

The Crisis of Academic Casualisation at LSE

LSE UCU Report 2023

2023 LSE UCU Report

This report was co-authored by members of LSE UCU. For media inquiries or to discuss further, please contact LSE UCU via email ucu.secretary@lse.ac.uk or twitter [@LSE_UCU](https://twitter.com/LSE_UCU).

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Key findings

There is a crisis of academic casualisation and precarity at the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE). In this report, we analyse two recent datasets to show the scale of this problem, including how the proportion of fixed-term to permanent academic staff has increased over the past decade.

The Big Picture

- The widely respected sector-wide HESA data indicates **that LSE has gone through a process of steep casualisation of its academic workforce** between the academic years 2014-2015 and 2021-2022. This includes a large increase of fixed-term academic contracts coupled with a drop in permanent academic contracts followed by stagnation.
- LSE now appears to be **one of the worst offenders** among comparable universities, with HESA data indicating that around 59% of its academic staff are on fixed-term contracts (an estimate confirmed by analysis of LSE HR internal data).
- According to HESA data, **permanent positions have been cut** in both absolute (-125 positions) and relative terms (-14%) since the academic year 2014-2015. This is in sharp contrast to other comparable universities where the number of permanent positions typically increased over the period. LSE internal HR data, only available for 2016-2017 onwards, finds a very small increase in permanent positions in the later part of the period (+15 positions), which is in part driven by the increase in teaching-only permanent positions. This small increase is not altogether inconsistent with HESA analyses, as the HESA data goes back further in time, and a large part of the cuts in permanent academic staff appear to have taken place between 2014-2015 and 2016-2017 (before the start of the LSE HR data).
- Meanwhile, student numbers have increased substantially (+22%) over the period, leading to **a dramatically worsening student-to-permanent staff ratio**. As of 2021-2022, HESA data suggests that LSE now has the worst student-to-permanent staff ratio among comparable universities, at over 17 students per permanent members of staff.

- The 2023 LSE Postdoc and Fellows Survey suggests that **around half of all LSE fixed-term academic staff are on very short contracts** (1 year or less).
- These very short contracts are equally present among LSE-funded positions and externally-funded positions, so **LSE has the power to immediately address and resolve the problem** of very short contracts among those internally funded positions.
- Internally funded **fixed-term academic positions are associated with a heavy teaching, marking, and administrative load**, despite being advertised as 'developmental'. Half of LSE Fellows state they spend upward of 70% of their working time on teaching, marking, and administration, with 40% reporting that they do over 100 teaching hours per year, which is generally the contracted maximum.
- Unsurprisingly then, **most Fellows at LSE feel they do not have sufficient time for research**. This is particularly concerning for the stated 'career development' purpose of these postdoctoral positions, as research and publications are widely understood to have a much greater impact on academic career prospects than the expansion of teaching portfolios which, for most Fellows, are already very solid, involving several years of teaching experience.
- **Mental health issues and constant overwork are endemic** among this population of fixed-term academic staff. In particular, **82% of postdocs and Fellows reported experiencing regular or constant anxiety** about their professional future.
- **Fellows and postdocs at LSE are acutely aware that the LSE will not hire them on a permanent basis**. In fact, 92% are confident that they will not get a permanent academic position at LSE following the end of their current fixed-term contract.

From the combined macro and micro-analysis, a pattern emerges where **LSE appears to have strongly curtailed permanent academic recruitment overall, especially for permanent positions involving research, while expanding its fixed-term academic workforce**. Furthermore, it appears to increasingly segregate recruitment for permanent academic positions from fixed-term academic positions, with no pathway to permanence for fixed-term academic staff.

After a detailed analysis and discussion, we outline a **series of concrete proposals** that can improve the working conditions of casual and precarious academic staff at LSE:

1. Reverse casualisation
2. Reform budgetary procedures to allow for longer post-doctoral contracts
3. Improve and enforce guidance on teaching limits
4. Develop a norm of open-ended contracts
5. Develop a path to permanence
6. Improve and standardise GTA working conditions

These proposals will be detailed later in the report.

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Introduction

Casualisation and precarity are major issues in the UK economy as a whole and a significant problem in higher education institutions. This report analyses the problem of casualisation (the increasing proportion of staff on fixed-term and hourly contracts) and experiences of precarity at the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE) by looking at contract types and working conditions of academic staff. The report draws on two recent datasets: the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) Staff Data and the 2023 LSE Postdoc and Fellows Survey, which is original data developed jointly by the LSE Fellows Network and the LSE UCU.

The analyses presented here reflect the effort to complete the picture of casualisation and casual academic labour at LSE. Most importantly, they reveal not just the pervasive but also **the sharp increase in use of casualised and precarious fixed-term contracts among academic staff at the LSE since the mid-2010s**, as well as the detrimental impacts of such contracts on the security and well-being of those subjected to them.

The LSE employs staff in a variety of academic and professional services roles. While casualisation and precarity are also an issue in professional services roles, this report focuses on the academic side of the issue, with a particular focus on early-career and fixed-term staff. The reasons behind this decision are threefold:

1. At LSE, precarity and casualisation appear to be less acute among administrative and professional service staff.
2. In their discussions with UCU following the release of results from the [LSE staff Pulse Survey](#), senior management noted that academic staff's assessments of their wellbeing and working conditions are considerably more negative than the School average.
3. The Pulse Survey's participation rate is very low for fixed-term and early-career academic staff. The effort of data collection and analysis which led to this report was therefore also designed to remedy the lack of knowledge surrounding these particular categories of staff.

Academics at LSE are either employed permanently or fixed-term. Whereas Assistant, Associate, and full Professors are employed on secure, permanent contracts, other staff including e.g. Fellows (typically funded by the LSE), post-doctoral researchers (often

funded through external grants), and most guest teachers have an employment end date which is based on funding ending or contract ending. In the micro-level analysis, this report does not focus on hourly-paid teaching staff such as Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs), although they arguably constitute one of the most precarious section of the academic workforce. Excellent micro-level quantitative data and analyses have already been produced by GTAs¹ and we refer interested readers to their report based on the 2022 [GTA survey](#)..² In our analysis and in our proposals as they relate to GTAs, we have built on the GTA report and on further consultation with GTA and PhD representatives.

Data and Methods

This report builds on three different sources of quantitative data: HESA data (2023); LSE internal HR data shared with LSE UCU (2023); and LSE Postdoc and Fellows Survey data (2023).

HESA data (2023)

The Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) produces an annual publication of higher education data, which includes detailed breakdowns of employment conditions of staff at all UK universities. HESA [works directly](#) with universities, ‘collaborating with them to collect and curate one of the world’s leading HE data sources’. Higher Education providers such as LSE have a statutory requirement to supply HESA with the relevant institutional data, on a yearly basis, in line with an extensive set of instructions. The data is then compiled and published by HESA. HESA data is the main and most official source of data on higher education and is referenced extensively in UK government reports as well as reports compiled by Universities UK (UUK), the advocacy organisation of 140 UK universities currently in dispute with the UCU (University and College Union).

In February 2023, HESA released their updated data, which now ranges from the academic year 2014-2015 to the year 2021-2022. This data is entirely public and freely-available: it can be downloaded [directly](#) from the HESA website. In this report, we

¹ GTA representatives have raised major concerns about casualisation and precarity. For example, [the 2021 LSE Student Union GTA Officer Report 'A Roadmap for Postgrad Inclusion in the Union'](#) states “GTAs do not believe LSE as an institution supports them in a professional capacity, often feeling overworked, under-appreciated and underpaid”. Furthermore, there are reports that some departments are reverting to mandatory teaching for PhD students, removing employee status and protections from PhD students, creating a steady non-voluntary and casualised supply of cheap teaching. Longstanding concerns around disparities of practices between departments (including preparation time and pay) remain unaddressed.

² see Brundu-Gonzalez, Jaede, Li, and Twahirwa (2022), *Dedicated and overworked: Graduate Teaching Assistants at the London School of Economics*, LSE ChangeMakers report.

have used the following HESA tables: dt025 table 7 (on employment terms of Higher Education academic staff by higher education providers), dt051 table 1 (on overall student enrollment by higher education providers) and dt051 table 28 (on EU and non-EU international student enrollment by higher education providers).

