further Education & Training: History, Politics, Practice*. (pp. 20-39). MACE Press.
- Novick, G. (2008). Is there a bias against telephone interviews in qualitative research?'. *Research in Nursing and Health*, 31(4), 391-398.
- Nugent, C., Pembroke, S., & Taft, M. (2019). *Precarious work in the Republic of Ireland*. Dublin: Research for New Economic Policies. Retrieved July 13, 2021, from https://www.nerinstitute.net/sites/default/files/research/2019/precarius_work_in_the_republic_of_ireland_july_19_final.pdf
- O'Keefe, T., & Courtois, A. (2019). 'Not one of the family': Gender and precarious work in the neoliberal university. *Gender Work Organisation*, 26, 463-479.

- O'Neill, J., & Fitzsimons, C. (2020). Precarious Professionalism: graduate outcomes and experiences from an Initial Teacher (Further) Education programme in Ireland. *Research in Post-Compulsory Education, 25*(1).
- Pembroke, S. (2018). *Precarious work, precarious lives*. Dublin: Foundation for European Progressive Studies and TASC.
- Silverman, D. (2011). *Interpreting Qualitative Data (4th Edition)*. London: Sage.
- Standing, G. (2011). *The precariat: the new dangerous class*. London: Bloomsbury Academic.
- Tashakkori, A., & Teddie, C. (2010). *Sage handbook of mixed methods in social and behavioral research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE. CA: Thousand Oaks, SAGE.
- UCU. (2016). *Precarious work in higher education: a snapshot of insecure contracts and institutional attitudes*. London: University and College Union.
- UN. (2015). *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*. New York: United Nations General Assembly.
- Whelan, J. (2021). Tales of precarity: A reflexive essay on experiencing the Covid pandemic as a social work educator on a precarious contract. *Qualitative Social Work, 20*(1-2), 579-586.

Appendix 1 Survey to participants

Thank you for taking the time to click on this link. We are two Maynooth University-based academics and researchers. Camilla is employed full-time as an academic. Before successfully interviewing for this post, she worked precariously for Maynooth for 5 years. Jerry also works at Maynooth University and has been working on a series of non-permanent contracts in further and higher education since returning to Ireland ten years ago.

We have decided to do some research on how Covid19 has impacted adult educators working on a non-permanent basis in tertiary education. By 'tertiary education' we mean outside of a school setting: for example, in a university, Institute of Technology, Further Education college, Community Education provider, Prison Service, Apprenticeship Programme etc.

We want to find out about changes in your working conditions that have happened since March 2020. We are interested in how these changes have affected your life both in the immediate sense (loss of income etc.) but also in terms of your professional identity and your sense of any impact on future job prospects.

The research takes the form of this anonymous questionnaire. There are some quantitative questions about the type of organisation you work in, your contract status, typical hours and so on. We will also ask about your own qualifications and whether or not you are a member of a professional body. We will also ask some open-ended, qualitative questions and encourage you to write as much as you can into these spaces.

Participation shouldn't take any more than 30 minutes, it really depends on how much you have to say. We are using the term 'non-permanent' as there are many different ways to describe precarious employment. You might have other ways of describing your circumstances and would encourage you to use your own language as much as possible when answering this questionnaire.

We hope that the research has a number of outcomes. The findings may help us identify opportunities for participants and stakeholders to enhance working experiences for those amongst us who are working on non-permanent contracts. It might, for example, be worthwhile organising an event to share findings for those experiencing or interested in precarious work in education. The findings will also appear in academic publications and presentations.

Thanks again, we have included our own contact details on the final page in case anything comes up during your participation that you would like to discuss in more detail

Camilla and Jerry

Page 2: This first section asks about your working life before Covid19

2. Which of these statements best describes your situation? Please bear in mind HEIs refer to universities and Institutes of Technology (IoT); FE providers refer to FE colleges, community education providers, prison education, youthreach (typically those providers who use QQI awards).

- I work in one Higher Education Institution (university or IoT)
- I work across more than one Higher Education Institution
- I work in one Further Education College/community educative provider etc.
- I work across more than one FE/community education providers
- I work across both HEI and FE providers
- None of these statements describe my situation so I will describe it myself below

- a. Please use the space below if you would like to say more in response to this question.

3. How long have you been working in a non-permanent basis with these or other education providers?

- 3 years (or part thereof) or less
- 4-6 yrs
- 7-10 yrs
- over 10 years
- over 20 years

- a. Please use the space below if you would like to say more about this question

4. Prior to the Covid19 pandemic, how much did you typically work? (For the purpose of this question, we are interpreting 'part-time' worker "... as an employee whose normal hours of work are less than the normal hours of work of an employee who is a comparable employee" [ref. Citizen's Information]).

