NAVIGATING STATES OF PRECARITY:

A TOOLKIT FOR EARLY CAREER ACADEMICS

States of Precarity

Royal Geographical Society with IBG

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Using this toolkit

Who is this toolkit for?

This toolkit is designed for colleagues who are currently employed on fixed term contracts, or who are likely to enrol on fixed term or otherwise precarious contracts within UK-based higher education (HE) departments.

What is the purpose of the toolkit?

In our 2025 report, we describe how academic precarity concerns "*employment conditions that do not enable the living of a fulfilling life and which prevent employees from planning for the future*" (Participant, States of Precarity Survey, 2023). Precarity was therefore shown to affect a wide range of academic colleagues, from across career stages. The report contains resources for addressing different forms of precarity, targeting its causes and felt effects.

However, it is clear that colleagues on fixed term contracts are especially vulnerable to precarious working conditions, and may experience precarity in distinct ways. This toolkit - requested by current PhD students and colleagues on fixed term contracts - is intended to be an accessible resource that outlines important considerations for navigating life during different stages of a fixed term contract and provides a series of tips shared by geographers who have experienced similar situations. It is based on data gathered as part of The States of Precarity research project, which surveyed colleagues who were navigating precarious employment conditions in UK Higher Education (HE) geography.

The advice and suggestions outlined in this resource are not universal, nor do any of its recommendations constitute legal advice. Rather, it simply constitutes a compilation of suggestions and recommendations based on colleagues' current and past experiences. While the guidance and tips enclosed have been helpful to some people, we appreciate that they may not be useful, evenly accessible or applicable to all readers and their institutional contexts.

For example, many of our respondents reflected on their intersectional experiences, sharing how disability, racism, energy limiting health conditions, visa status, and caring responsibilities compounded challenges for navigating fixed-term contracts. These challenges ranged from pressure to conform to notions of idealised academics, navigating repeated relocations, or to feeling unable or unwilling to invest in new relationships and social networks. We therefore recognise that the diversity of people's situations and experiences may mean that colleagues find themselves unable or unwilling to pursue some of the actions outlined here.

How is the toolkit organised?

The toolkit is organised into sections that address different stages or periods in the life of a fixed term contract. These are:

1. Approaches to applying for jobs
2. Ways to prepare for starting a new job
3. Advice for starting a new job
4. Advice for leaving a job
5. Navigating workplace difficulties
6. Useful resources – quick reference

How was the toolkit made?

This toolkit is an evolving document that has been informed by colleagues' responses to the 2024/25 States of Precarity survey. It reflects the experiences and contributions of 364 colleagues from across the higher education geography sector but has the capacity to incorporate further insights as they are submitted by users. If you would like to provide feedback, or offer your own suggestions, please email us at statesofprecarity@googlemail.com

1. Approaches to applying for jobs

Before we begin…

In this section, we present advice shared by survey respondents concerning how to review career options and locate job opportunities. However, it is worth first noting that the academic job market is competitive and the challenges of entering and remaining in academia are not experienced equally[1], and not all of the advice shared here may fit your situation. Academia can also cause many of us to doubt ourselves and our worth, and thinking about career planning (especially amidst precarity) can be deeply stressful and exhausting. As you start searching for employment, try to remember that ***you are already a skilled and accomplished person***. You may hold a PhD (or are nearing the completion of one) and you likely have a wide range of skills, experiences and accomplishments.

Tips for considering your options and finding job opportunities

Academic careers

If you are interested in pursuing or continuing an academic career, there are several things you can do to assess your options, depending on your position and career stage.



Looking for opportunities

Regularly check relevant websites, email listservs, and online networks for job opportunities (e.g. www.jobs.ac.uk - try using both general and specific search terms, Times Higher Education UniJobs, sign up to emails from relevant Royal Geographical Society Research Groups and wider networks, Critical Geography Forum is also a UK-based email listserv where users often share employment opportunities).

[1] Sectoral insecurity and academic precarity impact 'freedoms to choose' in uneven ways that necessitate intersectional attention.

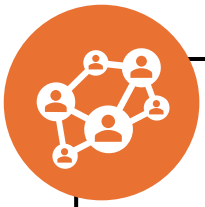
Exploring redeployment and internal opportunities

If you are already employed by an institution and have a line manager, it is worth reaching out to them to ask for information about any relevant institutional policies on redeployment and/or potential opportunities for continued employment. You could also try reaching out to your head of department/school. While not always possible, universities have a duty to support staff whose contracts are ending in finding suitable alternative employment within the institution. There may also be employment opportunities within the university but outside of research or teaching.

Seeking mentor support

If you are already at an institution and have a mentor, make sure you request time to talk to them about your next steps, including career aspirations and options or any research projects you may be interested in developing. If you don't have a mentor, consider reaching out to a trusted academic friend or colleague (if you have one) for informal mentorship, asking to discuss the topics above. Mentors may be able to offer forms of support beyond your institution's career support and/or staff training programmes. This may include support in skills such as academic CV writing and preparing postdoctoral fellowship applications. Try to be as direct as possible with them about your situation (e.g. visa restrictions, geographical restrictions). If you are thinking about developing a fellowship bid, it is similarly worth speaking to mentors or trusted academic peers about available funding schemes in your field, possible co-investigators, and for input on your proposal drafts.

If you are still in the process of completing your PhD, your supervisor may be willing to provide mentorship. You could initiate a discussion with them about when the right time might be to start applying for jobs, how you might approach this, and for which kinds of roles or positions. Some universities also offer free coaching services which may provide similar forms of support.



Connecting with your research group lead or head of research

If you are already working within an institution and are interested in extending your employment by applying for external fellowships based on an independent research project, why not ask for a meeting with either the head of your research group, or your department/school's head of research? You can ask them for advice on funding schemes, about the forms of support available for developing your proposals, and whether your institution holds any examples of successful past applications. Remember that any application that you submit, successful or otherwise, can be mentioned in job applications as evidence of engagement with the funding process and demonstrate that you are actively pursuing your own independent research.



Exploring diverse academic career paths and experiences

There are many pathways to a permanent academic contract. For example, some geographers in our survey entered a permanent position following their PhD. More often, however, colleagues first completed one or more research fellowships or teaching-focused positions. Others entered academia following a period of employment in a non-academic industry. A common observation across the survey was that speaking to colleagues from across career stages about their academic trajectories was a useful experience.



Knowing your rights

If you are a member of the University College Union (UCU) and have been on successive fixed-term contracts at your institution, consider consulting and/or seeking Union guidance related to successive fixed term contracts and permanency. The UCU also provides a range of guidance around 'knowing your rights' and the 'ending of a fixed-term contract'. If you are a UCU member, it may also be worth contacting your local UCU branch to determine if they have any hardship, solidarity, or bridging funds that may offer some temporary financial support whilst job searching. Further UCU resources can be found at the end of this toolkit.

Careers beyond the academy

It might not appear this way, but many geographers leave academia and lead successful and fulfilling careers. Whilst recent decades have seen considerable growth in the number of people receiving PhDs, the number of academic jobs has not risen to accommodate this growth. The skills developed through PhDs are in demand by employers, but we rarely receive sufficient support to think about how our skills and experiences may be translated into opportunities in other sectors. There is also a wider stigma around pursuing alternative career paths. As one respondent noted, we need to work towards "creating a culture where leaving academia is not a failure". While the wider UK job market has its own challenges, especially for marginalised groups and visa holders, it may be worth exploring non-academic career pathways to see what might be available.



Searching for non-academic jobs

Searching online for resources using terms such as 'alt ac' (alternative academic) can help in highlighting professional roles that utilise research skills both in and beyond the academy. Alongside useful guidance on understanding, preparing, getting started and 'going alt-ac', examples of active and supportive 'alt ac' communities include the 'AltAc Careers - Leaving Academia' Facebook group. Consider also consulting the Royal Geographical Society's career resources related to 'using Geography' beyond the academy and developing your career. In addition to advertising UK-based academic roles, jobs.ac.uk also includes listings for jobs across a range of sectors.



Seeking support from your institution

Most universities have an active career service division. If you are already based in an institution, have a look at what they offer and consider arranging a meeting with a career advisor. You can also reach out and ask if they offer guidance on writing non-academic CVs and preparing for interviews. Some institutions may also offer longer-term support for former students and staff, meaning it may be possible to draw on resources from previous institutions, if needed.



Seeking inspiration from peers and mentors

While many senior academics have limited industry experience, they may still have useful ideas or contacts related to alt-ac career paths relevant to your area of research. If you have friends, colleagues, or former colleagues who occupy senior roles, you could ask them about the career paths of previous PhD candidates or postdocs, what they consider to be particularly relevant industries or roles, as well as support in developing a list/record of the kinds of transferable skills you have accrued on your academic journey.

Tips for seeking feedback and support

Our survey shows that there is great willingness in our community to support early career academics and people experiencing precarity. This section contains suggestions for some of the different kinds of support you might be able to seek out from your community - as well as suggestions for how to return favours in kind if you have capacity to do so.

Sharing resources

Examples of resources that can be shared

- Academic CVs
- Cover letters
- Grant or fellowship applications (successful or unsuccessful) and any accompanying feedback
- Interview presentation slides
- Interview questions
- Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) statements
- Teaching approach statements
- Research plans
- Sample module outlines or proformas

Sharing application material with people you trust can be incredibly constructive. Consider asking mentors, people on more secure contracts, or peers who are less likely to be applying for the same positions as yourself for examples of their successful applications. Even examples from people with a different profile or specialism can be helpful to give you a sense of structure, tone, how to promote yourself, and the kinds of themes and examples to include. Remember that academic career paths and profiles can look very different, so try not to compare yourself unfavourably to your peers.

CV and cover letter writing

Examples of CV and cover letter templates

- Oxford Careers Service Cover Letter guidance
- RGS Professional CV writing guidance
- RGS Academic CV writing guidance

'Selling yourself' in CVs and cover letters can be challenging and even awkward. In terms of structure, you can consult online resources which provide template suggestions (see examples listed on the right). You also need to present yourself with a degree of confidence and with less modesty than you might normally do. Applying for different positions – in particular, postdoctoral positions - also often involves repeatedly reinventing and projecting different academic identities that may feel strange and uncomfortable.

Feedback from peers and mentors can play a crucial role here. If you can, ask for feedback on things like tone and whether your claims appear fully evidenced and convincing. Talk about how to position yourself for the job you're applying for and whether your application material responds to the job criteria effectively. You might also discuss how you can evidence any statements you make in your cover letter.