In order to draw meaningful comparisons and perspectives, for some of the HESA analysis we worked with a subset of comparable universities that stood alongside LSE in the top 10 of the [2022 QS ranking](#). These include: the University of Oxford, the University of Cambridge, Imperial College London, University College London, the University of Edinburgh and the University of Manchester, King's College London, the University of Warwick and the University of Bristol.

LSE internal HR data (2023)

When we formally presented the HESA and survey-based analyses included in this report to members of LSE senior management in early March, they expressed reservations about the accuracy of HESA data on LSE staff, and suggested that there are important mismatches between LSE's internal HR data and the HESA data. Since it is LSE who provides HESA with its data, as per statutory requirement, it was difficult to understand or account for any possible inaccuracy. Nevertheless, we indicated that we would also work with the LSE internal HR data and include it in the present report if it was shared with us in time for its publishing. This was eventually done, and so we are able to include and compare analyses based on HESA data and those based on the data shared directly with LSE UCU by LSE HR.

In the LSE HR data, we classified the following HR staff types as academic workers: Fellows; Policy, GTAs: Guest Teachers; Research; Teaching; Teaching and Research. We excluded support staff, who are not academic workers also by HESA's definition, and also removed a couple of very rare³ and ambiguous positions: Emeritus Teachers; Graduate interns; Extended Education.

To keep in line with the HESA data on higher education academic staff, academic positions on 'atypical' employment terms would have been excluded from the analysis, but there were none in the LSE HR data, so we did not need to exclude any data on that count. Academic positions were classified as permanent if described by LSE HR as "Open-ended/Permanent"; academic positions were classified as 'fixed-term' if they were fixed-term, hourly, or "Open-ended/subject to funding". The classification of this last category (open-ended subject to funding) was a point of concern raised by LSE

³ All these categories excluded because they were judged ambiguous amount to no more than 20 positions per academic year, when all combined. Their combined numbers are basically constant and most of these positions are fixed-term.

senior management in the JNCC discussions with LSE UCU with regards to the HESA data. It is clear to us (and, we believe, to HESA also) that these positions are for all intents and purposes “fixed-term”, insofar as one’s contract is only renewed in the event that they continuously secure (extremely competitive) external grants and funding for their position. We discuss these questions further as well as next steps to work together with LSE on the quantification of casualisation in the last section of this report.

LSE Postdoc and Fellows Survey (2023)

The LSE Postdoc and Fellows Survey is an annual survey of all fixed-term academic staff at LSE conducted by Fellows on a volunteer basis, through the [LSE Fellows Network](#) and in collaboration with the UCU anti-casualisation officers at LSE. Its first iteration was in 2022; in this report we work with the data from the 2023 iteration of the Survey, in which 171 fixed-term academic staff participated, 158 of whom were fixed-term, non-hourly employed (the rest were hourly). The majority of these staff members are employed as LSE Fellows, with the remaining being Teaching Fellows, Research Fellows, Research Officers, externally funded Postdoctoral Fellows (ESRC, Marie Curie, British Academy, or Leverhulme), and a small number of Policy Fellows and Professorial Fellows. Respondents thus included 99 LSE Fellows, which is LSE’s flagship stream of career development postdoctoral positions and whose job descriptions include both teaching and research.

Using publicly available [LSE HR scorecard](#) from December 2022, we can precisely estimate that the participation rate of LSE Fellows was 58%.⁴ 49 of our remaining 73 responses are from Research Fellows and Research Officers. Overall, across all fixed-term Fellows and Postdoctoral researchers positions (non-hourly, not including research officers, GTAs and Guest teachers), we estimate the participation rate to be in the range of 50%. The survey included respondents from all departments except the Department of Finance and the Department of Accounting.⁵ The focus of the LSE Postdoc and Fellows survey is to document the working responsibilities, working conditions and general well-being of this fixed-term, postdoctoral academic workforce.

Analytical Methods

⁴ This response rate is higher than the university’s own staff survey, the 2022 LSE Pulse Survey, which in 2022 yielded a response rate of 55% among both all staff and academic staff (permanent), and much worse still for fixed-term hourly-paid academic staff.

⁵ We do not have an exact figure as LSE does not release breakdown data by employment category apart from positions other than Fellows. Thus, we cannot access data on other categories of fixed-term academic staff at LSE, such as guest lecturers and course tutors, whose working conditions and teaching load are likely worse than those of the categories of fixed-term staff upon whom this survey focused.

While the Postdoc and Fellows Survey gives detailed and rich insight into the working conditions among casualised and precarious staff at LSE, the HESA Staff Data allows us to paint a macro picture of casual academic work at LSE, and to compare the situation at LSE with that of comparable UK institutions. Taken together, the Postdoc and Fellows Survey and HESA Staff Data therefore provide rich, layered and up-to-date data on casualisation and casual working conditions at LSE among academic staff, and put into perspective with other comparable universities.

The analytical methods are entirely descriptive and fully-reproducible; we have made the code for data formatting, analysis and data visualisation of the HESA data publicly available [here](#), for the purpose of transparency and reproducible research. We also want to encourage other workers in other institutions to use this code to run similar analyses and hopefully also gain similar quantitative insights. The LSE HR internal data was shared with LSE UCU only and therefore the data is not freely available, although our code is. In order to protect the anonymity of those who took part in the LSE Postdoc and Fellow Survey, we are sharing neither data nor code for this specific element of the analysis here.

Results

Casualisation at LSE: macro-trends among academic staff

Below, we outline the current situation and recent worsening trends of casualisation and precarity at LSE. *Figure 1* shows the development of the number of fixed-term and permanent academic staff at LSE from 2014 to 2022. According to HESA data, the number of fixed-term academic staff has dramatically *increased* over the period, from 770 to 1080, while the number of permanent academic positions was *cut down*, with 125 permanent positions replaced by fixed-term and casual labour.

