Academic staff working in higher education (HE) are not civil servants but are employees of individual higher education institutions (HEIs) [1], which are responsible for all aspects of their human resources management. Decisions are made within the framework of:

- **employment legislation** - the same legislation applies to England, Wales and Scotland; Northern Ireland has its own specific legislation, although in practice, employment rights are largely the same as the rest of the UK.

- **equality legislation** – the Equality Act 2010 [2] prohibits discrimination on the grounds of nine ‘protected characteristics’: age; disability; gender reassignment; marriage and civil partnership; pregnancy and maternity; race; religion or belief; sex; sexual orientation. The Act has direct implications for HEIs in a number of areas, including employment as well as student services, making it unlawful for HEIs to discriminate against, victimise or harass employees or those seeking work. The Act also imposes a new public sector equality duty on HEIs, requiring them to have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between different people when carrying out activities. The Equality Challenge Unit (ECU) [3] provides guidance for the HE sector on this legislation.

- national frameworks and agreements on **pay structures** and **conditions of employment** – see below.

*In March 2018, the ECU merged with the Higher Education Academy (HEA) and the Leadership Foundation for Higher Education to form Advance HE [4], a single sector agency for equality and diversity, learning and teaching, and leadership and governance in higher education. Advance HE will continue the ECU’s work on equality.*

**Pay structures** and some conditions of employment are negotiated for all HE staff in the UK on a multi-employer basis through the New Joint Negotiating Committee for Higher Education Staff (New JNCHES) [5]. HE employers are represented by the Universities and Colleges Employers Association (UCEA) [6]. New JNCHES covers all HE staff, not just those in academic roles; within this structure, the University and College Union (UCU) [7] represents academic staff: lecturers, researchers and academic-related staff.

The pay structures and conditions of employment agreed nationally through New JNCHES are not mandatory. Local implementation is negotiated between individual HEIs as employers (who may be advised by UCEA) and UCU local associations and branches.

**Conditions of employment** are not subject to a single framework. Institutions fall into two groups based on the provisions of the Further and Higher Education Act 1992 [8], which gave university status to a number of polytechnics and higher education colleges:

For **post-1992 institutions**, a national agreement [9] was reached in 1990. This provided for an agreed contract of employment and national staff handbook text to be in place by 31
August 1992 in each HEI for all full-time and part-time (‘fractional’) lecturing staff (lecturers, senior lecturers and principal lecturers).

For pre-1992 institutions, the situation is more complex. Institutional governance is set out in statutes with an employment statute to cover redundancy, disciplinary, dismissal and grievance procedures and incorporated into employment contracts. Most institutions have adopted a model employment statute which can only be changed by the Office for Students (OfS) [10], the independent regulator of higher education in England, established following the Higher Education and Research Act 2017 [11] in April 2018. Previously, model employment statutes could only be changed by the Privy Council [12]. Some HEIs have moved the provisions of their model statutes to ordinances, thereby allowing modifications by the institution without needing approval by the OfS.

**Planning Policy**

Planning policy is a matter for individual institutions. It is informed by surveys of recruitment, retention and labour turnover in the HE sector undertaken by the Universities and Colleges Employers Association (UCEA) [6] and until April 2018, the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) [13]*. This was achieved in part by HEFCE's higher education workforce framework [14], which explored the major considerations and challenges that face the workforce of the English HE sector. These included the future supply and demand for academic staff in the light of predicted changes in student demand, and how HE pay and reward could remain competitive and equitable while also being affordable and not threatening the HE sector's future financial sustainability.

Staff turnover and recruitment and retention measures are important indicators of the state of the HE labour market and the attraction of the sector to job applicants and can also indicate particular areas where demand may be outstripping supply. HEFCE’s website groups information on trends and profiles [15] of staff at English higher education institutions (HEIs) [1] during the period 2012/13 to 2015/16, looking at a variety of characteristics: academic function, age, contract type, disability, ethnicity, institution type, mode of employment, nationality, region, salary, sex, subject taught.

