

Improving Careers in Philosophy

Some information and recommendations for Heads of Department

Helen Beebee, Director, British Philosophical Association, on behalf of the Executive Committee

1. Non-permanent staff and adverse working conditions

Staff employed on non-permanent contracts encounter a range of problems that are not generally faced by staff on permanent contracts. Setting aside problems that individual departments tend not to have any control over (such as pension and relocation expenses entitlement and the general instability that results from constantly searching for the next job), these include:

- Lack of automatic involvement with standard induction, mentoring and professional development processes, such as those typically required for probationary staff and those that go along with RAE/REF preparation.
- Lack of entitlement to the reduced teaching load that new permanent staff are often given.
- Temporary teaching staff (TFs, temporary lecturers and hourly-paid staff) are typically used to fill the gaps that are left after permanent staff teaching and administrative responsibilities have been allocated. This typically results in a much higher, but often invisible, teaching load: such staff are more likely to be teaching outside their area of expertise and/or teaching a greater range of courses, and less likely to be able to reuse the same material from one year to the next as they move from job to job. A similar point applies with respect to administrative responsibilities.
- It is now commonplace for short-term replacements for academic staff (e.g. on maternity leave or externally-funded research leave) to be appointed as Teaching Fellows, which come with a much higher teaching load than a lectureship.
- Shorter-term contracts (e.g. 6 or 9 months) and fractional contracts are increasingly being used as a way to both cut costs and avoid possible legal obligations. Many temporary staff thus have to move from job to job during the academic year, and/or travel between fractional appointments at different universities, and/or take on paid non-academic work out of term-time. These all have an adverse effect on research productivity.
- Lack of personal office space. This can result not only in using the time between classes unproductively, but also in a diminished sense of belonging and lack of visibility within the department.
- Non-permanent staff are often not entitled to research and conference allowances, thus making them less professionally visible and giving them fewer opportunities to present and get informal feedback on their research.

2. Legal drivers for worse contracts

There are two relevant pieces of legislation (NB this is not formal legal advice!):

(a) Staff who have been employed on fixed-term contracts for at least four years, and have had their contract renewed at least once, are entitled to an open-ended contract. ('Open-ended' is different to 'permanent'. E.g. if the job has been tied to specific external research funding and the funding runs out, staff on an open-ended contract can still be made redundant.)

(b) Staff who have been employed for 12 months or more on one or more fixed-term contracts cannot be made redundant if the work they have been doing is not, in fact, redundant. For example, (i) you can't employ a succession of staff on 12-month contracts for effectively the same job; and (ii) if you have, say, a one-year temporary lecturer replacing a member of staff on leave, and that member of staff then leaves the university, the default assumption is that the replacement lecturer is then entitled to fill the resulting permanent vacancy (assuming it has broadly the same duties and teaching/research specialisms as the temporary post).

(a) is more relevant to science researchers funded by a succession of research grants. In the arts and humanities, however, (b) has been a major driver for shorter-term contracts (so that the 12-month requirement isn't met) and the appointment of teaching fellows rather than temporary lecturers (since a permanent lecturer's job description automatically contains the research element that is missing from a TF's job description, thus resulting in no default entitlement to the permanent position).

3. Institutional drivers for poor working conditions

It is important to be aware of institutional policies and practices that are likely to undermine the future employability of non-permanent staff. Such policies and practices are often not set in stone and can be influenced by heads of department if they make a fuss.

A good example is Roberts funding (now being phased out). This funding was intended for research students and ECRs, but many institutions restricted access to PhD students, while others devolved decisions on use of the funds to faculty level, with the result in some cases that science faculties were using some of the money to support ECRs while arts and humanities faculties were not.

Another example is pressure from HR to appoint teaching fellows rather than temporary lecturers, on the grounds that the university will not benefit from any research conducted by the temporary post-holder. In such cases, it may sometimes be possible to talk them round, e.g. by noting the possibility that the post-holder may well be a strong candidate for a future permanent position if given sufficient time for research or by pointing out that their outputs may be submissible to the REF (again, if given sufficient time to produce outputs).

4. Some consequences

The major career-threatening consequences of the above are:

- Lack of time to conduct research (for temporary staff not on postdocs).
- Lack of research-related guidance (especially publishing strategies) and support.
- For postdoctoral staff, a lack of the kind of targeted, appropriate teaching experience that is often required of serious candidates for permanent positions.