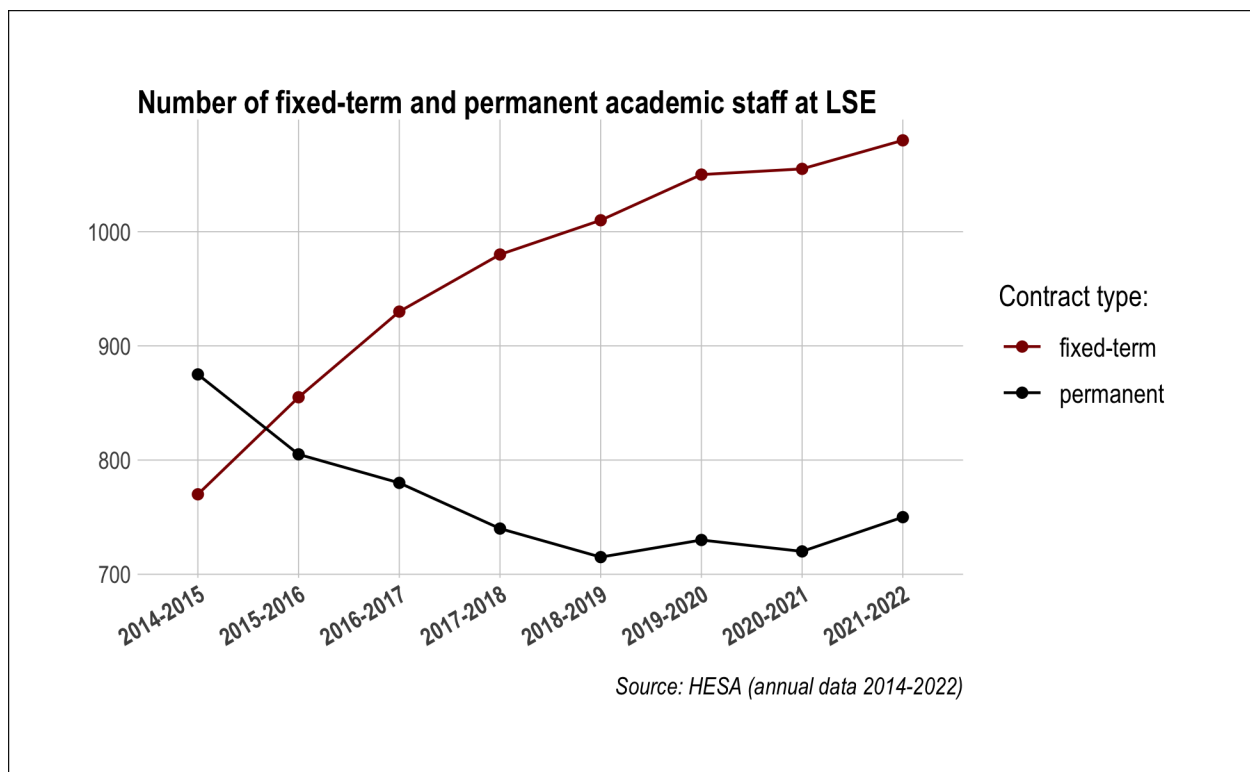
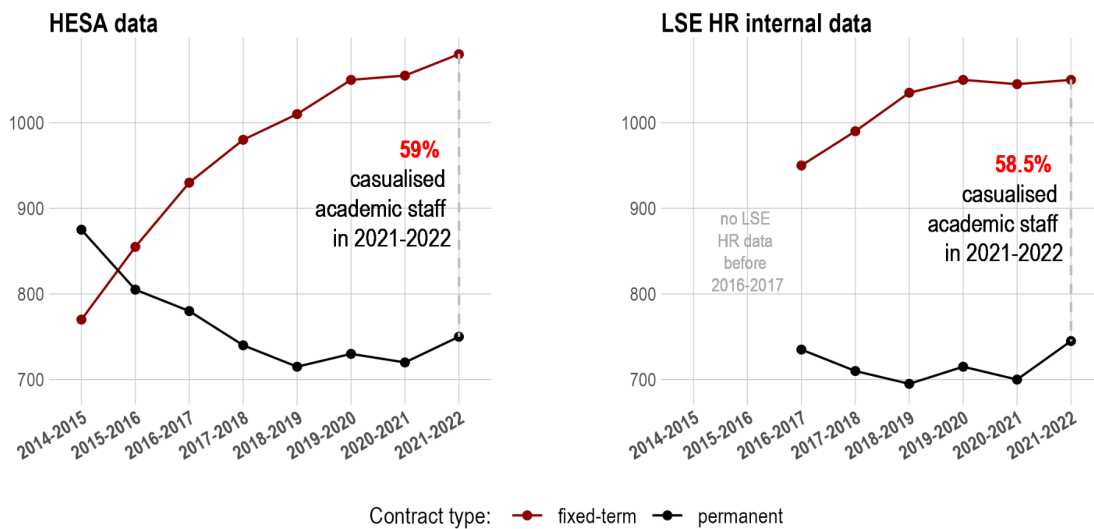


Figure 1: Number of fixed term staff and permanent staff at LSE (HESA 2023)

Overall, the HESA data indicates that LSE's rate of casualised-to-permanent academic staff has risen to 59% (from 47% 7 years prior), making it second-worst among comparable universities. Only Oxford has a higher proportion of casual academic work (66%) although in contrast to LSE, the proportion appears constant rather than on the rise over the period available in the data.

Figure 2 below shows this same trend but based on LSE’s internal HR data.

Numbers of fixed-term and permanent academic staff at LSE according to HESA data and LSE HR internal data)



Sources: HESA 2023 (left plot); LSE HR internal data 2023 (right plot)

Figure 2: number of fixed-term and permanent academic staff at LSE (LSE HR internal data 2023)

The LSE internal HR data seems to reflect a similar trend, although it captures it at a later point, as LSE has not provided data for years prior to 2016-2017. This LSE HR data is more or less a perfect match with the HESA data, and leads to a similar estimate of academic casualisation (58.5% in 2021-2022 according to LSE HR data, vs 59% according to the HESA data). Both data sources suggest that casualisation of academic work is a very serious issue, and the comparative HESA data suggests that it is particularly serious at LSE.

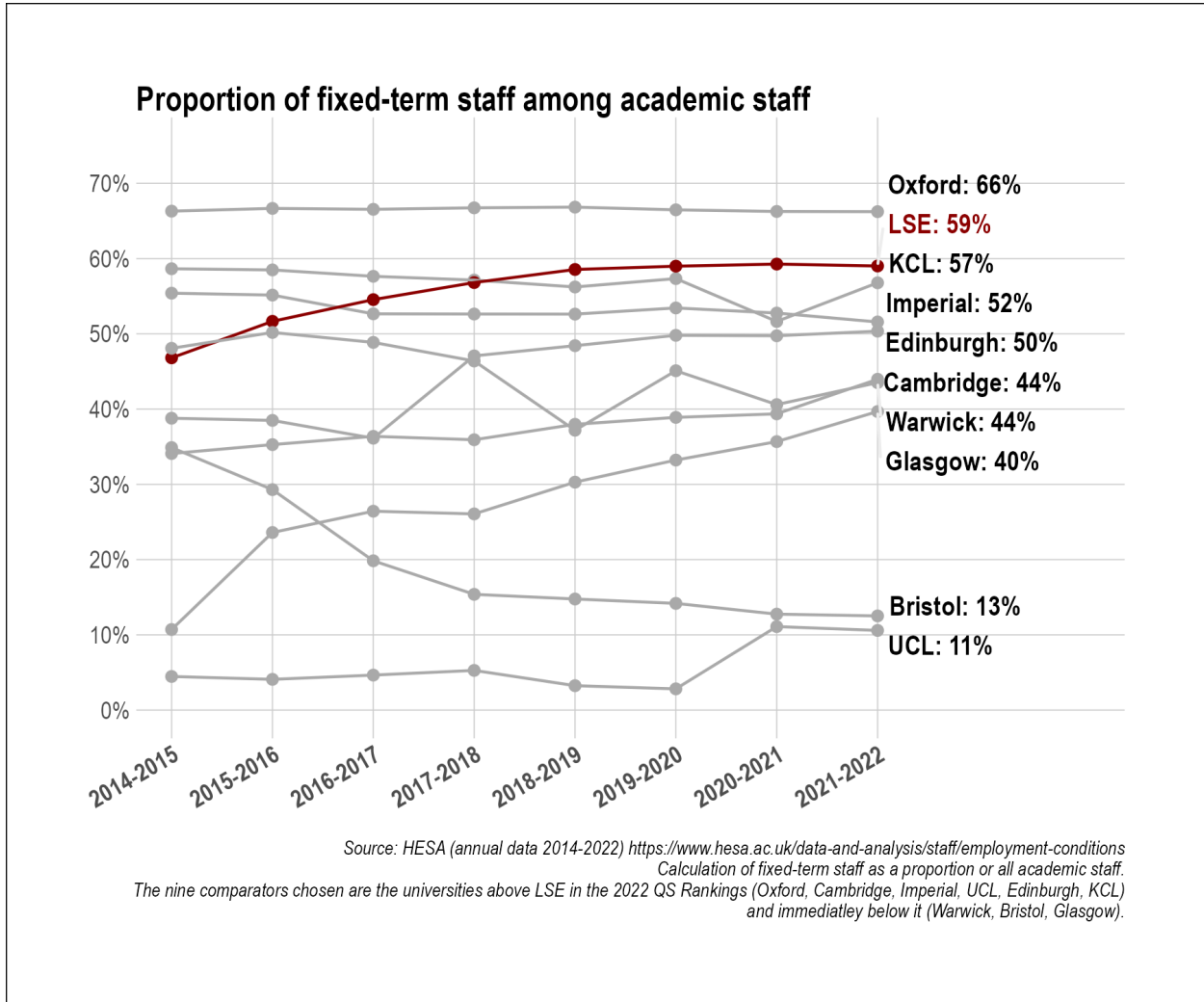


Figure 3: Proportion of fixed-term academic staff as a percentage of all academic staff (i.e. rate of casualisation) since 2014-2015

Evolution in permanent academic staff

The drop in permanent staff number at LSE in the HESA-based analyses (pictured in Figure 1 and again in Figure 4 below) suggests a strong contrast between LSE and developments at comparable institutions, where numbers of permanent academic staff have grown (although not always at the same pace as the number of fixed term staff). As seen in Figure 4, HESA data indicates that the number of permanent academic staff is increasing at all other comparable institutions apart from Cambridge. At LSE, the overall decrease is -14% between 2014-2015 and 2021-2022. Going by the HESA data, LSE has cut down 125 permanent academic positions since 2014-2015. In contrast, UCL has increased their number of permanent academic staff by 36%, Edinburgh by 46%, and Bristol by 67%.