UCEA produces an annual Higher Education Workforce Survey [16]. The 2017 survey reported some recruitment difficulties at all levels, but particularly at lecturer and professor level and in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) subject areas. Employee turnover has been rising steadily since 2012, but is still low compared with the wider economy.

In addition, the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) produces an annual staff record providing detailed information regarding higher education staff in all four UK countries. It includes staff numbers and characteristics such as ethnicity and nationality; contracts and terms of employment and staff numbers working in different academic subject disciplines. The 2016/17 staff record is available on the HESA [17] website.

*HEFCE closed at the end of March 2018. In April 2018, its functions were taken over by the Office for Students (OfS) [10], the new regulator of higher education in England.

**Entry to the Profession**

Those new to teaching in higher education find themselves in very different contexts, roles and circumstances. They may be:

- postgraduate students, for example studying for a doctorate [18], who also do some teaching of undergraduates
• newly appointed as a teaching fellow [19] or to a primarily teaching post (whether permanent or on a variety of contracts)
• entering from a previous career in a different profession, teaching in a different sector of education, or working in industry/commerce.

Recruitment procedures are a matter for individual higher education institutions (HEIs) [1] and are not centrally regulated other than by the framework of employment legislation and equality legislation that governs all employment in the UK.

A bachelor’s degree [20] classified/graded 2.1 or above* in the subject to be taught is normally a minimum requirement and a master’s degree [21] or a doctorate is often required. Requirements vary according to the discipline. For teaching within vocational disciplines, professional experience may be required, and, in the case of programmes leading to professional registration (such as nursing and social work), current professional registration.

*See the subheading ‘Certification [22]’ in the article entitled ‘Bachelor’ for an explanation of the degree classification/grading system.

Each post is advertised and suitably qualified candidates are invited to apply. Short-listing of applicants is carried out by departments or schools and interview panels can include representatives from the department, faculty, senior management and human resources department.

**Professional Status**

Academic staff in higher education institutions (HEIs) are employees of the individual institution. They are not civil servants, are not guaranteed employment at any stage of their professional life and must apply for specific posts.

It is up to individual institutions whether they have a code of conduct for staff and if so, they are free to determine the content. For an example, see this link [23] on the University of Exeter website.

**Salaries**

The pay of academic staff in higher education institutions (HEIs) is a matter for national negotiation (see the introduction to this article) but is not subject to government regulation. There is a national agreement, the Framework Agreement for the Modernisation of Pay Structures [24] in UK HEIs, which came into force in August 2006. It consists of a 51 point pay spine covering the majority of HE staff, not only academic staff, against which individual HEIs create their own pay and grading structures. The Framework Agreement outlines five academic grades each with a minimum and maximum salary point:

1. **Research and postgraduate teachers** (these are postgraduate students teaching under close supervision). Role holders at this level are likely to undertake clearly prescribed tasks to assist in teaching and/or research activities.
2. **Lecturers**. Role holders at this level are likely to be responsible for the delivery of teaching within an established teaching programme and/or for carrying out research as an individual or team member.
3. **Senior lecturers**. Role holders at this level are likely to be responsible for planning, designing and delivering educational programmes and/or for conducting research programmes.
4. **Principal lecturers**. Role holders at this level are likely to be responsible for a balance of planning, designing and delivering major educational programmes, leading teaching or research teams, coordinating departmental administrative activities and enterprise activities.
5. **Heads of departments or professor.** Role holders at this level are likely to be responsible for academic leadership involving the development and overall management of teaching or research programmes or enterprise activities, and/or for the management of departmental administration activities with significant responsibility for resources (staff, finances and equipment). The pay structures indicate a minimum salary for professors and heads of department; maximum salaries for these roles are negotiated individually.

As stated by the [Universities and Colleges Employers Association (UCEA)](https://www.ucsea.org.uk) [25], full-time academic staff were paid an annual salary of £46,924 (£52,693.99*) at the median in 2016/17. The median full-time basic pay for professors was £73,014 (£81,992.14*) with other academic staff paid £42,955 (£48,236.95*). The pay premium for higher education teaching staff over other teaching occupations has increased over the past decade with secondary school teachers earning 75 per cent of their median earnings compared to 89 per cent in 2002.