Keep a record of your activities

To ease the process of updating your CV and writing strong cover letters, keep a live document where you proactively and consistently record your activities and reflect on them. These may include teaching (with details of modules and responsibilities), internal and external seminars and workshops, conferences, publications, blog posts, administrative responsibilities, committee memberships, awards or prizes, impact work and other forms of engagement and activity. Save any correspondence or feedback (e.g. module evaluations, referee reports) that speaks to the quality of your work or its impact - this can be cited in cover letters as direct evidence to support your applications.

Supporting referees to write strong letters of recommendation

Applications often require applicants to list one or several 'referees', namely an individual who can comment on you in a professional capacity. Referees are often only approached when applicants reach the interview stage or are offered a role. Referees play an important role in the application process. If you have a mentor, supervisor, or trusted colleague, ask them for their input on who would make a good referee for your application. In some cases, they may be well-placed to act as a referee, though the most suitable referee may differ depending on what kind of opportunity you are applying for. Make sure your referees have all the information they need to write a letter of recommendation that makes it clear why you are the best

candidate for the job (including details about the position you are applying for, and information on your relevant experience and skills). Send them your CV, cover letter and consider highlighting some concrete points that you think the referee would be well positioned to communicate and speak to.

Mock interviews and presentations

Useful resources for interviews and presentations

- General guidance on academic interviews, including sample interview questions
- 10 Top Tips for Interview Presentations (jobs.ac.uk)
- Pointers on academic interview presentations (RGS)

Making it to the interview stage is a significant accomplishment. Remember that you have been shortlisted because you are a strong candidate (and because you are already considered employable and able to do that job). This means you can afford to be confident in yourself! Seek out opportunities for doing a mock job presentation and/or interview to get some feedback on your performance. You can ask a supervisor or a mentor, or if you are part of an institution already, check what is on offer from the career service. If your interview involves a presentation, it can be a good idea to practice in front of peers or mentors, too.

Learning from past interviews

If you don't get offered a job, it may be because of factors outside of your control (departmental priorities, candidates with more experience in specific areas), so try not to beat yourself up! Employers in academia typically interview 3-6 candidates for each position, and statistically most people who interview don't get the job despite being highly qualified. Try to remember that each interview is a learning opportunity. Whilst it may be the last thing you want to hear after an unsuccessful job interview, ask for feedback from the person leading the interview and try to listen to the positives as well as areas for improvement. Keeping a record of the questions you were asked during your interviews and job presentations can also help you when preparing for the next one.

Wellbeing and community support

The survey showed that applying for jobs - or even thinking about applying for jobs - can be stressful and may feel all-consuming – particularly because of the effort of having to place yourself within the advertised role and location. Try to be aware of and protect your mental health throughout this process. Many respondents said that talking to peers and mentors about their experiences was helpful, but this should never be a substitute for professional forms of mental health support.

> My colleagues have been proactive in looking at opportunities which can support my personal career development.

Employment status: Fixed Term Contract
Age: Prefer not to say
Gender: Female

> My colleagues within my research team take the time to listen, to support me and my colleagues, e.g. through regular meetings where we discuss wellbeing and work issues, and through positive feedback and attempts to find new contracts for me for after this one ends.

Employment status: Fixed Term Contract
Age: 30-39
Gender: Female

> Colleagues have regularly given positive feedback and expressed their desire to keep me on permanently, and when by chance the opportunity of a short-term extension came up this was advertised to me.

Employment status: Fixed Term Contract
Age: Under 30
Gender: Female

2. Ways to prepare for starting a new job

Congratulations - you have been offered a job! Whether fixed term or permanent, this is a great achievement. Now on to the next step: navigating the period between the job offer and the start of your contract. This can involve considerable legwork and navigating a sea of emotions, so is worth giving the following topics and issues some consideration.

Tips for negotiating your contract

You have been offered the job because the employer wants what you have to offer, and you are worthy of the position. As our survey has shown, competitive job markets, precarious employment conditions and academic critique can often erode our confidence and feelings of self-belief and may discourage us from effectively negotiating the terms of our contracts. This section unpacks some of the mysteries of the negotiation process.

What is 'normal' to expect from your employer?

Before entering contract negotiations, it is worth being aware of what is typically included within employment packages. All institutions and contracts will differ, but as a rule of thumb, you should expect and feel able to request the following forms of support:

Pay and Pensions

Job advertisements should state the pay levels that that contract can cover. It is very unlikely that you will be able to negotiate more pay than the upper limit of what is advertised, so if a contract is described as level 6-7, then level 7 pay is likely the maximum that can be requested during negotiations. However, within pay levels, salaries are broken down into incremental bands. Most institutions will automatically raise employees' payment bands each year, until they reach the upper band for their pay level (not applicable if your contract is shorter than 13 months). After this, a promotion is usually required to progress (e.g. to move from level 6 into level 7). It is usually possible to negotiate your starting point within these incremental bands. Employers are also legally required to enrol employees who earn more than £10,000 per annum into a pension scheme and contribute at least 3% of qualifying earnings into that scheme.



Working Hours

Working hours can differ across contracts, and there may be flexibility in the role offered to work alternative hours (for example, reduced hours or fractional working arrangements). This can be beneficial for some people but try to avoid committing to more work than can reasonably fit within your contracted hours. Fractional contracts and reduced hours often involve changes to overall salary, meaning that you will take home less pay at the end of the month. It is also worthwhile confirming that fractional working arrangements and/or flexible working will be formally recognised in the timetabling of teaching and administrative roles.



Probation Period

It is sometimes possible to negotiate the length of probationary periods if you can convincingly demonstrate your capacity to fulfil contractual responsibilities (e.g. through a strong publishing record or the completion of previous probationary periods). Whilst subject to changing UK laws, most probationary periods last around 1-2 years.

Annual Leave

Most universities offer 25-30 days of annual leave per year, plus 8 bank holidays and 4-6 days where the university is closed (totalling 39-44 days per year). Some universities also offer the rollover of a limited number of days of annual leave each year. It is unlikely that you will be able to negotiate changes to annual leave arrangements within contract negotiations.

Sick Leave

Most UK universities offer paid sick leave, with extended periods of leave (typically 3-6 months) often being available depending upon the length of time you have been employed at the institution and the condition you are experiencing. It is worth noting that the sector is subject to changes in UK law, and these requirements could be revised. It is unlikely that you will be able to negotiate changes to such arrangements.

Parental Leave

Parental leave can vary considerably between institutions but usually consists of up to 52 weeks maternity/adoption leave (18-26 at full pay, the remainder statutory), and 2-4 weeks paternity leave. Most universities also offer the option of shared parental leave. It is unlikely that you will be able to negotiate changes to these arrangements, but poor offers may be used as a negotiating factor.

Relocation Allowance

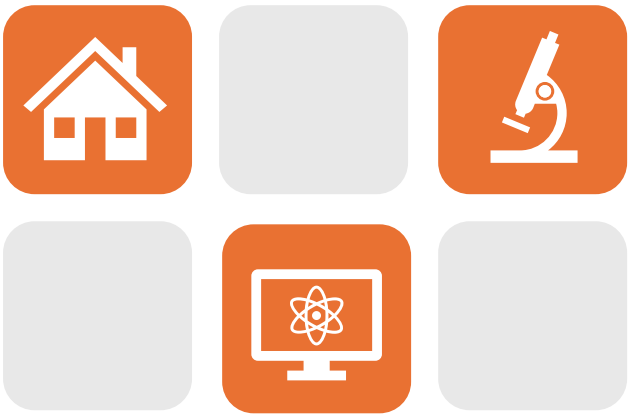
This is a nominal capped sum that institutions will often provide for covering the costs of moving institutions. It usually covers removal fees, a contribution to stamp duty (if purchasing property) and potentially the costs of early termination of rental agreements. It is typically claimed back from the employer, after costs have been incurred. If not explicitly offered, this can be negotiated.

Visa Support and Associated Costs

Visa application fees are commonly covered by universities, but only for the employee, not dependents. They are also usually only covered for the initial period of a contract (international employees on long-term contracts may have to renew their visas at their own expense). Costs for the UK's Certificate of Sponsorship should be covered by the institution too, but the immigration health surcharge is rarely covered unless the role proves hard to recruit for. It should be noted that it is less typical for visa costs to be covered for more junior research posts.

Startup Costs

Some universities offer a small amount of money that can be used within the first year of a contract to purchase office items, tools, equipment, licenses, or pay for activities such as conference fees and accommodation. You may be able to request or negotiate for this resource.



Research Funds

It is worth checking what internal funding is allocated as standard to employees for research and professional development purposes. Most institutions will have funds to support research development and activities such as conference fees and accommodation (but this typically needs to be applied for). It may be possible to negotiate the amount of available support funds, under the right conditions.

Basic Equipment

All institutions should provide basic access to a desk and a computer. However, it may also be possible to negotiate the forms of equipment provided, especially if you can demonstrate a realistic need for non-standard items, such as computers with different operating systems or software. You could also ask about any adaptations you need for your workspace related to disability and impairment, if you feel able to disclose these conditions. This might involve working with occupational health.

Sabbaticals/Research Leave

Sabbatical periods are common across institutions but are rarely available for colleagues employed on fixed term contracts, or those on non-research inclusive contracts. For everyone else, they are not universal or guaranteed, and many institutions are currently cutting back on sabbatical periods. Those institutions that do offer them will usually follow a rough schedule, typically consisting of one semester of research leave for every 6-7 semesters worked. Employees normally have to apply for sabbaticals and make a case for how they intend to use them. Applications may be rejected at the institution's discretion, and it is typical that evidence is provided upon completion, demonstrating how the intended outcomes have been achieved (or why they have not). Some universities will also offer sabbaticals to employees returning from a period of parental leave, as a way of easing staff back into employment. You may have to request (and advocate for) this.

Mentorship

Most institutions will provide forms of mentorship to support your professional development, usually broken down into mentorship for research and for teaching. This can be invaluable for early career researchers' career development and is now expected from most HE institutions. It is something that you can ask for.





Settling In Period

Many institutions offer a period of reduced teaching load to new starters who are joining on a research and teaching contract. This is not guaranteed, but it is worthwhile inquiring about this possibility during contract negotiations.

Other Benefits

Many universities will offer additional benefits such as cycle to work schemes, corporate travel cards, free counselling services, and access to discounts. It is always worth asking what is offered.

Approaching Contract Negotiations

Many colleagues can feel unsure about negotiating their terms of employment and salary, particularly if they are in a precarious position or transitioning out of a fixed-term contract to an open-ended one. Here are a few pointers on how to approach contract negotiations.

WHAT TO KEEP IN MIND

Be prepared

Thinking about salary and any questions you may have before the interview can make post-interview conversations feel less rushed.