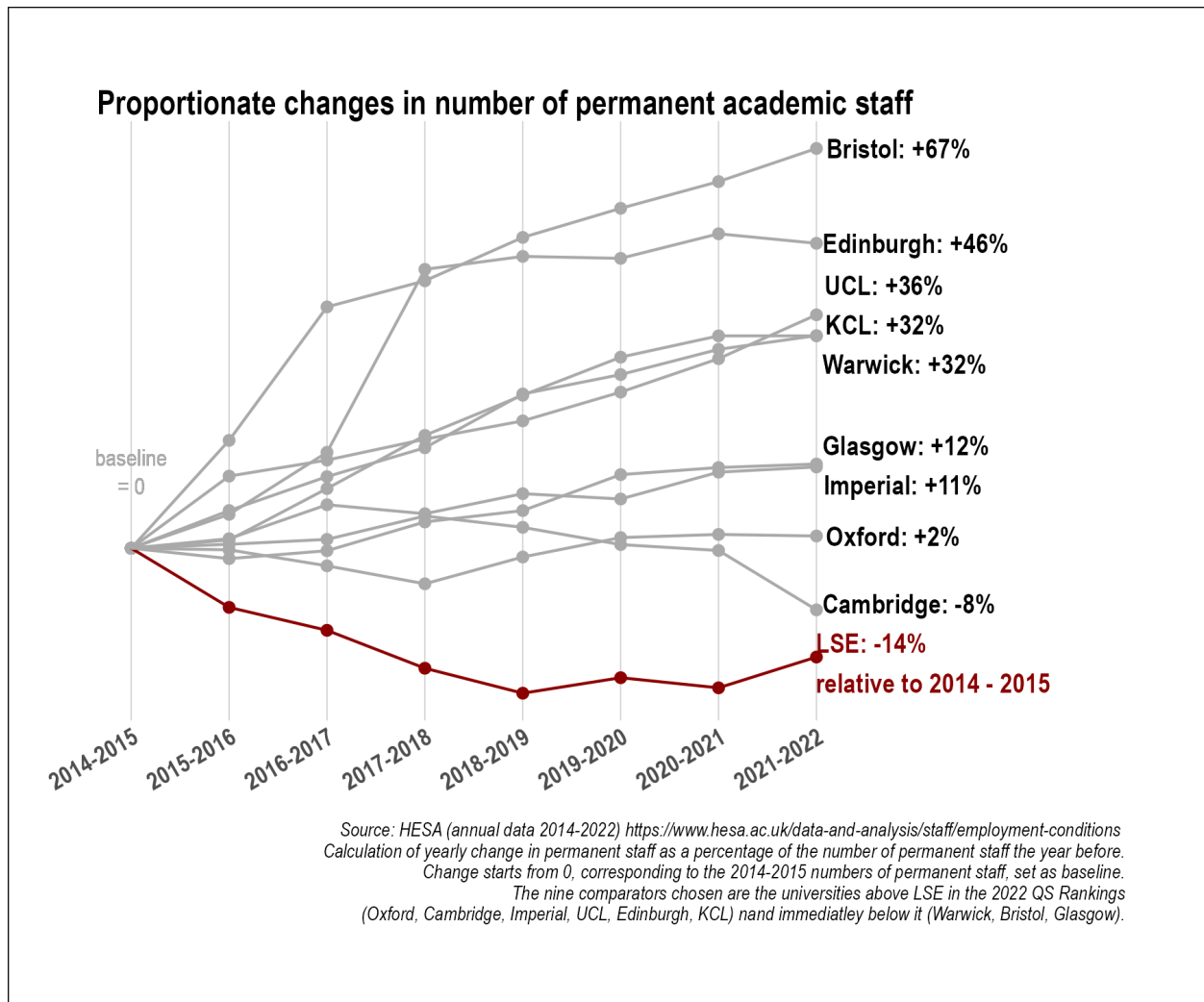


Figure 4: Change in the proportion of the number of permanent academic staff to all academic staff from 2014-15.

The LSE internal HR data, (see Figures 5 and 6 below) suggests a very small increase in permanent staff number (+15 positions overall, as opposed to +80 fixed-term academic positions) since 2016-2017. This does not necessarily constitute a real departure from the HESA analysis, insofar as the LSE HR data starts after a period of two years (between 2014-2015 and 2016-2017) in which a large proportion of the HESA-documented drop in permanent staff numbers is concentrated.

In the HESA analysis, the period corresponding to the LSE HR data (starting in 2016-2017) is almost neutral in terms of permanent staff numbers, with an initial drop compensated by hires in the last year of study (2021-2022). The difference between the HESA data and the LSE HR data is therefore minimal, either a very small decrease or a very small increase. Here again, most of the discrepancy regarding the overall trend could be explained by the fact that the LSE HR data does not provide as complete a picture as the HESA data, simply because the HESA data goes back further in time and therefore captures a longer trend.

The LSE HR data allows us to look more finely into which category of permanent staff are being recruited. Figures 5 and 6 below highlight that **there has been a strong decrease in permanent research-only staff**, with permanent research-only position basically disappearing, while LSE saw small increases in the other categories of permanent academic staff that involve teaching; it is perhaps important to note that while 'classic' academic positions (teaching and research) have seen fluctuations with increases and decreases in number over the period (see Figure 6), **teaching-only permanent positions (education-track faculty and permanent guest teachers) are the only categories of permanent staff that have seen steady growth or stabilisation in numbers over the period**. Nevertheless, these aggregated numbers remain small (+15 permanent positions since 2016-2017) when contrasted with the numbers and the increase in fixed-term staff. They appear especially small when held up against the increasing student numbers at LSE, and the increasing student-to-permanent staff ratio.

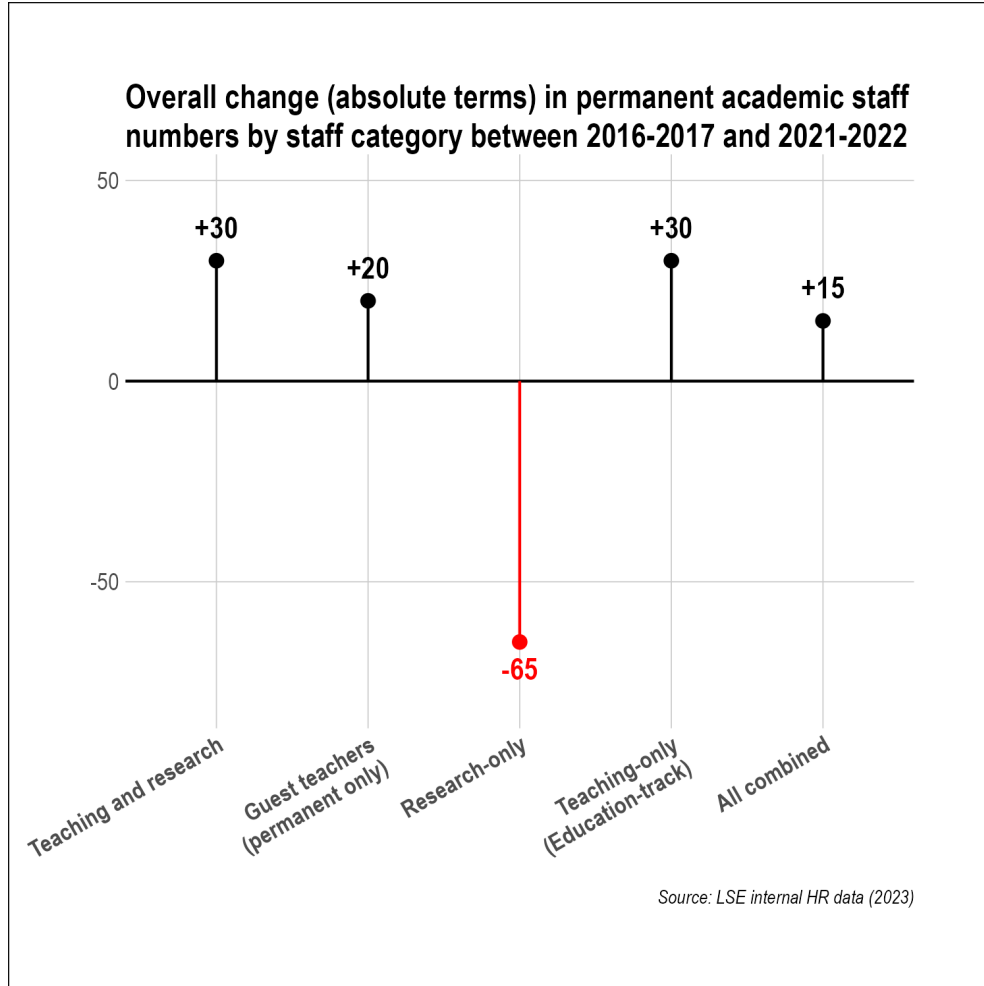


Figure 5: Total change in permanent academic staff numbers by category from 2016-17.