In line with the Framework Agreement, the value of the pay points in the spine is reviewed through the agreed national negotiation machinery, with effect from 1st August each year. The 2018/19 New JNCHES pay settlement, together with an outline of the negotiation process that operated, is available on the [Universities and Colleges Employers Association (UCEA)](https://www.ucsea.org.uk) [26] website.

The background to and key features of the Framework Agreement are described by the UCEA in a [review](https://www.ucsea.org.uk) [27] of the implementation of the Agreement. The review noted the recommendations of the Independent Review of Higher Education Pay and Conditions (the Bett Report, 1999) concerning reform of the pay bargaining arrangements and also employers' desire to introduce more local flexibility into the national arrangements so that institutional pay and grading structures could be related more closely to local circumstances. This led to the creation of a new national Framework Agreement negotiated through the Joint Negotiating Committee for Higher Education Staff (JNCHES) (now replaced by New JNCHES). Following the introduction of the Framework Agreement HEIs conducted job evaluations to ensure that their pay structures conformed with the criteria for equal pay.

*Exchange rate used: €1 = £0.89, [ECB 3 August 2018](https://www.ecb.europa.eu) [28]*

**Working Time and Holidays**

In terms of employment conditions, institutions can be broadly divided into two groups: pre-1992 and post-1992 HEIs.

Many of the pre-1992 institutions (i.e. institutions which were chartered or incorporated before the [Further and Higher Education Act 1992](https://www.legislation.gov.uk) [8]) do not have specified contractual teaching hours for their academic staff, who were traditionally expected to focus on research.

For the post-1992 institutions (those incorporated after that Act), working time and holidays for academic staff are a matter for national negotiation (see the introduction to this article) but are not subject to government regulation. The nationally agreed contract of employment sets out a maximum teaching load of 550 hours over the year and 18 hours per week, although this does not apply where the nature of the curriculum and teaching style make it inappropriate, such as art, design and performing arts. This maximum teaching load assumes 36 teaching weeks and two weeks to carry out administrative duties each year. As well as teaching and administrative duties, the duties of academic staff include tutorial guidance, research and other forms of scholarly activity, assessment and curriculum development. Individual staff duties are agreed with the Head of Department and reviewed regularly through the staff appraisal process.
In addition to public holidays and other days when the institution is closed, teachers in the ‘new’, post-1992 universities are allowed 35 days’ leave, which must normally be taken outside term time and with the agreement of the line manager. For more information see the ‘post-1992’ contract of employment [29] and staff handbook agreed national text [30] (both on the University and College Union website).

**Promotion, Advancement**

Academic staff are not civil servants and their job categories and the conditions on which they are promoted are the responsibility of their employer, the individual [higher education institution (HEI)] [31]. It is common that the main levels of academic staff are divided into teaching and research (the standard lecturing post), research only and teaching only. There is a strong link between role and contract status, with teaching and research posts tending to be permanent and research-only posts tending to be fixed-term contract posts. Career paths for young academics tend to be from fixed-term contract, research posts into permanent lecturing posts. Achieving a permanent post may take a long time and involve many moves.

Through performance management, academics’ development needs for progression can be identified. HEIs’ typical performance management processes are described in the section ‘Incentives for Participation in Continuing Professional Development (CPD) Activities’ [32] in the article on ‘Continuing Professional Development for Academic Staff’.

Academic staff achieve promotion to a higher grade by successfully applying for a vacant post at a higher grade. Vacancies are advertised and both internal and external candidates may apply. However, an institution may also promote a member of staff independently of any vacancies.

With regard to progression within each grade, the Framework Agreement [24] sets out the three forms of pay progression as follows (page 14):

- Progression up to the contribution threshold for each grade, reflecting the growing experience and skill of the job holder. Staff will have a normal expectation that progression from point to point up to this threshold will take place on an annual basis, subject exceptionally to existing procedures for dealing with performance problems.
- Accelerated incremental progression, reflecting substantially greater than normal application of skill and experience by the job holder.
- Discretionary progression beyond the agreed contribution threshold.