Take your time

It can be tempting to say yes to less than is fair or feasible, especially when you are keen to secure the role. Taking time to reflect before agreeing to the terms can help ensure that what you accept is workable and does not place unrealistic constraints on your standard of living from the outset.

Remember your self-worth

You have been offered the role because the department values your skills and experience.

You may receive a verbal offer first

Although verbal agreements can be binding, wait until you have the full offer in writing before making a final decision.

Negotiation is normal

It is appropriate and reasonable to ask questions about salary and the terms of the offer.

Inequalities should be recognised

Gender and ethnicity pay gaps persist within and beyond the HE sector and a contributing factor is often the so-called 'ask gap', whereby women and members of ethnic minority groups tend to negotiate less than other applicants (see: BBC, 2021; Harvard Law School, 2025; Dreber, Heikensten & Säve-Söderbergh, 2022). Reminding yourself and employers of these disparities can be a valuable tool for negotiating contract offers, and for addressing pay gaps moving forward.

Top tips:

- ☑ **Contract negotiations don't have to just be about pay**

  Treat salary negotiations as an opportunity to ask broader questions about the terms and conditions of employment, not just pay. For example, you might enquire about any support that might be available for relocation, if this is relevant to your circumstances.

- ☑ **It is OK to tentatively accept a position**

  When you receive a job offer, you are entitled to ask for time to consider it. It is fine to say you accept the job subject to finalising the details, and you will respond once you have had time to reflect.

- ☑ **Go in high (but not unrealistically high)**

  It can be helpful to suggest a salary point slightly above what you expect to receive, as this can create space for discussion.

- ☑ **Recognise location-related costs**

  Salary levels sometimes vary by location. For example, some universities offer additional supplements for posts based in London to help offset the higher cost of living.

- ☑ **Keep notes**

  Keep a written record of key details from phone calls or meetings during the negotiation process. This supports clarity and avoids later misunderstandings.

- ☑ **Acknowledge offer details in writing**

  This can help bind parties to the arrangement. You should avoid agreeing to an offer whereby key conditions are only offered verbally.

Other useful resources for approaching contract negotiations

- THE (2022) "Salary Negotiation – A Guide for Faculty Members" *Times Higher Education website.* Online. Available at: https://www.timeshighereducation.com/campus/salary-negotiation-guide-faculty-members [Last accessed 12/12/25]
- Jobs.ac.uk (2025) "Negotiating a Salary" *Jobs.ac.uk website.* Online. Available at: https://career-advice.jobs.ac.uk/professional/negotiating-a-salary/ [Last accessed 12/12/25]
- Cambridge University Careers Service (2025) "Negotiating Job Offers" *Cambridge University Careers Service website.* Online. Available at: https://www.careers.cam.ac.uk/negotiating-job-offers. [Last accessed 12/12/25]

Tips for approaching moving

Across our survey, many colleagues said that they found relocating one of the more stressful aspects of moving between positions. Below are a series of tips that may help you with this process.

Negotiating your starting arrangements

The start dates of new contracts can often be negotiated (and sometimes need to be, to meet both the notice period requirements of your current employer and the needs of your new employer). You may also be able to request that some initial meetings are held remotely, or that in-person activities are scheduled on certain days so that you have a little more time to finalise your relocation arrangements or minimise the number of trips you make before fully relocating.

Seeking advice from new colleagues

If you can get details of an internal mailing list from your employer, your new colleagues can be a great resource to call on to help you settle into your new home and institution. Most people will be happy to provide suggestions about the best areas to live and local amenities such as health services, childcare, or sports facilities. They may also know of upcoming rental opportunities and rooms that are available on a short-term basis, if you are looking for a temporary base.

Do you need to relocate?

Many people found that they could complete their work commitments by living in their existing location and doing occasional long commutes. However, the responses show that this approach comes with benefits and drawbacks. The upsides are significant, including being able to remain embedded in existing support networks, save time lost to finding new accommodation, and avoiding the costs of relocation. However, the downsides can also be significant and are potentially more numerous. They can include financial costs arising from commuting and/or overnight stays; the loss of time and energy to frequent travel (which often leaves less time and energy for leisure, friends, and family); mounting discomfort over the environmental costs of commuting; a residual feeling of placelessness, with life being lived out of a suitcase; and your integration into your new work environments sometimes becoming impeded.



Think about connection

It can be tempting (or necessary) to move to cheaper locations. However, if you can afford it, connectivity and proximity to your workplace may have value and reduce experiences of physical isolation. Whether thinking about your daily commute, the availability of nearby facilities, or simply the sense of place of an area, location has a clear importance for respondents' experiences of new jobs (and thus, their feelings of precarity).

Take your time (if possible)

Taking your time over decisions regarding living arrangements can make a big difference to feelings of precarity. The need to secure accommodation quickly can lead people to sign exploitative contracts and commit to poor quality accommodation (survey respondents shared many complaints about accommodation quality). If you can afford it, see whether it is possible to either: rent a room in university guest accommodation or postgraduate halls of residence; hire a short-term room or flat (e.g. through trusted local companies); or arrange a temporary sublet (possibly with a colleague). Giving yourself a temporary base may allow you to get a better sense of an area and avoid committing to an undesirable contract.

Performing 'homeliness'

It is clear from our survey data that small - but not necessarily essential - things like putting up lamps, plants, and photographs can make a big psychological difference to experiences of moving and to overall feelings of precarity. In the melee of packing, departing, unpacking, and getting to grips with your new job, it can be tempting to deprioritize such things. However, if you can, try to do a few things that make your new place feel a little more homely. It is also easy for removal boxes to stay unpacked for long periods. These can serve as a reminder that the future could hold a return to experiences of heightened mobility. If you find it possible, try to unpack fully – you can move things into their final location later.



Tips for approaching leaving

The section above describes approaches to arriving at a new place, but starting a new job also often means leaving an old role or departing a place where you have existing relationships and emotional connections. Section 4 provides an overview of respondents' advice for approaching leaving a position.

3. Advice for starting a new job

Starting a new role can be simultaneously exciting and uncertain. There is often an additional sense of pressure to "settle in quickly" that can be heightened by fixed-term contracts where time feels limited and expectations are unclear. Most colleagues will recognise that it takes time to settle in. There is a lot to get your head around when joining a new institution. You are likely to make mistakes and overlook things. If you do, don't fret – people should understand. Try to ask questions if you have them.

What resources are available to you?

All institutions differ and conditions are changing rapidly in the current university environment. However, it is still common to have access to the following resources from employers:

Desk space

Nearly all employers should offer you somewhere to work with access to internet, electricity, and basic amenities. It is also a UK requirement that reasonable adjustments - such as the provision of ergonomic resources - are made by employers to accommodate existing health conditions and ensure your continued health and safety within the workplace.



IT equipment and software

You should be provided with an appropriate computer to complete your work, plus standard office software. This computer should reflect the kind of work you do - if your research is computationally intensive, you should be provided with a machine sufficient to fulfil your job criteria. It may be possible to request an alternative, if you have justification for this. If you require specialist software or licenses for your research, this may also be available upon request. You should not have to independently purchase the core tools you need to do your job.



Printing and photocopying

All universities should provide staff with free printing and photocopying resources. However, fair use policies may be implemented.



Open access support

Many universities will provide financial support for covering journal fees for publishing articles open access. This usually must be applied for, but do look up your university's policy on this. If you have research funding from an external body, they may also have requirements around open access publication and routes to accessing funds.



Training schemes

Universities provide both required and optional training which covers a range of professional development areas, including teaching, EDI, leadership, grant writing, writing, knowledge exchange, media skills, and more. Make the most of these.



Library access

This includes access to physical library resources and online subscriptions to academic publications. In most cases, it will also include access to research databases for academic articles and historic newspaper coverage. You may also be able to request books or other kinds of library resources to be ordered in, depending upon library permissions and budgets.



Internal funding

Most universities provide forms of internal funding to support research and/or teaching activities. It is important to ask your line manager about the forms of funding that are available. Common forms of funding include PhD studentships, seed corn funding, teaching innovation, EDI initiatives and some limited research budgets.



Administrative materials

Most departments will have centralised digital repositories of documents associated with the administrative life of the department. This might take the form of a dedicated Teams channel or SharePoint site. They will typically include lists of key roles and contact information, lists of line managers and mentors, workload models, sabbatical rotas, meeting minutes, and academic calendars. Make sure that you can access these and understand what's there. Acronyms are often used within departments or schools to refer to particular roles, positions, committees, and meetings – ask for a list of internally used acronyms or for clarification if these are unclear.



Teaching materials

This can be trickier to access, as many people store their teaching materials on their own devices and may or may not be willing to share their resources. Most departments will store previous teaching materials on the pages of their virtual learning environments (VLE). Marking criteria should be centrally accessible. You can ask for examples of teaching documents such as marking rubrics, if necessary. It is always instructive to see how others approach common tasks. It may also be useful to identify the programme lead within your department as they may be open to a conversation about broad teaching areas. They can also add you to other modules on the VLE to get a sense of what is being taught and common approaches to producing core resources such as module handbooks or assessment guidance.



Timetabling and room booking

Most universities have specialist timetabling software accessible via the staff pages of their websites. Staff timetables are usually also conveyed through Microsoft Outlook calendar pages. You may also be able to book particular rooms for meetings via these timetabling pages but check with colleagues or line management for specific details on how to book rooms on your institution's campus.



What should you discuss in a first meeting with your line manager[2]?

Your first meeting with your line manager is an opportunity to learn about one another, the workplace you have joined, and for you both to develop a shared sense of purpose. It can help to approach this conversation as an opportunity to clarify expectations, discuss priorities, and identify the support you'll need to thrive in your role. This meeting is not about proving yourself (you already have the job!) but is more about ensuring that both of you have a clear and realistic picture of what is expected of you, and what resources are available to help you succeed.

What to expect and look out for

- ☑ A friendly welcome to the department and an initial overview of the role you are stepping into.
- ☑ An outline of the support available to you, including how often you will meet with your line manager and what these meetings are intended to cover.
- ☑ Signposting to colleagues who can support different aspects of your work, including administrators, teaching coordinators, research support teams, or mentors.
- ☑ An outline of the key responsibilities and any immediate priorities for the coming weeks.
- ☑ An introduction to relevant departmental processes, such as teaching support, timetabling, or research activity.
- ☑ An introduction to key departmental resources, shared file systems, and other digital infrastructures.
- ☑ Information about any formal review processes associated with your role, such as probation or appraisal, along with any required training.
- ☑ Time and space to ask questions and raise anything you are unsure about as you begin your role.