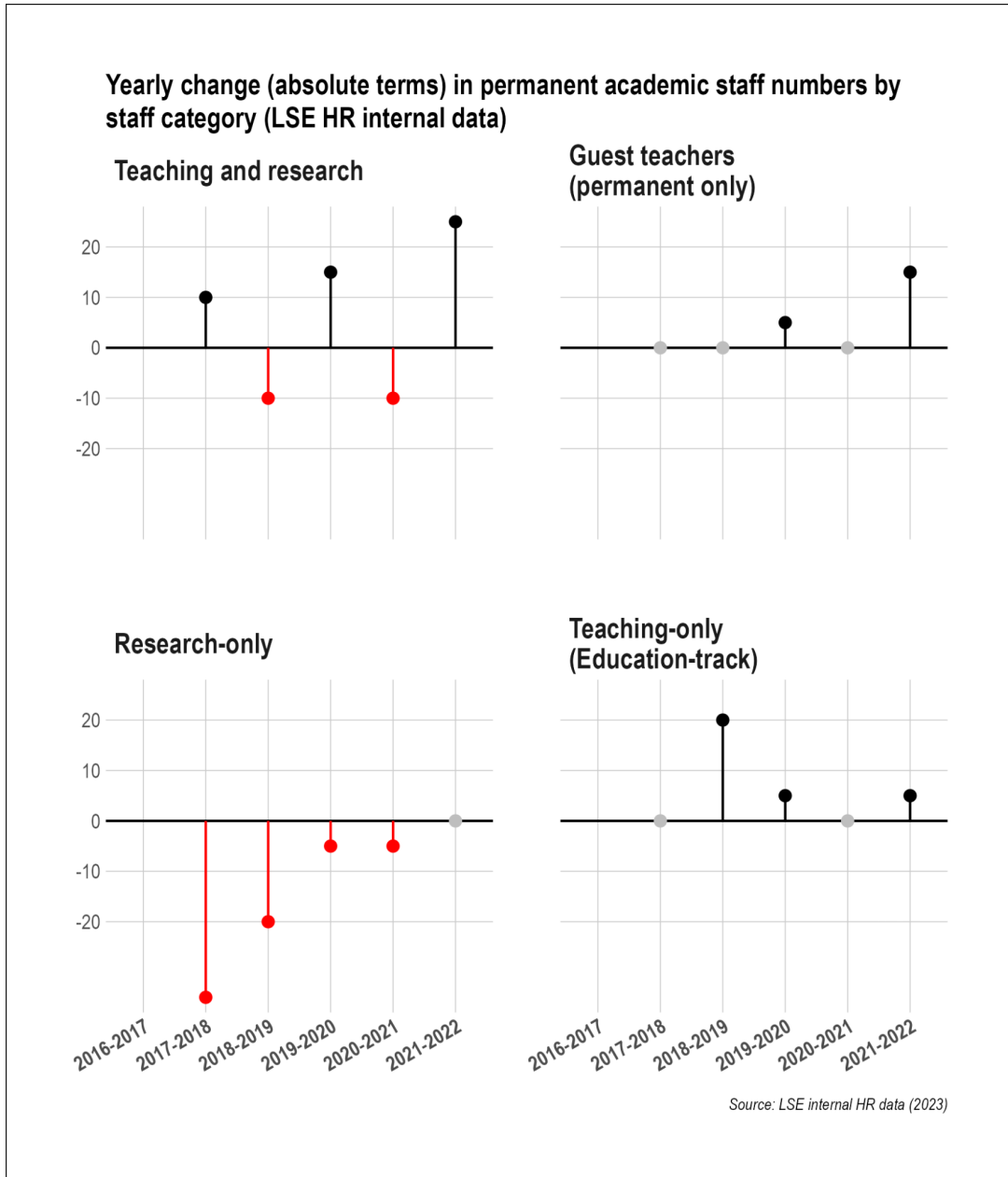


Figure 6: Yearly change in permanent academic staff numbers by category from 2017-18.

Figure 6 above shows the year-on-year change in permanent academic staff numbers between different staff types available in the data.

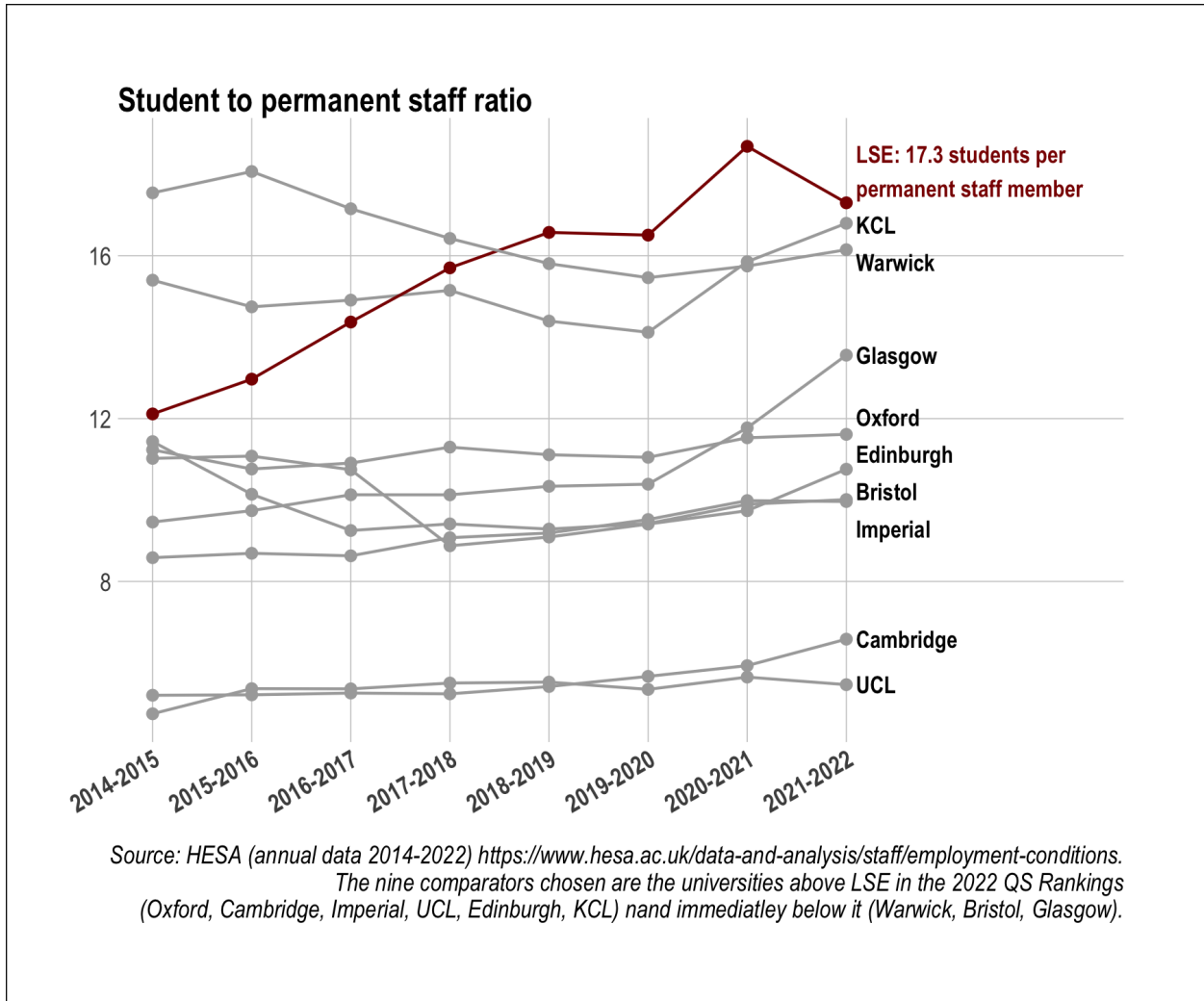


Figure 7: Yearly changes in student to permanent staff ratio from 2014-15

Figure 7 above shows the student-to-permanent staff ratio at LSE and comparable institutions. At 17.3 students to 1 staff member (2021-2022), LSE has for the last 4 years the highest number of students per permanent academic staff member out of the group of 10 comparable institutions.