- I worked a full-time week throughout the year
- I worked a full-time week but term time only
- I worked a part-time week throughout the calendar year
- I worked a part-time week term time only

- a. Please use the space below if you would like to say more about this question

Page 3: These questions ask specifically about changes to your circumstances since closures were announced as a result of the Covid19 pandemic.

5. Please describe, in as much detail as possible, how your working conditions have changed (for better or worse) since the Covid19 pandemic.



6. Please describe, in as much detail as possible, what you think should have happened that didn't happen since Covid19 in terms of your own working conditions, relationships and arrangements.



7. What, if anything, has your employer(s) done well?



8. What, if anything, has your employer(s) done badly?



9. Which of the following factors have impacted your capacity to carry out your occupational duties (tick as many as apply to your situation).

- I have been unwell
- Someone in my family has been unwell
- I have had additional care responsibilities
- I have no dedicated workspace at home
- I have no suitable computer
- I have to share a computer
- I have poor internet access
- I have found it difficult to concentrate and be productive in the context of Covid19
- I had very little contact with other employees
- I no longer have physical access to my workplace(s)
- My workload has increased
- something else you haven't listed

10. Since the Covid19 pandemic, how much did you typically work? (For the purpose of this question, we are interpreting 'part-time' worker "... as an employee whose normal hours of work are less than the normal hours of work of an employee who is a comparable employee" [ref: Citizen's Information]).

- I am currently working a full-time week throughout the year
- I am currently working a full-time week but term time only
- I am currently working a part-time week throughout the calendar year
- I am currently working a part-time week term time only

- a. Please use the space below if you would like to say more about this question

- 11.** Since March 2020 there has been a reduction in my takehome pay that would not have happened if it wasn't for Covid19

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

- a.** Please use the space below to explain your answer

- b.** Please use the space below if you would like to say more about this question

- 12.** Since the Covid19 pandemic began, I have been kept up to date with changes at my workplace(s) through regular communications from my employers

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Not sure if I agree or disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

The following are more general questions about your working life and background

13. What is your highest level of qualification?

- I hold a doctorate/Phd
- I hold a Masters
- I hold a post-graduate Diploma
- I hold a degree
- I hold a diploma
- I hold a certificate
- I don't have any recognisable qualifications

14. What subject/topics do you teach and/or provide supervision?

15. If you have completed a recognised teacher training qualification in any jurisdiction, please tell us what country

16. What (if any) professional standards body are you a member of?

- I am a member of the Teaching Council of Ireland
- I am not a member of any professional body
- I am a member of another professional body which I will detail below

17. Which, if any, of these statements describes your situation. Please tick as many as apply to you.

- I am only paid for the hours I teach. If my class doesn't run, I don't get paid
- I am paid for the hours I teach and this is guaranteed even if the class is cancelled
- I have a written contract of employment with a fixed end date
- I have a written contract of employment with no end date
- I have no current written contract
- I have more than one contract from more than one employer

18. Are you a member of a Trade Union?

- No
- Yes, IFUT
- Yes, TUI
- Yes, ASTI
- Yes, SIPTU
- Yes, another union not named above

a. If you answered another union please name it here

19. How would you describe your relationship with the Human Resource Department (or its equivalent) in the organisation where you do most of your work.

20. What else would you like to say that we haven't thought to ask about?

21. Last question....for the purposes of us writing this up, which pronoun do you prefer?

- She
- He
- They
- I prefer something else

a. If you answered something else, please write this below.

< Previous

Finish ✓

Final page

Please feel free to contact either of us at

camilla.fitzsimons@mu.ie or jerry.oneill@mu.ie if you want to talk to us about the research. These conversations will not be part of the research.

If during your participation in this study you feel the information and guidelines that you were given have been neglected or disregarded in any way, or if you are unhappy about the process, please contact the Secretary of the Maynooth University Ethics Committee at research.ethics@mu.ie or +353 (0)1 708 6019. Please be assured that your concerns will be dealt with in a sensitive manner.

For your information the Data Controller for this research project is Maynooth University, Maynooth, Co. Kildare. Maynooth University Data Protection officer is Ann McKeon in Humanity house, room 17, who can be contacted at ann.mckeeon@mu.ie. Maynooth University Data Privacy policies can be found at <https://www.maynoothuniversity.ie/data-protection>.

Thank you so much for your participation