Tips for making the most of the meeting

Workload

If your post includes both teaching and research, ask what proportion of your time is expected to be spent on each and make sure that this aligns with what is in your contract.

[2] Some colleagues may have a supervisor or principal investigator who is different to your formal line manager and who may oversee some of these responsibilities.

Key responsibilities

If your line manager doesn't do so, confirm the key responsibilities of your role and ask how your workload will be structured across the year. If administrative or student-focused pastoral duties are part of the role, clarify what this involves and how they are allocated.

Mentoring support

Ask whether there is a formal mentoring scheme in the department. If so, clarify how the allocation of mentors works and if there are any guidance documents available. If you are working as a postdoctoral researcher on a project, it might be beneficial for you to have a mentor who is NOT your line manager. If there are no formal mentoring arrangements, enquire about what forms of pastoral and development support are provided across the University.

Progression review arrangements

Confirm how your performance or progress will be reviewed (e.g. probation, appraisal, mid-year review), what the key criteria are, when these conversations will take place, and what paperwork you will need to prepare for these meetings.

Opportunities for professional development

Ask what opportunities there are for continuing professional development (CPD). This might include training courses, workshops, or mentoring that can help you build skills and confidence in your role. If your role involves teaching, you might want to ask about opportunities to gain qualifications and accreditations, such as AdvanceHE programmes, and whether time is allocated for these. Clarify whether any such qualifications are a necessary part of your role, and if so, the required timeline for applications. If you have special interests (for example, EDI work, employability, public engagement), try to raise these early so they can be acknowledged and appropriately work-loaded, not taken up quietly and invisibly.

Opportunities for research development

If your post is teaching-only and you aspire to develop your research in future, it can be helpful to discuss this early. Ask whether there are opportunities to stay connected with research in your department, such as attending research group seminars and departmental presentations, contributing to projects, or receiving guidance on applying for fellowships or small grants. Even small forms of encouragement or visibility can make a real difference to your longer-term plans.

If your line manager doesn't arrange an initial meeting, it's fine to be proactive and request one yourself. A short conversation early on can make a big difference in clarifying expectations and helping you settle in. In some departments, the line manager or head of department may delegate this first meeting to another colleague, such as a deputy or assigned mentor, so don't be surprised if this happens.

If you are unsure who to approach, check your offer letter or welcome email, which should include contact details for someone in your department or HR team who can point you in the right direction.

What is an induction and what should you look for?

An induction is the process that helps you settle into your new role and institution. It usually involves a series of meetings or activities designed to introduce you to your department, colleagues, and key sources of support. Unlike your first meeting with your line manager, which focuses on the specifics of your role, induction is about understanding the broader working environment you are joining. In some cases, your first meeting with your line manager may form part of the induction process, helping to connect departmental priorities with your individual responsibilities. Inductions are often more generic than bespoke, providing an overview of structures, policies, and procedures rather than the finer details of your position.

A well-structured induction can make a real difference in helping you feel confident and part of a community. Their scope and scale can vary; some focus on the wider institution and its structures, while others are specific to your school, department, or role. In some universities, induction is a formal process linked to probation and includes mandatory sessions on areas such as health and safety or equality, diversity and inclusion. In others, it may be more informal, centred on local introductions and meetings with colleagues. Induction processes also vary significantly in quality and clarity, so it helps to view induction as an ongoing process rather than a one-off event, taking time to revisit information and ask questions as you settle in.

What to expect and find out about

- ☑ **An introduction to your working environment**

  This may include short tours or informal meetings that help you get to know the spaces where you will work, teach, or meet students.

- ☑ **An introduction to the institution and department**

  This might include welcome events, presentations, or online modules outlining the university's mission, values, and organisational structure, as well as how your department fits within it.

- ☑ **Guidance on everyday practicalities**

  This may include things such as how to access printers and photocopiers, post and mail collection systems, room bookings, employee identity badges, email and IT account access, parking permits, or the use of shared kitchen and communal spaces.

- ☑ **Mandatory training**

  These typically involve sessions on essential topics such as health and safety, equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI), safeguarding, data protection, and research integrity.

- ☑ **Information on key systems and policies**

  This will likely include how to use internal systems for HR, finance, teaching, or research management. You should also be given access to staff handbooks or policy documents on matters such as leave.

- ☑ **Introductions to professional services staff**

  These include colleagues who support teaching, research, and administration (for example, departmental administrators, HR partners, IT services, and library staff).

- ☑ **Overview of available support networks and services**

  These include wellbeing, occupational health, or counselling services, as well as staff networks (for example, parents and carers, disability, LGBTQ+, or race equality groups).

- ☑ **Details of probation or training requirements**

  In some universities, induction forms part of probation and may include compulsory training such as AdvanceHE teaching qualifications or research ethics modules.

Tips for making the most of inductions

- Keep copies of slides, handbooks, and induction materials to refer to later.
- Take note of who does what in your department and who to contact with practical or academic questions.
- Ask for clarification if policies, acronyms, or processes are unclear.
- Make time for informal connections through coffee breaks, departmental meetings, or social gatherings.
- Keep track of any mandatory training and note deadlines for completion.
- Identify any gaps in the information you have received and ask for further guidance where needed.

What do people usually forget to check?

Alongside meeting your line manager and completing your induction, there are a few practical areas that often get overlooked when starting a new role.

Departmental rhythms

Universities work to different rhythms across the year, and these shape when workloads intensify. It can help to look at the academic calendar early in your contract and note key points such as teaching start dates, assessment periods, exam boards, and holidays and University closures.

Highlighting these in your diary can make it easier to anticipate busy weeks and plan your time with more confidence. It can also help to ensure you take your paid leave.

Key contacts

Administrators, programme leaders, timetabling teams, finance officers, and other professional services colleagues often hold essential knowledge about day-to-day processes. Introducing yourself, even briefly, and noting who manages what can save you a lot of time.

Many colleagues find it useful to keep a simple list of "who to contact for which query" as they settle in.

Email culture

Email practices vary across departments, so it can be helpful to get a sense of how colleagues tend to communicate. You might ask whether the department has any shared expectations around response times, use of group lists, or managing email during busy teaching periods.

Some colleagues find it useful to follow conscientious email practices, such as the Email Charter by Chris Anderson and Jane Wulf, which encourages clarity, kindness, and realistic expectations. You may wish to use an out of office email response to communicate specific working arrangements.

Attendance expectations

You do not always have to be physically present in the office, and some colleagues found it beneficial to work from home when their presence was not required (however, this does assume access to an appropriate home workspace and equipment). Many universities do operate flexible working arrangements, and it is completely reasonable to clarify what this looks like in your department. You might find it helpful to ask:

- which days colleagues tend to be on campus,
- when in-person presence is expected,
- and how people usually balance home and on-campus working.

Understanding this can help you settle into a healthy routine and avoid feeling pressure to be visible for its own sake.

Digital platforms

Every university uses its own digital systems for managing various activities such as storing teaching content (often known as a Virtual Learning Environment or VLE) to booking meeting rooms. These systems can take time to learn. It can be helpful to block out small amounts of time in your first few weeks to explore one system at a time. Asking a colleague to walk you through how they use a system can also make it easier to understand. There are often also specific training courses available to support you getting started with a range of platforms (e.g. Blackboard or Moodle for hosting teaching materials).

If you are teaching, team-taught modules can be a particularly helpful way to learn these systems in practice. Asking the module convenor to show you how they use them is often one of the quickest ways to understand what you need to do.

How can I build relationships inside and outside of my university?

We hope that your department makes you feel welcome and that your new colleagues reach out to you. Our research highlighted that some colleagues and departments are good at this, but others might neglect this process or not realise the significance of welcoming new colleagues. It's therefore worth looking out for opportunities to connect with your colleagues. This is important for several reasons, including learning about how your department works, finding out about the local area, developing new research collaborations, and learning from more experienced colleagues about how they 'do' academia at your new institution.

Tips for formal departmental integration

Check with your line manager that you have been added to all relevant mailing lists

This is something that can dramatically influence your experience of integrating into a new work environment and your recognition by colleagues. Unfortunately, it is also something that is easy for colleagues to overlook – often because mailing lists are not always centrally controlled. Making sure that you are added to networks is always a sensible move.

Attend departmental events

Keep an eye out for departmental meetings, research seminars, and teaching related activities and go along to what you can. Beyond being an opportunity to get to know people, their work, and get stuck in with departmental life, being present raises your visibility and others' awareness of your presence in the workplace. If your department has a departmental calendar, this can also be a useful way to get a sense of key activities over the year.

Discuss opportunities for contributing to the department with your mentor

Whilst you're coming into a new working environment, remember that your experiences and research are important and you have much to contribute, whilst also building up your own skillset and CV. Discuss what this might look like with a trusted mentor. You might, for example, look out (and ask for) opportunities to present your research, and consider whether participating in relevant committee work would be helpful to you. Make sure you are mindful (where it is in your control) of workload and prioritise skills-building that best contributes to your own career development.

Engage with wider university networks

Finally, it can be helpful to engage with wider university networks that are relevant to you. These can usually be found on the staff intranet or communicated through newsletters - it might take some digging. They could include cross departmental research groups, and staff networks (e.g. for women, LGBTQ+, disabled, and racially minoritised staff). These can be a fantastic way to meet new people and build community beyond your department/school.



Tips for informal departmental integration

Whilst it can feel daunting and for some people it may not be possible, if you can, try to:

Approach colleagues working in similar areas

Invite them for a coffee or virtual chat. This can be a great excuse to get to know people, as well as being a way to develop new research connections and explore opportunities for future collaborations.

Find out from your line manager or mentor what informal structures for socialising exist

Your department/school may hold social events, coffee and cake meetings and reading groups. These kinds of informal events can be a fantastic way to get to know your colleagues beyond 'work' and help you to feel more connected in your new role.

Find others in similar situations

Identify and reach out to other fixed-term and/or early career colleagues. Alongside getting to know members of your team, you might consider suggesting mutual peer support (e.g. swapping draft materials for feedback, listening to presentations).

Plug into your local Union branch

This may be accompanied by WhatsApp groups and regular meetings and can be a great way to meet people both in and beyond your department. In troubling times in HE, solidarity is more important than ever. Information on joining the UCU: https://www.ucu.org.uk/join

Note: Unions charge membership fees. There are often different rates depending on career stage and income.

Tips for building new social networks (inside and outside of work)

Many respondents emphasised the importance of social networks inside and outside of work for improving their resilience to precarious forms of employment. However, building new social networks from scratch is a hard task, especially if you are naturally more introverted. Several respondents also noted that it problematically constitutes unpaid 'work' (emotional and physical labour), whereby individuals must assume further responsibility for mitigating the feelings of precarity that are created through their employment. Not all of the tips below will be possible or appropriate for everyone; here are a few suggestions of things you can do to increase the likelihood of making friends in a new location.