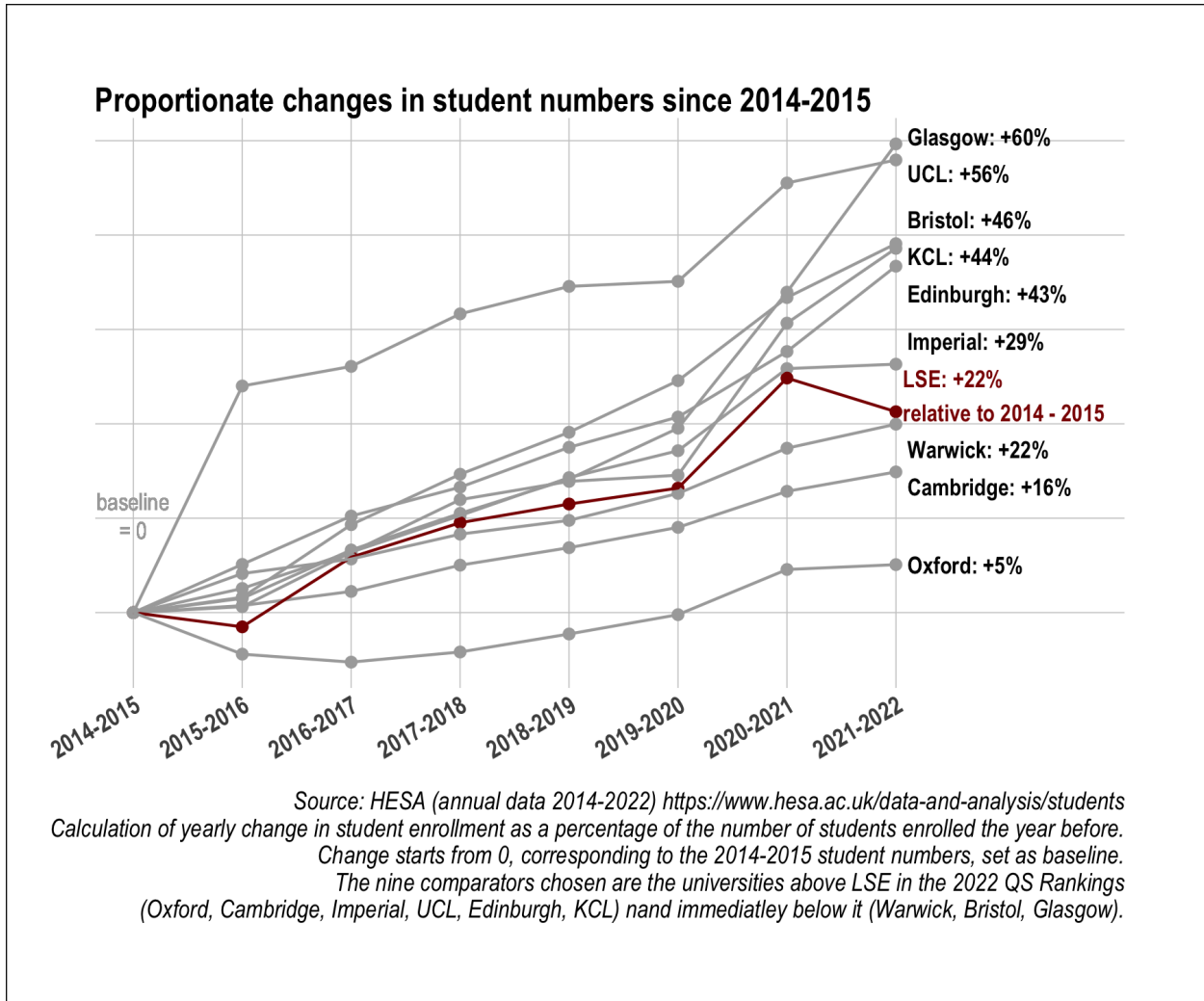


Figure 8: Changes in total number of permanent staff, percentage relative to the previous year

Figure 8 above shows the proportional change in number of students since 2014-15. During this period, LSE has increased the size of its student body by 22% (an extra 3,000 students).

It is clear that in the recent past, the number of students enrolled at LSE has increased in incommensurate measure with the number of permanent academic staff, regardless of which data sources one chooses to focus on. This trend was particularly grievous in 2020-2021, likely due to the simultaneous hiring freeze and over-enrollment of students linked to the COVID-19 pandemic.

We note that both HESA data and LSE HR data suggest a slight relative improvement in 2021-2022. It is important to also note that this is only an improvement in comparison to the year before (2020-2021), and does not compensate for the deterioration over the

period. While we hope that this reflects a shift towards moving away from casualised academic work and towards giving greater job security to academic workers, this hope must remain contained as it hangs entirely on a single year entry. In addition, the proportion of casual-to-permanent academic staff and the student-staff ratio remain at very high and very concerning levels, also relative to other comparable institutions.

It is particularly perplexing why LSE has a higher rate of casualised staff than other comparable institutions as the institution is comparatively insulated from the budgetary pressures linked to tuition fee caps on home student fees. As shown in Figures 10 and 11 in the Appendix, LSE's student body is the most international among its competitors (66% of all students are international), and continuously rising international fees provide the institution with a fast-growing source of income. LSE also has the highest proportion of EU students (15%), a demographic that has moved from the Home to International category after Brexit, thus moving from the £9,250 to the £23,330 fee bracket. This is a contributing factor to how LSE has managed to increase its total tuition fee income from £177.2m in 2015-16 to 265.8m in 2021-22. **We call on LSE to issue urgent reassurances and make concrete commitments to turning the tide on these problems (see proposals section).**

Experiences of casual academic work at LSE: Results from LSE Postdoc and Fellows Survey (2023)

We now shift the analytical lens to the micro-level and turn to the results of the LSE Postdoc and Fellows Survey to provide insights into the experiences and working conditions of fixed-term academic staff at LSE.

Most survey participants (65%) are funded internally by LSE, as LSE Fellows or Teaching Fellows. **45% of participants have been hired on one-year contracts or shorter** (the percentage of short contracts is the same for externally or internally funded postdoctoral positions). Thus it is clear that short-term academic contracts are not only and perhaps not mainly driven by externally-funded research grants, but also chosen and produced by LSE directly.

LSE Fellows and Teaching Fellows are often hired to replace permanent staff on leave or suddenly departed (41%). Teaching Fellows as well as LSE Fellows are given heavy teaching and marking loads. **40% of full-time LSE Fellows teach more than 101 hours**, and 16% teach more than 125 hours per academic year (not including office hours). **This leaves little room for research.** Half of LSE Fellows (48%) report that they spent upward of 70% of their working time on teaching and administrative duties, leaving at most 30% for research.⁶ Accordingly, two out of three LSE Fellows estimate that their current teaching and administrative load has left them too little time to carry out their research.

Anxiety about the future is a widespread problem experienced by casualised academic staff at LSE. **Figure 9 below shows that 82% of respondents experience regular or constant anxiety about their professional future.** 48% of respondents stated that they are 'almost always' anxious about their professional future. There is a difference of 8 percentage points between those on short contracts (52% constant anxiety) and those on contracts longer than 1 year in the first instance (44% constant anxiety).

Mental health issues are endemic among respondents, as is overwork (working regularly in the evenings, at the weekend, on vacation). Thus, while these positions are considered some of the better positions in the sector, staff report significant problems around their well-being.