A variety of job titles may be in use in different HEIs. To support understanding of the data it produces, the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) provides definitions of [contract levels] [33] incorporating job titles, which indicate staff roles in order of seniority:

- senior management
- head of schools/senior function head
- professor
- function head
- non-academic section manager, senior/principal lecturer, reader, principal research fellow
- team leader (professional, technical, administrative), lecturer, senior lecturer, senior research fellow
- senior professional (technical), lecturer, research fellow, researcher (senior research assistant), teaching fellow [34]
- senior administrative staff (professional/technical), research assistant, teaching assistant.
The title of ‘reader’ may be awarded as a mark of personal distinction to a senior member of staff who has made a distinguished contribution to the advancement of their discipline, by way of original research and/or innovative application. The title of ‘professor’ may be awarded to a member of staff who has made an outstanding contribution to original research over a significant period of time, and is widely and internationally recognised as a distinguished authority in their field.

Individual teachers in higher education may apply for professional recognition from the Higher Education Academy (HEA) [35]*. Professional recognition means that individual staff have completed HEA-accredited programmes or have a proven track record of experience within the UK Professional Standards Framework (UKPSF) [36]. It leads to one of four levels of HEA Fellowship. For further information, see the section ‘Supporting organisations and frameworks’ [37] in the article on 'Continuing Professional Development'.

*In March 2018, the HEA, the Equality Challenge Unit and the Leadership Foundation for Higher Education merged to form Advance HE [4], a single sector agency for equality and diversity, learning and teaching, and leadership and governance in higher education.

**Retirement and Pensions**

In terms of employment conditions, higher education institutions (HEIs) can be broadly divided into two groups: pre-1992 and post-1992 HEIs.

For academic staff in **post-1992 institutions**, the principal pension scheme is the Teachers’ Pension Scheme. This is the same scheme as for school teachers. For information on this, see the section 'Retirement and Pensions' [38] in the article on 'Conditions of Service for Teachers Working in Early Childhood and School Education'.

For academic staff in **pre-1992 institutions**, the principal scheme is the Universities Superannuation Scheme (USS) [39].

Following the introduction of a revised scheme in 2016, all members automatically join the USS Retirement Income Builder, where benefits are based on each year’s salary throughout the period of membership. Members accrue a pension of 1/75 of their salary and a cash lump sum of 3/75 of their salary for each year of service. At the end of each year, the benefits for that year are calculated and added to previous years.

USS members may also choose to join the USS Investment Builder which allows them to make additional contributions to top up their retirement savings. All contributions are invested and at retirement members can use the value to supplement their income from the USS Retirement Income Builder.

There are a number of different circumstances in which members may be eligible to receive retirement benefits. These are:

- Normal retirement. Members retiring at the normal pension age, currently 65, can take their USS Retirement Income Builder benefits in full.
- Early retirement. Members may retire from the age of 55 with agreement from their employer. Benefits under the USS Retirement Income Builder are reduced by four per cent for each year members claim them before the normal pension age of 65. In cases of redundancy, members may be able to claim benefits from the age of 50.
- Early retirement due to incapacity. A member who cannot continue working because of long-term illness or injury may receive a pension for life and a tax-free lump sum. The amounts
payable depend on whether retirement has occurred on the grounds of partial or total incapacity.

- Flexible retirement. Members may, with their employer’s agreement, take up to 80 per cent of their USS Retirement Income Builder benefits, providing they agree to reduce their hours by at least 20 per cent. With this option, members can take their benefits in two stages and continue working.
- Later retirement. Members may, with the agreement of their employer, remain in service after age 65.

Note that in 2011 the Government phased out the default retirement age of 65, meaning that employers cannot compulsorily retire their employees, unless the retirement can be objectively justified in their particular circumstances. The Equality Challenge Unit, which works as part of the organisation Advance HE [4] to advance equality and diversity in higher education institutions, provides guidance [40] on the implications of age discrimination legislation on retirement, pensions and redundancy arrangements in the higher education sector.

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