Try to say 'yes' to social events and opportunities

You don't need to go to everything but if you can, try to say 'yes' to invitations to social situations – especially in the first weeks of a new contract when people are most aware of your 'newness'.

Try to let people know that you are new

Most people want to help others settle in. Simply letting people know that you are new to an area can make a big difference. Even colleagues who technically know that you are new won't necessarily realise that they can help you to find your feet until you tell them. Joining a new club and doing something *entirely* different can also boost this effect and give you easy entry points into conversations.

Try to join weekly special interest clubs (e.g. sports teams, language classes)

This not only gives you repeated opportunities to make connections, but it also lowers the barriers to conversation.

Be friendly

If you have the energy, asking people questions or providing warm follow ups to conversations (e.g. it was great chatting last week) can indicate you are open to friendship and make it easier for friendships to form organically.

Try to be socially proactive

If social invitations aren't forthcoming, it will typically be because of oversight, rather than unkindness. Could you try to go out of your comfort zone and ask colleagues whether they would like to do something? You could also try to think creatively about ways of making new contacts - could you join a club or society, or volunteer for a local cause? The initial leap of putting yourself out there can be scary, but it can pay dividends.

Try to utilise existing contacts

If you are lucky enough to have friends of friends in a new location, why not ask them for introductions? If they are friends of your friends, there is a good chance you will share commonalities. They may also be able to provide more nuanced advice that will help you settle in.

Try to create and maintain regular routines

Consistency is often key to friendships. Friendship rarely forms through dramatic gestures but often evolves through frequency and ease. Going to the department, gym, a cafe, or bar at approximately the same time and day of the week increases your chances of becoming familiar with people who use these places at the same times as you.

Should you join a union?

In the UK, trade unions are independent organisations that represent and support employees. By joining a union, you become part of a collective body that works to protect fair working conditions, provide advice and advocacy, and enable staff to raise concerns through recognised channels. A local UCU, or relevant trade union branch, can offer confidential advice on issues such as contracts, workload, grievances, and working conditions. Many branches also host social events, reading groups, or newcomer meetings, which can be a helpful way to build connections and feel part of a wider community.

A common misconception is that being a union member means that you must take part in industrial action, if it is initiated. This is not true. While colleagues would value and appreciate solidarity (on the picket line, as part of action short of a strike, or marking boycotts), this is often accompanied by an understanding that many people, particularly those on fixed-term contracts or work visas, can feel vulnerable about this aspect of membership. It is completely reasonable to ask questions about any forms of industrial action taking place and then decide how to participate in a way that feels right for you.

If you are an international member of staff working in the UK, you can also join a trade union and access the support that membership provides. However, you should still check whether union activity affects your visa conditions, or whether you are more vulnerable to employer actions than others. The UCU's migrant member's page is a good place to start (it provides guidance on the forms of legal support offered to migrant members) but you can also seek tailored advice from your local branch representatives.

> Appraisal meetings, wider staff meetings and geog departmental workshops etc. I would say that I have made a conscious effort to involve myself and embed myself as a member of faculty, even before I had a permanent post. I always tried to attend social coffees, writing groups, departmental meetings. I also sought internal funding to run a small writing workshop for the department, but in doing this I got to meet a lot of other faculty who I didn't know until then, and who are all supportive and very engaged too, but I think part of this is in being proactive to get myself out there.

Employment status: Fixed Term Contract
Age: Under 30
Gender: Female

> There is a representative for post-doctoral researchers and research fellows who can speak on behalf of the community in school discussions [...] And I have been made to feel welcome and part of the research culture,

Employment status: Fixed Term Contract
Age: Under 30
Gender: Female

> Colleagues have invited me to research group meetings and away days (despite being on an education only contract). Individual colleagues have offered career advice. I was nominated (by a colleague) and won an award from my Faculty. Individual colleagues have praised my work with students.

Employment status: Fixed Term Contract
Age: 30-39
Gender: Female

4. Advice for leaving a job

Leaving a role – for whatever reason – can be a stressful and emotional period that is difficult to navigate. In this section, we share advice on leaving your fixed-term role from those who have been through it. The guidance provided focuses on: assessing your options (what's next?), navigating practicalities (from offices and IT to pensions), sharing experiences and insight, and staying connected (if desirable).

How to navigate the next steps in your career

In our survey, respondents repeatedly expressed experiencing a "tension between knowing one role is coming to an end and [...] needing to find a new job" (Fixed Term Contract respondent, 2025). We have compiled a set of tools in Section 1 (Approaches to applying for jobs) that may be helpful for planning your next steps and identifying opportunities within and beyond the academy.

How do I manage the end of access to key university resources?

Ahead of your fixed-term contract coming to an end, it can be useful to consider how to navigate some upcoming practicalities around leaving your current institution. This includes how to manage the imminent relinquishing of key resources, such as offices and IT equipment, and ensuring that pension arrangements are up to date.

Office space

If you have access to office or working space, make plans to remove any personal items from these locations while you have access to relevant buildings and find out how to return your keys/keycards. Ensure that safe arrangements are in place for storing any confidential documents that need to be retained by the institution. If you have physical materials pertaining to a project, make sure that these are passed on to team members before you leave. Share a forwarding address with a trusted university administrator so that any post can be sent to you.



Information Technology (IT)

Many respondents found that access to key academic resources, including email accounts, digital library access, cloud storage accounts, and physical resources such as laptops and hard drives terminated immediately or very soon after their contract end dates. This can have a range of impacts for maintaining research correspondence, applying for jobs, writing papers and grant applications, and maintaining access to research data. As such, it is important to take measures to mitigate these issues ahead of your contract end date.

Share a personal work-related email account

If you don't have one already, create a personal email account for work correspondence using platforms such as Outlook, Google or Yahoo. Give it a clear and easy to remember name (it is usually best to be a variation of your professional name). Share this address with research partners and key contacts via your existing institutional email account, before access is terminated. This will enable you to maintain professional networks after your departure and in the interim between posts. It is worthwhile giving this address to a trusted departmental administrator, too, so that they can contact you if needed.

Download any cloud-hosted data that you may need but not be able to access in future

It is easy to forget that some materials may be hosted on cloud servers (for example, recorded Teams interviews) that may be impossible to access once your account has been deleted. Download these before you go but ensure the material is stored safely and securely and in compliance with relevant data management and ethical protocols.

Transfer passwords

Many people now use password managers, some of which are hardware based. Make sure that you export any passwords you might need in the future before leaving.

Register an alternative email address on digital platforms

Log into key websites (e.g. journal portals, Orchid ID, external academic profile pages such as academia.edu or ResearchGate) to change to, or add, a personal email address so that you can still log in after your institutional email address is closed. Make sure that memberships of any email mailing lists are transferred to this new account, too.

Make backups of important materials

Independently back up key materials from an institutionally provided computer/laptop to a personal hard drive to ensure ongoing access to key files (e.g. research work, teaching materials).

Download articles you might need

If you don't know when your access to academic articles may return, it might be worth considering spending some time downloading relevant materials before your library access is revoked.

Log out of personal accounts on university computers

Protect your privacy by ensuring that your accounts can't be accessed by someone logging into a computer you have returned.

In advance of leaving, you might also consider requesting extended access to your institutional email address. You can find a template letter which can be used on the States of Precarity project resources page.



Pensions

If you are employed on a fixed-term contract and have been making contributions to a UK pension-scheme (e.g. USS, TPS), consider consulting their relevant online advice about managing your pension and/or leaving the scheme. Make sure that you keep careful records of your pension schemes and contributions.



How to maintain professional connections

Many survey respondents reflected on the challenges of 'leaving personal networks behind'. Ahead of leaving, consider taking the following steps to facilitate staying connected with colleagues:

Share a personal email address with colleagues	Explore opportunities for ongoing collaborations	Leave an automatic reply on your institutional email account
If you wish to stay in correspondence with your colleagues, consider circulating an alternative email address in advance of your departure.	This might include suggesting the co-organisation of a conference session or co-presentation of a talk, co-developing or supporting a funding application, or co-authoring an output. Reach out to colleagues to propose and share any ideas and/or to highlight your interest in keeping in touch.	This should include instructions for follow-on contact (e.g. alternative email address), relevant webpages/profiles, and/or social media. Ideally, introduce this ahead of the end of your contract.

How to share experiences and insights

Survey respondents repeatedly shared that leaving a fixed-term role can be emotionally challenging. The suggestions below are designed both to facilitate supporting your own health and wellbeing, and to highlight where you might consider sharing your experiences that might help current and future precarious colleagues in a similar position.



Wellbeing and support

Consider engaging with your institution's wellbeing services and support resources (e.g. employee assistance programme), as well as relevant external providers (such as Education Support). Colleagues may also find online networks helpful. For example, the Women in Academia Support Network (WIASN) community is a supportive and kind space for women to share experiences and concerns (see the website and free Facebook Group).



Sharing your experience to support insight

While we recognise that preparing to leave a role is often a stressful period, if you feel you have capacity, consider asking for an exit interview in which you can constructively share your experiences of fixed-term employment with your head of department/head of school and/or human resources (HR). Hearing from fixed-term colleagues can be powerful in informing ongoing attention and change in relation to precarity in HE geography. Similarly, if you have capacity, consider reaching out to your department/school's equality, diversity and inclusivity (EDI) Committee and/or Athena Swan working group to share your experiences as a fixed-term colleague. This can provide you with an opportunity to share your experiences (e.g. where there's room for improvement, any examples of good practice) as well as provide a valuable opportunity for the relevant committee to learn from your experience in ways which inform ongoing and further work and actions around academic precarity.

> I think it's really important to support people in their careers and help them get permanent positions. I once overheard a conversation between a senior academic and their research assistant who had just gotten a job offer for a much better position. The RA was apologising for leaving the project, but the senior academic said something along the lines of 'Don't apologies, people leaving for better places shows me that I'm hiring the best' - that resonated so much with me!

Employment status: Permanent
Age: 30-39
Gender: Female

> When I meet colleagues on fixed-term contracts now I try to ensure I make them feel as they belong here, even if they know they will be leaving again in the future. I try to treat them as the valued colleagues they are, and to include them in any and all discussions - also those that may be about future teaching/research after their current contract ends here. I try to get to know them, and make an effort to introduce myself - and them to others - when possible.