⁶ The other half estimate that their time is more evenly split (around 40% or 50% time for research. Almost none of the respondents estimate that they have more time for research than for teaching).

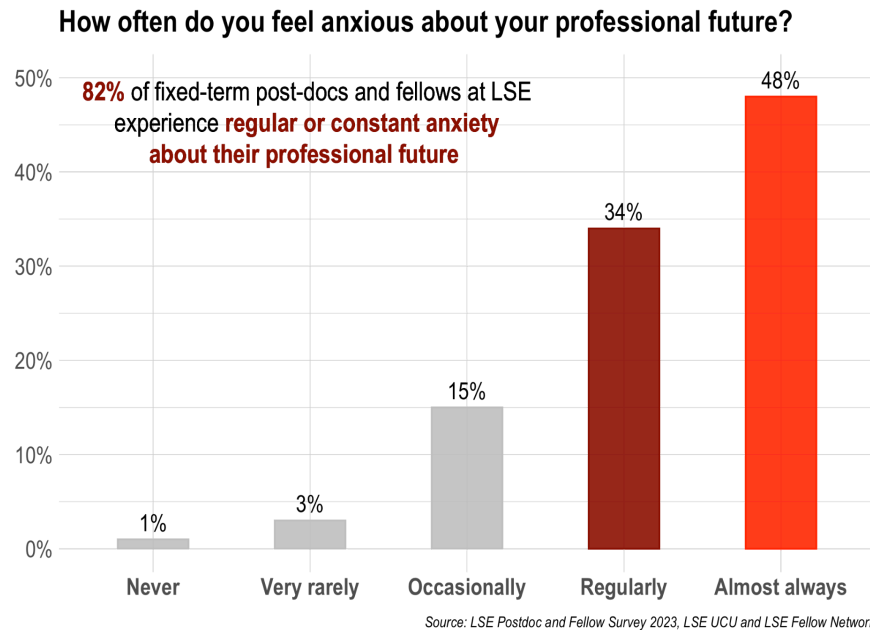


Figure 9: Fellows and postdocs' anxiety about the future

The overwhelming majority of survey respondents (**92%**) are affirmative that they will **not get a permanent position at LSE**: 69% think it 'very unlikely' and a further 23% deem it 'unlikely'. They assess their chances to be relatively better in the broader academic market, although these odds are by no means good. In detail; 37% think it unlikely or very unlikely; 35% think it's 50-50 whether they will get an academic position anywhere; only 26% (one in four) think it likely.

Working conditions are uneven across departments. **Several departments exclusively offer short contracts of one year or less**: Gender Studies, International Development and Psychological & Behavioural Science. **Many other departments offer such short contracts as their default length** (if not the only one): Geography & Environment, Health Policy, Management, Mathematics, Social Policy, Philosophy, Logic & Scientific Method, the European Institute, and the School of Public Policy.

In terms of teaching load, **many departments consistently give LSE Fellows over 100 hours of teaching per year**. This includes Anthropology, Economic History, International Development, International History, International Relations, Philosophy, Logic and Scientific Method and the European Institute. LSE100 stands out as a particularly teaching-heavy department for LSE Fellows, with no Fellow under 101 teaching hours.

Although we know that hourly-paid guest lecturers are very common in some departments (e.g. International History), we could not document their working conditions due to the difficulty of accessing these staff members through available channels of communication. The analyses presented here reflect the working conditions of the fixed-term academic staff in the best positions at LSE. They ought therefore to be considered positively skewed in terms of (relative) job security, teaching load, and possibly mental health. **It is likely that the overall picture of fixed-term academic work at LSE is worse than the one depicted here.**

LSE's response

In order to give LSE a fair opportunity to respond to our findings, in early March 2023 we presented these findings through the formal channels of the LSE management structure at the Joint Negotiating and Consultative Committee (JNCC), the main negotiating body between the LSE UCU and the senior management of the LSE. Alongside the empirical findings, we included a set of proposals as a starting point for discussion on addressing the casualisation of academic work at LSE. These proposals are listed below. LSE's response focused on their claim that the HESA data misrepresents LSE's situation, both in absolute terms (the estimate of casualisation at LSE) and in relative terms (in comparison to other universities).

This was unexpected as the HESA data is provided by LSE, with HESA and LSE working together to collate the public output. Nevertheless, we were interested in working with the LSE HR data and communicated with LSE that in the event that they would share this data with us in time for us to include it in our report, we would run analyses and present them alongside the HESA-based analyses. LSE agreed to share this data with us, in the appropriate format, by Friday 24th March, and it was eventually shared with us on Tuesday 28th March. This internal HR data does not show any deviation from the HESA-based analyses. We offer two possible paths of explanations as to why LSE senior management perceived a mismatch with the trends identified in the analyses of the HESA data:

1. The HESA data covers a longer period and the trend we identified were tallied against the 2014-2015 academic year, whereas LSE HR data (as shared with us) does not document academic years prior to 2016-2017.
2. Most of LSE senior managements' analyses of casualisation as they were discussed with us focused on aggregates of all workers at LSE - including non-academic workers (e.g. support staff, who form a large part of the workforce of LSE departments and institutes, and are more often employed on permanent contracts than academic workers).

We remain interested in working with LSE so as to produce as exact a picture of casualisation at LSE as possible, and we are available to help LSE identify where mismatches, misclassifications or misreporting to HESA may have occurred.

At the JNCC meeting with senior management, there was highly limited engagement with the substance of our findings or consideration of our proposals (detailed below). We note that senior management stated that it was working with the financial services to try to find a solution to the financial constraints which prevent departments from giving contracts no shorter than 2 years in the first instance to LSE Fellows. We also note that they stated a desire to improve GTA pay and paid preparation time, although they expressed reservations as to whether it would be possible to harmonise across departments and align pay and paid hours with the departments with the best practices. When asked what their ambition is regarding the casualisation of academic work, senior management expressed their wish that LSE be 'a good employer' and 'no worse than comparable institutions' when it comes to casualisation.

We take note of this statement of intent and we hope that LSE and LSE UCU can work together constructively to recognise the current rate of casualisation, to agree on shared objectives to give greater job security to the academic workforce, and to tackle the problem of casualisation overall. We must also note the non-committal approach of LSE so far despite our cooperative appeal to formal channels. **We are releasing this report publicly in order to let concerned members of the LSE community as well as the wider public know about what is the scale and depth of the problems.** We urge LSE senior management to work with us and to rapidly address this crisis.

Proposals

Our analysis portrays the wide-ranging problems around casualisation and precarity at LSE. In order to address these problems, we suggest a range of proposals below that could improve the situation:

1. Reverse casualisation

The most pressing need is for a commitment to reversing the increasing trend of casualisation, i.e. hiring more permanent than fixed-term academic staff. Only Oxford has a higher proportion of fixed-term academic staff than LSE, as shown in *Figure 2*. The average for the institutions we analysed is around 40%. We therefore propose that LSE should in the first instance move to this comparable average and eventually become sector-leading. Job security and ability to plan ahead is crucial for early-career academics and reversing casualisation is one of the most straightforward ways of improving these.

It is important that any reduction in casualisation among full-time staff is not simply shifted onto hourly-paid staff such as GTAs or guest teachers. All else equal, overall casualisation should drop, not be moved elsewhere within the institution.

2. Reform budgetary procedures to allow for longer post-doctoral contracts

A second requirement that will improve the situation is for LSE to issue a commitment to reforming budgetary procedures and constraints around recruitment. A particular problem is that departmental funding structures and accounting procedures prevent departments from hiring early-career staff on longer let alone permanent contracts.

We propose that normal budgetary constraints be loosened and new accounting mechanisms in order to provide such departments with the adequate tools to offer contracts no shorter than 2 years in the first instance, but ultimately move toward permanent contracts.

3. Improve and enforce guidance on teaching limits

A third requirement is for LSE to issue a commitment to the development and enforcement of a universal teaching limit of 100 hours per academic year for LSE Fellows. Currently, as evidenced in the data analysis above, Fellows in many departments teach over 100 hours per academic year.