These consequences are bad not only for the individuals concerned, but also for the profession as a whole. Increasingly, applications for permanent positions are falling into two distinct groups: (a) people with a postdoc behind them who may (but don't always) have a reasonable research record but little teaching experience, and (b) people with one or more temporary teaching positions behind them who have a huge amount of teaching and administrative experience but an inadequate publication record.

Ideally, of course, selection panels would like to see applications that deliver on both the teaching and research sides; however, if we are not careful this will become increasingly rare and the profession will suffer as a result. In short, philosophers who show a lot of talent and promise when they complete their PhDs find themselves in working conditions that do not give them the opportunity to convert their promise into a track record that renders them employable in the long term.

5. Some practical recommendations

There are things that every department can do to improve the conditions and thus career prospects of non-permanent staff. Below are some suggestions. We appreciate, of course, that not every Head of Department will be in a position to implement all of them; and also that not every Head of Department will believe that all of the recommendations *should* be implemented where possible. However, we hope that at least some of the recommendations are fairly uncontroversial.

- Bundle external funding together to create a larger temporary position (full-time rather than part-time; two years rather than one year; etc.).
- Appoint temporary lecturers rather than teaching fellows.
- Bear in mind that some weight was placed on the development of ECRs in the RAE, and that temporary lecturers' and teaching fellows' outputs could be submitted to the RAE. These features are likely to be retained in the REF.

- Make research and conference allowances available to non-permanent staff. If faculty- and university-level funding opportunities are available to non-permanent staff, ensure that staff are aware of this.
- Ensure that non-permanent staff have adequate office space and facilities (e.g. access to a computer, printing, telephone, etc.), especially staff on fractional teaching appointments.
- Ensure that adequate induction procedures are in place for non-permanent staff.
- Ensure that adequate mentoring and review arrangements are in place (e.g. by making formal procedures such as staff development reviews available to them; appointing a mentor to advise on publication strategies; etc.).
- Ensure that non-permanent staff – including casual teaching staff – are on your staff email list, so that they find out about conferences, seminars and workshops, professional development opportunities (such as events aimed at junior staff thinking of applying for research funding), etc.
- Ensure that non-permanent staff (again, including casual teaching staff) are treated as bona fide members of the department, e.g. by ensuring that they are invited to participate in departmental activities such as research seminars, reading groups, and staff meetings.
- Don't make temporary teaching staff the departmental dogsbodies (e.g. picking up teaching and administrative roles that nobody else want to do). Consider their existing skills and past experience when assigning teaching and administration, and consider asking permanent staff to switch roles or teaching duties if this will significantly benefit the temporary member of staff.
- If you have a workload allocation model, give extra credit for newly-prepared courses, so that the workload of temporary teaching staff teaching courses for the first time is adequately recognised.
- If available, consider appointing temporary staff with no immediate employment once their contract comes to an end to a university honorary position (many universities have 'honorary fellow' positions). This will provide library borrowing rights, access to e-journals, and an institutional affiliation and address.
- Treat non-permanent staff in a similar way to PhD supervisees, in the sense of caring about what happens to them afterwards. E.g. encourage permanent staff to apply for research funding including them as a named postdoc, encourage them to apply for self-standing postdocs (Leverhulme, BA), alerting them to employment opportunities elsewhere that they would be suitable for, etc.

6. For further information ...

This document draws heavily on Dawn Philips' report, 'Improving careers: philosophers in non-permanent employment in the UK', written for the BPA Executive Committee.

Dawn's original report is available from the 'Policies' section of the BPA website, together with links to other relevant documentation:

- **Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers** (to which Universities UK is a signatory), www.researchconcordat.ac.uk
- **Annexes to the Concordat.** These include links to relevant legislation, policy and guidance documents, www.researchconcordat.ac.uk/annexes.html
- **Research careers in the UK**, a report for the Government by Nigel Thrift (VC, Warwick), webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/+http://www.dius.gov.uk/higher_education/shape_and_structure/he_debate/research_careers.aspx

7. Feedback

We welcome feedback from HoDs and temporary staff themselves; we would be particularly grateful for any reports concerning any changes that have been made as a result of this document and whether they have had positive (or negative) effects. Please email any feedback to admin@bpa.ac.uk.