Employment status: Permanent
Age: 30-39
Gender: Female

5. Navigating workplace difficulties

It's important that you feel supported throughout your employment, but there may be times when you experience challenges in the workplace (including mental health issues, financial hardship, or instances of bullying, misconduct, and exploitation) and you don't know where best to turn. In this section, we offer a troubleshooting guide for finding appropriate forms of support, raising issues and concerns, and prioritizing your mental health and wellbeing. Where appropriate, we reflect on the roles of particular people and groups and offer suggestions of things to consider when approaching them for support.

Who Can I Approach? - Situation Troubleshooter

1. Is anyone in immediate danger, or has a serious crime taken place? (For example, physical assault, sexual assault, credible threats, suicidal thoughts)



If yes:

Depending upon severity and whether the situation occurs on university property, you should consider calling the following services, at the time of the event:

- Emergency Services (Police)
- University Security Team

It may be necessary to contact external forms of specialist support service after the incident. For example:

GP and NHS prescribed mental health support services	The NHS can provide a variety of free therapy services. These include forms of talking therapy and specialist trauma services.
Private mental health support services	It is also possible to get counselling and trauma-focused therapy privately. If you can afford it, this may reduce wait times before therapy begins. The British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy maintains a directory of qualified practitioners here: How to find a therapist: BACP Therapist Directory

Victim support	This is an independent charity that offers free confidential advice for people who have experienced a crime. You don't have to have been a direct victim, and it does not matter when the incident took place, or whether it has been reported to the police. Their telephone number is: +44 (0) 8081689111. They also offer a live chat service on their website at www.victimsupport.org.uk.
Samaritans	Samaritans is an independent charity that offers people facing a personal crisis or suicidal thoughts with the opportunity to speak to someone who will listen to them. Their free confidential hotline is: 116 123.
Mind	Mind is an independent charity that offers confidential mental health support services, including separate hotlines for helping people with mental health problems to: 1) navigate the benefits and welfare system - 0300 222 5782, 2) receive legal advice on mental health related law - 0300 466 6463, 3) have someone listen to them who can guide them on taking the right steps to improve their mental health - 0300 102 1234. Their website also offers live chat services at www.mind.org.uk.
Rape Crisis	Rape Crisis England & Wales works to support victims of sexual abuse, rape, assault, harassment, and all other forms of sexual violence. They maintain a free 24/7 Support Line - 0808 500 2222, and a live chat service at www.247sexualabusesupport.org.uk.

It is not compulsory to report incidents to the university, and this can also be done later. However, if you wish to report an incident, most universities have a 'Report and Support' scheme, whereby incidents can be logged either anonymously or with your contact information attached.

2. Is the issue about your health and/or wellbeing? (For example, stress, burnout, anxiety, depression, chronic illness, disability)



If yes:

NHS/Healthcare Provider

Your first port of call will most likely be your primary healthcare provider – for most people in the UK, this is the NHS and more specifically, their general practitioner (GP). This is the first step in getting an official diagnosis, medication, and medical evidence, for all forms of health-related issues. Healthcare providers offer confidential advice and can provide 'fit notes' that can both indicate your inability to work as well as your ability to return to work. Institutions are legally required to acknowledge receipt of fit notes. It is often necessary to receive a fit note before reasonable adjustments can be implemented on your return to work, or longer-term sick leave can be authorised.

Occupational Health

Universities offer centralised health assessment services. These are rarely therapeutic and instead offer evaluations of existing health issues and present recommendations for reasonable adjustments that can be implemented by employers/departments, including periods of phased return to work, reduced workloads, and resource provision.

Line Manager/Head of Department

Depending upon the condition, you may wish/need to speak to your line manager to discuss reasonable adjustments that can be made to accommodate a health condition. This could range from relatively informal, affecting short term flexibility arrangements, or more formal, with longer-term adjustments to workloads, deadlines and duties. Your line manager may need to speak to the head of department for more significant alterations (unless, of course, your line manager is the head of department).

Mentors/Peers

If you have a mentor or trusted colleagues, you may wish to discuss your health issues with them before raising them with your line manager or Head of Department. This can provide emotional validation and help normalise difficulties.

Human Resources

Human resources can provide guidance on institutional policy around topics such as reporting absences, disability support, and flexible working arrangements. They tend to coordinate with occupational health and can provide clarity on rights, entitlements, and procedures. They can also provide protections, if processes are correctly followed. It is often necessary if health issues are likely to be long-term.

Employee Wellbeing and Support Services

Universities often offer internal counselling and wellbeing support services that are free to access. Whilst employed by the university, these services should be confidential and can be useful for providing support that recognises the pressures associated with academic work. Many UK universities also have employee assistance programmes that are often separate from counselling services and which can be used remotely, online or via the telephone.

Trade Union

Trade unions can provide guidance on employee rights, workload arrangements, and reasonable adjustments. They can be a good source of advice before you make a disclosure to the university. Unlike the university, they prioritise the interests of the worker and can advocate on your behalf. You may be able to request that a union representative accompany you to meetings with University management, and their assistance can often help avoid the inappropriate escalation of issues. Please note, membership of trade unions is not free, but membership fees do consider differences in circumstance.

3. Is the issue about financial difficulties?



If yes:

Sadly, financial difficulties among academic staff are not uncommon particularly for those working on fixed-term contracts and those with caring responsibilities or health conditions. There are several different forms of support that can be drawn on, if you are experiencing financial hardship.

Human resources	Human Resources can often help with short-term issues relating to cash flow, or institutional issues with the timing of payments. They may be able to advise upon and offer short-term salary advances or hardship loans. They may also be aware of institutional hardship or benevolent funds, if such schemes exist within your institution (they may not be publicised). They may also be able to adjust pension contributions and salary sacrifice schemes, if the matter is a short-term issue.
Trade unions	Being a member of a trade union (for most academics, this will be the UCU) can provide you with access to union-provided benevolent or welfare funds. Membership does cost a fee, but this typically acknowledges your financial situation. The UCU tends to be particularly supportive of financial hardship relating to precarious employment conditions or contract issues. Their support is independent of your employer and is provided confidentially and without judgement. In addition to direct financial support, they can advise on other forms of externally available support, including schemes offered by your university (which may not be advertised). They can also advocate on your behalf with management, if your financial situation intersects with your employment conditions.
Staff Hardship or Benevolent Funds	Many universities offer confidential staff support funds. They are typically provided by Human Resources, or by the university's staff wellbeing and support teams. Schemes that may be available include one-off grants, emergency payments for rent, utilities, or travel, and financial support during crises, such as bereavement, illness, or partner redundancy.

Line Managers and Heads of Departments	Whilst departmental managers are unable to provide direct financial assistance, they may be able to provide support for dealing with other stressors that add to the stresses generated by financial hardship, including easing workload responsibilities or adjusting deadlines. They may also be able to help you access internal funds discretely. However, this does require you to disclose your financial situation to colleagues, and the levels of support provided may differ between departments and institutions.
Professional Bodies (e.g. Royal Geographical Society, British Academy)	Some professional bodies may offer financial support schemes, including emergency grants, travel or conference fee waivers, grants, or reduced rates, or benevolence support funds for members experiencing hardships.
Citizens Advice	Citizens Advice is a free independent body that can help with debt advice and budgeting, negotiations with creditors and landlords, and assessment of your eligibility for different forms of government welfare support (benefits). More information is provided on their website – www.citizensadvice.org.uk.
Turn2Us	An independent charity that offers confidential advice tailored to individual professions and circumstances. It also hosts a database of grants and benevolent funds. More information is provided on their website – www.turn2us.org.uk.
National Debtline	An independent charity that is run by the Money Advice Trust. It works in partnership with other charities to provide a free hotline service (0808 808 4000) and a webchat system (Debt Advice Online Chat | National Debtline). It works with Citizen's Advice to provide general financial advice, Mental Health and Money Advice to provide specialist support for people with mental health difficulties who are experiencing hardship, and the HMRC, with whom it can refer you for extra support, if you have debts with them. Depending upon your situation, they may also be able to interact with bailiffs on your behalf.

4. Is the issue about accommodation or housing?



Please note: The sources of support for financial assistance above may also have relevance for this section, if your accommodation issue relates to housing costs.

If yes:

University Accommodation Office (or equivalent)	Many universities retain a small number of rooms or apartments for visiting academics, new starters, or emergency or short-term staff accommodation. These aren't always advertised, so you may have to enquire about them, and access to them may be time-limited (days to weeks). Capacity is often limited, but this can be a way of finding short-term accommodation that avoids expensive hotels or commitment to longer-term contracts.
Line Manager/Head of Department	Departmental managers can provide letters of support for confirming your employment to landlords or estate agents. They may also be able to authorise a period of remote working or reduced travel expectations.
Citizen's Advice	Citizen's Advice is an independent charity that can provide free confidential advice on tenancy rights, eviction processes, benefits eligibility (including the Universal Credit housing element) and can negotiate with landlords or agents on your behalf. Further information can be found on their website – www.citizensadvice.org.uk.
Local Authority - Housing Support	Local authorities can provide advice on tenant's rights and can mediate with landlords on your behalf. They are also legally required to help prevent homelessness within 56 days, once homelessness is threatened.
Local Authority – Environmental Health	Local Authorities also have a responsibility for investigating complaints concerning the condition of rented accommodation. You may wish to complain to your authority's environmental health team if your landlord or agent ignores your report of a repair or maintenance issue, or if they do not fix reported issues in a reasonable amount of time. Local Authorities can issue legal notices that force property owners to implement requested changes.

Specialist Housing Charities	Renter's unions such as ACORN can provide collective support and advocacy for tenants. Law Centres can provide free legal advice in accommodation disputes (find your local law centre here – www.lawcentres.org.uk), and Shelter provides personalised legal advice on housing issues and potential homelessness via their website (www.shelter.org.uk), webchat, and emergency helpline (0808 8004444).

5. Does your issue relate to visas and the 'right to work'?



If yes:

We appreciate that if you need a visa to work in the UK, immigration requirements can shape your employment choices and add an extra layer of uncertainty when applying for or starting a new role. Unfortunately, this toolkit cannot provide immigration advice. Visa regulations are complex, subject to change, and depend on individual circumstances, so informal guidance may not always be accurate or appropriate.

Job applications and recruitment processes usually ask about visa status and 'right to work' in the UK at an early stage. If you require a visa, it can be helpful to identify the relevant contacts within the institution early on and clarify what support the university can provide around visa sponsorship. Universities typically have designated teams who oversee this process, and details of relevant personnel should be provided as part of the recruitment and job application. Trade unions and specialist advisers may also be able to offer guidance and help you understand your options.