We understand the need for flexibility between departments and the variation in departmental norms around teaching. We also appreciate that teaching and teaching-related activities take many different forms in different departments and

disciplines, for which reason we see the 100 hour limit as an upper ceiling on teaching-only activities, to be complemented by wider limits on teaching-related activities such as supervision, office hours, and other student-facing activities. However, in the first instance, we consider a 100 hours teaching limit to be appropriate to ensure ability to pursue research given the career development nature of the role. Further discussions are needed on measuring and limiting teaching-related tasks.

4. Develop a norm of open-ended contracts

A fourth requirement is for LSE to issue a commitment to making open-ended permanent contracts the norm for academic staff, whether teaching or research focused, apart from exceptional circumstances (e.g. GTAs when needing teaching experience or external professionals doing guest lecturing). For example, where departments can evidence the ongoing, consistent need for additional academic staff, this should be in the form of permanent contracts rather than successive fixed-term contracts.

In order to break the cycle of early-career academics rotating between casualised contracts, often having to uproot their lives while chasing their next payslip, we need LSE to change its institutional norms around what is appropriate and fair work.

This is particularly pertinent for migrant staff on visas, who are in an extremely precarious position if they face difficulties at work, e.g. a breakdown in relationship with a line manager, a change in career plans or family circumstances, or other major disruptions to their lives. The careful balancing act of aligning fixed-term employment contracts is incompatible with the hostile environment and threat of deportation.

Moreover, such casualised contracts mean that Fellows spend an inordinate amount of time on job and grant applications rather than research and teaching. The lack of adequate time for research is a stumbling block for Fellows seeking more secure future employment.

5. Develop a path to permanence

LSE needs to commit to developing a path for fixed-term academic positions turning into permanent positions, i.e. making it possible for departments to convert a Fellow into a permanent member of staff at the end of their Fellowship. Currently, LSE explicitly highlights that Fellows will not be offered extensions beyond 3 years, nor are Fellows converted into permanent positions. This means that Fellows know from day one that they are destined to a precarious future across their time at LSE, at the expense of their mental and physical well-being.

6. Improve and standardise GTA working conditions

Finally, LSE should commit to improving and standardising the rate of GTA pay/contracted hours per class across departments in line with the departments with the highest standard, as requested previously by the UCU and by the LSE PhD Action Network. There is [ample evidence](#) that GTAs at LSE are working routinely well beyond their contracted hours, alongside evidence that GTAs are often struggling with financial hardship.⁷ LSE UCU, alongside the LSE PhD action network, requires assurance from LSE that teaching provided by PhD students is recognised and treated as work, which therefore must come with all the protections and benefits of an employment contract, and with proper pay of teaching, marking and preparation time.

Note, 3/04/2023

In a first version of this report, we had found a slight discrepancy between HESA data and LSE HR, with the HR data short of a number of fixed-term academic staff relative to HESA data. This did not affect the general findings or interpretation. We have since identified that the discrepancy was due to the fact that a category of fixed-term staff had been excluded from the first analyses with the HR data, which explains why it led to a slightly lower estimate of casualisation relative to HESA-based estimates. Once all categories of fixed-term academic staff are included, we find (as described earlier in this report) a practically perfect match between HESA and LSE HR data on academic casualisation.

This report was co-authored by members of the LSE UCU. For media inquiries or to discuss further, please contact LSE UCU via email ucu.secretary@lse.ac.uk or twitter [@LSE_UCU](https://twitter.com/LSE_UCU).

The report can be cited as: *The Crisis of Academic Casualisation at LSE*, LSE UCU report, 29th March 2023.

⁷ see Brundu-Gonzalez, Jaede, Li, and Twahirwa (2022), *Dedicated and overworked: Graduate Teaching Assistants at the London School of Economics*, LSE ChangeMakers report.

Appendix

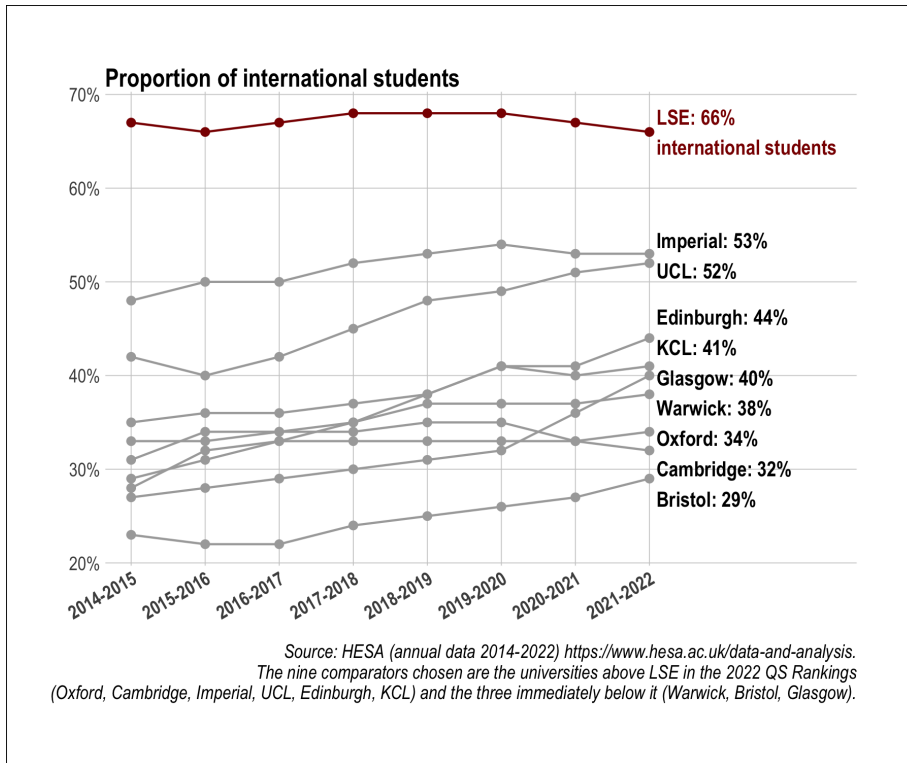


Figure 10: International students as a percentage of total student body from 2014-15.

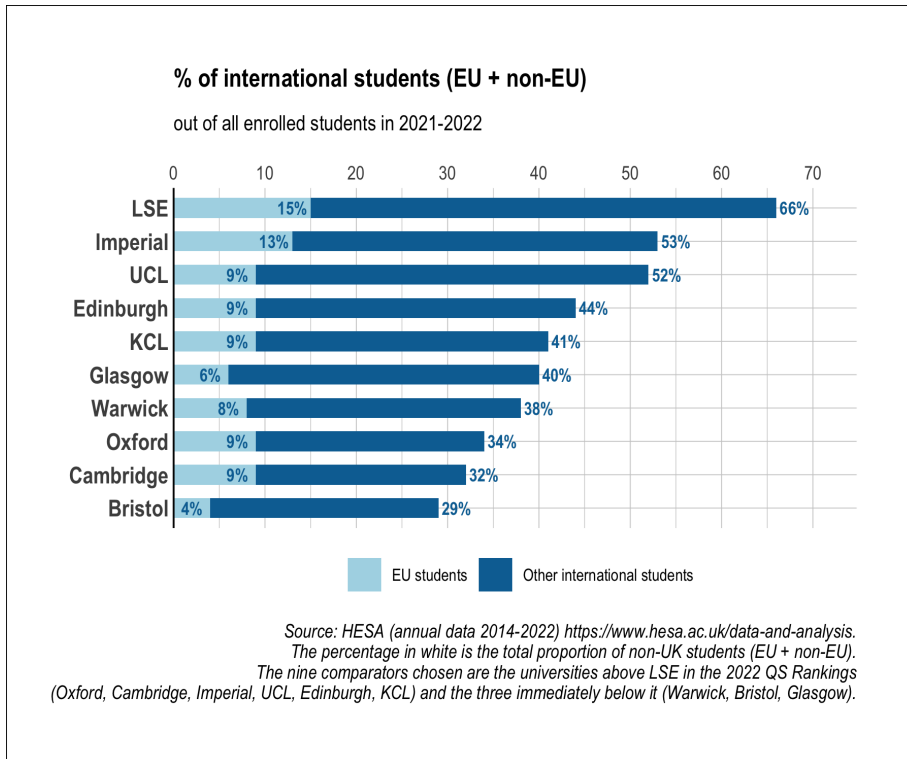


Figure 11: Percentage of international students (EU and non-EU) in 2021-22.