6. Is the issue about office space, facilities, or work resources?



If yes:

Line Manager/Head of Department

If the issue relates to minor repairs or adjustments that are immediately affecting productivity and you either don't have the authority to independently address them, don't know who to raise the issues with, or think it needs wider recognition, it is worth speaking to your line manager or head of department. They can raise issues on your behalf, advocate for resource reallocation, or adjust workloads and expectations until the issue is resolved.

Estates

Estates are responsible for managing the university's buildings, office spaces, utility systems, furniture, security access, and building repairs. They may also be responsible for implementing accessibility and ergonomic adjustments. You can contact them when there is an issue that severely affects productivity, or when a situation creates an unsafe or unsuitable workspace.

Research support

The research support team may be able to help you to secure funding for equipment, research spaces, or new laboratories. They can also advise on grant applications and the costing of staffing, equipment and facilities.

EDI Leads

EDI leads are responsible for ensuring that the principles of equality, diversity and inclusion are maintained within departmental workspaces. Often, these principles have material dimensions. Speak to your EDI officer if you have concerns over the accessibility of office and teaching spaces, or recommendations for reasonable adjustments that could be implemented.

IT Services

IT services are responsible for hardware provision, software licensing and access, network connectivity, online services, printing, and shared storage. They are often guided by well-publicised institutional policies (for instance, regarding the replacement of ageing devices).

Occupational Health

Occupational health is responsible for assessing workplace needs and allocating resources for ensuring that the health of employees is maintained. They conduct ergonomic assessments, provide ergonomic technologies and recommended office setups.

Human Resources

Human Resources can be contacted for clarification on workspace policies and resources, mediating disputes over resources, or when resources are entangled in concerns over employment conditions or employee wellbeing.

Trade Union

The trade union can provide advice on workplace rights and advocate on employees' behalf in disputes over resources or facilities.

7. Is the issue about workloads, role expectations, working conditions, unfairness, or inconsistent treatment?



If yes:

Mentor/Trusted Peers

Sometimes, you may not know whether what is being asked of you is 'normal' or unrealistic. Speaking with a mentor (if you have one) or trusted peer can give you a sense of whether it is worth raising concerns over the distribution of your responsibilities. They can also talk through strategies for managing academic workloads and help you to implement them.

Module Leader, Program Leader, Principal Investigator

Some issues with the (un)balanced distribution of responsibilities can be managed informally, within teaching and research teams. This is often preferable to taking more formal steps to address concerns – at least in the first instance. Be honest with your colleagues if you are struggling to get work done in the time allocated, or if you feel like the workload distribution is unfair. It is important for them to consider making reasonable accommodations so that you can complete the work to a good standard whilst remaining well.

Line Manager/Head of Subject/Head of Department

If adjustments and accommodations are not forthcoming and the workload allocated feels unreasonable, it may be worth raising this formally, within your department. If the work relates to a grant, then your first point of formal contact will likely be the Principal Investigator of Co-Investigator on this grant, or your line manager (if different). If the work relates to teaching or research that is not grant funded, then you may wish to contact your line manager or those responsible for allocating workload hours (departmental administrator, head of department). If this still does not resolve the issue, you may wish to escalate it to your head of department, or to the Union.

Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Leads

EDI leads may be able to provide advice, guidance and advocacy within your department in cases where disproportionate workload burdens combine with protected characteristics.

Occupational Health

If issues are having effects on your wellbeing, occupational health may be able to recommend workload adjustments or provide evidence in support of temporary or longer-term changes that must be recognised by departmental managers.

Human Resources

Human Resources can provide clarification on contract details, working hours, overtime, and workload policy. They also oversee flexible working requests and formal grievance or mediation processes. In most cases, this route should only be pursued if the above options have been exhausted.

Trade Union

The trade union can provide confidential advice on worker rights and workload policies and guide you on how to make formal complaints. They can also support you in meetings with management.

8. Does the issue involve bullying, harassment, or discrimination?



If yes:

Who you contact will depend upon who is perpetrating the violence/discrimination and the nature of the complaint. It is generally recommended that, where possible, you keep a detailed record of incidents that can be shared with managers on request. These records should ideally include dates, times, locations, people involved, precise wordings, the effects of those incidents, and any accompanying digital or physical evidence. They will be especially valuable in cases where you wish to make a formal complaint.

Many forms of bullying and harassment can be addressed informally – at least initially. This means that it does not involve the implementation of formal investigations and disciplinary measures. However, informal measures are **not appropriate** for any incidents where behaviour is severe, discriminatory, or persistent.

Informal Routes

Mentor/Trusted Colleagues
It can sometimes feel unclear as to whether the behaviours you are subject to constitute a form of misconduct. Speaking to a mentor (if you have one) or a trusted colleague can help you identify cases of misconduct and provide solidarity and emotional support.
Line Manager
If your line manager is not implicated in the violence/discrimination and you feel comfortable raising it with them, they will usually be your first formal port of call. They can offer advice and intervene informally, typically acting as a mediator between staff or raising the issue with the perpetrator's line manager. You should be informed of who your information will be shared with and how, and you should be given the opportunity to authorise the measures that are implemented.
Head of Department
If your line manager is implicated in the violence/discrimination, it may be appropriate to raise the issue with your head of department. Like your line manager, they should be able to offer advice and intervene informally. You should again be informed of who your information will be shared with and how, and you should be given the opportunity to authorise the measures that are implemented.
Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Lead
If your experience intersects with a protected characteristic, your EDI lead may be able to provide advice and advocate on your behalf within the department.

Formal Routes

Trade Union
It is strongly recommended that you involve the trade union in any formal dispute. The union can provide confidential, independent advice and an evaluation of whether the behaviours in question constitute a breach in university policy or national law. They will work to represent you within meetings and formal processes and ensure that you are protected against procedural missteps. This is particularly important in cases where the incident involves an individual that manages you or who is a senior colleague, or in cases where you fear retaliatory actions.

Line Manager
If your line manager is not implicated in the violence/discrimination and you feel comfortable raising it with them, they can formally raise the issue within the department (typically involving the head of department. You should be informed of who your information will be shared with and how, and you should be given the opportunity to authorise the measures that are implemented.
Head of Department
If your line manager is implicated in the violence/discrimination, it may be appropriate to raise the issue with your head of department. They may decide to take formal disciplinary measures, via Human Resources. You should again be informed of who your information will be shared with and how, and you should be given the opportunity to authorise the measures that are implemented.
Human Resources
Most Human Resources teams offer a range of ways of reporting cases of misconduct. These usually include anonymous reporting mechanisms and formal reporting mechanisms. It should be noted that the priority of Human Resources teams is usually institutional risk, and not the experience of workers. It is recommended that you involve the union when formally raising any incidents. Human Resources may initiate an investigation into the alleged misconduct and implement mediation procedures in a first instance, or disciplinary procedures if the incident is serious or repeated, informal routes are unsafe, or if discrimination is linked to a protected characteristic.
Police
In serious situations where behaviour involves threats, assault, stalking or hate crime, it may be necessary to report these to the police.
Citizen's Advice
Citizen's Advice is an independent charity that offers advice on workplace discrimination issues. They can also advise on how to source free legal assistance. Find more information on their website at – www.citizensadvice.org.uk.
Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS)
ACAS is an independent public body that provides free employment advice for workers and employers across the UK. They provide support services aimed at improving workplace conditions and resolving workplace disputes, including early mediation strategies. They have a hotline on 0300 123 1100 and extensive guidance on their website – www.acas.org.uk.

9. Does the issue involve academic misconduct or relate to research integrity, including breaches in ethics?



If yes:

Research Integrity Officer/Research Governance Team

It is a legal requirement for UK universities to appoint named contacts for research integrity. They can provide confidential advice on whether an issue meets a threshold for misconduct, explain institutional procedures, and advise on how to raise concerns safely and proportionately. They can be helpful if you are concerned about the consequences of raising an issue.

UK Research Integrity Office

The UK Research Integrity Office offers confidential advice concerning potential breaches in research integrity but does not conduct formal investigations into academic practice. They can be contacted via their website at www.ukrio.org.uk.

Ethics Committee

The university's ethics committee can advise on breaches of ethics approval, consent, or governance and amend ethics approval. They are better for providing non-punitive guidance in the early stages of emerging incidents. Some institutions have department or school level ethics committees or leads that can be contacted in the first instance.

Trade Union

If there are reputational or career risks in raising an issue, it is strongly recommended that you contact your trade union before taking further action. They can assist with confidential advice and representation and help ensure procedural fairness. If you are the accused party in a complaint, they can also offer guidance and support.

Line Manager/Head of Department

Departmental management routes are better for informal early interventions which may prevent later escalations of an issue.

Human Resources

When an issue may affect university reputation and involve disciplinary procedures, Human Resources may be involved. Initial information and advice may be available on internal staff HR webpages.

University Whistleblowing (Public Interest Disclosure) Procedures

Universities maintain designated recipients for public interest disclosures (often these are whistleblowing officers, university secretaries, registrars, or directors of governance). Disclosures should be made in writing and be clearly marked as a 'public interest disclosure'. They should include comprehensive information on what happened, when, why it matters, and provide evidence supporting the case. It is strongly advised that you do not make a disclosure to the university without first soliciting sound advice.

External Whistleblowing (Public Interest Disclosure) Procedures

If internal whistleblowing routes are deemed unsafe or inappropriate, it may be possible to disclose research integrity issues via external organisations. It is strongly recommended that you get legal advice before taking such actions. Relevant organisations may include:

1) Research Funders – these typically require research to be conducted ethically and rigorously. They may withdraw funding from researchers who breach their commitments or insist upon adjustments in practice;

2) Health and Safety Executive – responsible for enforcing workplace safety. Disclosure to the HSE may be appropriate if workplace practices present serious risks to staff, students, or research participants, if the buildings or working practices are unsafe, or if risks are known to your institution but are not being acted upon;

3) Social or Traditional Media – if you have exhausted all internal or prescribed routes, or if there is a danger of an imminent cover-up, it may be appropriate to disclose details of your situation to these outlets. This is a particularly risky strategy however and should not be taken without legal guidance.

10. Do you just need general advice?



If yes:

- **Line Managers**

  Line managers have a responsibility to ensure that you have the resources you need to thrive but also have a duty to manage your performance. They may be able to offer forms of professional advice, too. They are your first point of contact for emerging issues that may affect your capacity to complete your contractual responsibilities.

- **Mentors/Trusted Peers**

  You should have ideally been assigned a mentor when joining your institution. If you haven't, it is worth asking your line manager for one to be assigned and to confirm the arrangements for this (for example, scope of support, frequency of meetings, key milestones). If not, you may be able to source similar forms of support from trusted peers. Mentors are responsible for providing guidance. They have no responsibility for managing your performance, so may therefore feel safer to approach for general advice. Mentors can be useful for receiving guidance on departmental processes and requirements, career development, feedback on written materials (papers, job applications, grant proposals), advice on teaching, training, and student engagement, including any required teaching qualifications (e.g. AdvanceHE qualifications), and sharing examples of key materials such as grant applications, cover letters, CVs, and peer review documents.

- **Research Lead**

  Your department may have a Research Lead. They will likely be key in shaping research culture in the department and be able to offer advice on your research profile, relevant activities, and funding calls that you are eligible to apply for. Also look out for departmental and institutional events on different funding schemes and grant opportunities.

- **Teaching Lead**

  You will most likely be working with an Undergraduate Education Lead (or similar). They can be a great point of contact for understanding departmental practices and processes and can offer specific advice about engaging with the students you'll be teaching. The title of this role may vary across institutions (for example, Teaching and Learning Lead).

- **Impact Lead**

  Impact (how your research travels and has influence beyond the academy) is increasingly important in terms of career building but can be quite difficult to navigate. You might

consider contacting your Impact lead to discuss your research, potential avenues to impact, and whether there are impact related funding streams at your institution that you can apply for to develop this area of your work (where relevant).

- **Academic support beyond your institution**

  There are fantastic opportunities to engage with wider professional networks. These could be specific to your field (ask colleagues about this) or have a broader remit, such as learned societies (e.g. the Royal Geographical Society, Royal Society, or British Academy Early Career Network). Some research groups (e.g. within the RGS-IBG) offer their own early career, networking, and mentorship schemes. Membership of learned societies can involve fees so do speak to your line manager or mentor about whether there is funding to support this.

You may wish to use your line managers and mentors in the following ways:

→ Share your aspirations for future employment and your career with them. This can be helpful in tailoring the mentoring process and your ongoing work to align with your specific goals. It may be, for example, that you need to gain more teaching experience, or you might feel you need to develop a stronger publication strategy. Both should be able to help guide you in your decision making and to help you identify opportunities to meet your objectives.

→ Ask about contract renewal and pathways to permanency from the outset. Don't be afraid to do this. Clarity on this can help you to strategize and think about what you want to get out of your contract.

→ Request guidance on promotion criteria. Even if you are not eligible on your contract, familiarising yourself with the criteria can be helpful for thinking through next steps.

→ Ask what careers services and wider professional networks you might have access to.

→ Ask your mentor and colleagues to share wider opportunities with you.

→ Identify opportunities for feedback. This might include requesting peer supervision of your teaching, asking for feedback on drafts of papers or grant proposals and gaining insight in the formal review processes.

→ Identify how to access training resources, inside and beyond the institution as well as keeping abreast of opportunities internal and external funding schemes.

> My colleagues regularly praise me for my work and provide support to help me do it when it is needed. They are incredibly understanding and generous when time needs to be spent away from work priorities (whether this is to support my professional development, for health reasons, personal reasons etc.). They show interest in my professional ambitions and try to find ways to help me achieve those ambitions. They have made it clear they want me to remain in the department and have been writing me into funding bids to do this (I have already had one contract extension as a result of a successful funding bid). They have also supported me in forwarding me funding calls and job adverts that are relevant to my research interests. They regularly recognise my position as a fixed-term employee in work discussions and factor this into decision-making. At department level, the Head of Department talked to me personally about how I might fit into the future research priorities of the department and how this might be supported. They have recognised my employment status and have offered support in managing the issues related to this.

Employment status: Fixed Term Contract
Age; Under 30
Gender: Male

> I have a teaching and a research mentor who both were always there to help. But also my Head of School, Head of Teaching and Head of Research have been incredibly helpful in making time for my own projects and for putting grant applications together. All the colleagues I approached for feedback and help did not turn me down.

Employment status: Fixed Term Contract
Age: 30-39
Gender: Female

> Colleagues often mention my contract and offer advice on the job market and the possibility that the department might offer me a permanent post. Several colleagues have moved from fixed term to permanent contracts at the department in the past and offer support and advice in the process.

Employment status: Fixed Term Contract
Age: 30-39
Gender: Female

How can I prioritise my mental health and wellbeing?



Our research highlights that, whilst rewarding, academic work can come with all kinds of emotional stressors that are only exacerbated (or generated) by being on a fixed term contract. It can feel difficult to do, but prioritising your own mental health and well-being is extremely important within this context. Your department might have working cultures that actively support this (for example those that enable and prioritise work life balance), but even so, considering how you can engage with this yourself is key. You might consider:

Taking time for physical and mental health

It can be hard to take time out of busy schedules, but your health is important. Try to prioritise it.

Exploring the services on offer at your university

Many institutions will offer an employee assistance scheme (or equivalent) that can offer advice and sometimes a short period of counselling amongst other services. At the same time, your employer may offer other services related to health and wellbeing or financial advice. Ask your line manager about what is offered at your institution. This is also something that can be raised at an institution induction meeting.

Making time for hobbies and interests outside of work

This can be extremely difficult when working with competing pressures and deadlines, but it can make all the difference to well-being.

Actively discussing workload with your line manager and mentor and reviewing this on a regular basis.

You are absolutely entitled to have this conversation. As highlighted in Section 2 - you have been given the job because you have the skills and ability to do it. This doesn't mean, however, that your workload should be unmanageable. Maintaining an open dialogue (wherever possible) with your line manager and mentor can be very helpful here.

Turning off email notifications on both your phone and laptop/desktop

When starting a job, particularly one where the contract is fixed term, it can feel like you need to be available 24/7 to your employer. Wherever possible put in boundaries around communication. This could be as simple as turning off sound alerts that disrupt your work or removing emails altogether from your phone. No employer should expect instant responses, and your department might have its own email policy (for example replying within three working days). You may also choose only to check emails at certain times of day so you can manage your time.

Saying 'no' to tasks that are beyond your workload or the agreed terms of your contract

This can feel very difficult, but it is important to remember that you can't be expected to do everything all the time. Our research showed that colleagues on FTC routinely feel overworked and that they need to say 'yes' to everything that is asked. Meet with a trusted mentor or friend either within or outside your institution to discuss strategies to mitigate this and how to say 'no'!

More broadly, building community is important

This might come through institutional or disciplinary networks but also ask your line manager whether early career networks exist at your university. These can be spaces to discuss and share key concerns - whether about a hyper-competitive job market and ongoing sectoral dynamics, or imposter syndrome - you aren't alone in your experiences and whilst not a 'cure all', sharing solidarity with your peers and colleagues is an important way to navigate academia.

6. Useful resources – quick reference

Employment Rights, Contracts, and Trade Union Support

Author	Title / Description	URL
ACAS	The advisory, conciliation and arbitration service. This offers free and impartial advice to employees and employers, as well as resources for dispute resolution.	ACAS | Making working life better for everyone in Britain
University and College Union (UCU)	Guidance on successive fixed-term contracts, permanency, and model letters	https://www.ucu.org.uk
University and College Union (UCU)	Information on joining UCU	https://www.ucu.org.uk/join
University and College Union (UCU)	UCU Anti-Casualisation Legal Toolkit	Anti-casualisation legal toolkit
University and College Union (UCU)	UCU Postgraduate Researcher's Manifesto	UCU - PGRs as staff, not students
University and College Union (UCU)	UCU Research Staff Manifesto	Research Staff Manifesto
University and College Union (UCU)	A guide for neurodiverse members on casualised contracts	Supporting neurodiversity and colleagues on casualised contracts
University and College Union (UCU)	Eligibility Criteria for UCU Legal Support	UCU - Am I eligible for union legal support?

University and College Union (UCU)	Support for Migrant Members	Support for Migrant Members
Researcher Development Concordat	Concordat to support the career development of UK researchers - an agreement between research institutes, universities and funders	researcherdevelopmentconcordat.ac.uk
University and College Union (UCU)	Free membership for unemployed academics	UCU - Unemployed membership
States of Precarity Project	Template letter for requesting extended email access	Resources - States of Precarity

Creating Positive Working Cultures

Author	Title / Description	URL
Anderson, C. & Wulf, J.	Emailing Practice for a Work-Life Balance	Email Charter by Chris Anderson and Jane Wulf

Career Planning, Job Searching, and Professional Development

Author	Title / Description	URL
Careers Service, Oxford University	Cover Letters	Oxford Careers Service Cover Letter guidance
Royal Geographical Society (with IBG)	Curating a professional career CV	RGS professional CV writing guidance
Royal Geographical Society (with IBG)	Writing an effective CV and covering letter	RGS academic CV writing guidance

Royal Geographical Society (with IBG)	Career resources on using Geography beyond academia	https://www.rgs.org
jobs.ac.uk	Academic and professional job listings	https://www.jobs.ac.uk
Advance HE	Teaching qualifications and professional development programmes	https://www.advance-he.ac.uk
Royal Geographical Society (with IBG)	Applications and Interviews	Applications and interviews | RGS
jobs.ac.uk	10 Top Tips for Interview Presentations	10 Top Tips for Interview Presentations - jobs.ac.uk
Careers Service, University of Edinburgh	Prepare for an academic interview (includes example interview questions)	Prepare for an academic interview | Careers Service | Careers Service
AltAc Careers	AltAc Careers – Leaving Academia (Facebook community)	AltAc Careers - Leaving Academia | Facebook
AltAc Jobs	AltAc Jobs listing site	Altac Jobs

Financial Advice, Debt, and Hardship Support

Author	Title / Description	URL
Turn2Us	Grants, benevolent funds, and tailored financial advice	https://www.turn2us.org.uk
National Debtline	Free debt advice and webchat	https://www.nationaldebtline.org.uk
Citizens Advice	Benefits, debt, and legal rights advice	https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk

Housing and Accommodation Support

Author	Title / Description	URL
Law Centres Network	Free legal advice on housing disputes	https://www.lawcentres.org.uk
Shelter	Housing and homelessness advice	https://www.shelter.org.uk
ACORN	Renter's union and tenant advocacy	https://www.acorntheunion.org.uk

Mental Health and Wellbeing Support

Author	Title / Description	URL
NHS	Mental health and talking therapies	https://www.nhs.uk
BACP	Therapist Directory	https://www.bacp.co.uk
Victim Support	Support for people affected by crime	https://www.victimsupport.org.uk
Samaritans	Emotional support hotline	https://www.samaritans.org
Mind	Mental health advice and live chat	https://www.mind.org.uk
Rape Crisis England & Wales	Support for survivors of sexual violence	https://www.247sexualabusesupport.org.uk
Education Support	Wellbeing support for education staff	https://www.educationsupport.org.uk
Women in Academia Support Network (WIASN)	Peer support network	https://www.wiasn.co.uk