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

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

- **Equality legislation** - HEIs have a responsibility not to discriminate against students on the grounds of: sex; sexual orientation; race; religious belief and political opinion; age; disability. Rather than a single, overarching piece of legislation, these responsibilities are enshrined in a number of Acts, listed on the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland website [1].

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

**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) [2]. HE employers are represented by the Universities and Colleges Employers Association (UCEA) [3]. The New JNCHES covers all HE staff, not just those in academic roles; within this structure, the University and College Union (UCU) [4] 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:** Queen’s University Belfast [5] and the University of Ulster [6] are ‘chartered’ institutions, which means that each has a Royal Charter providing the framework for their governance. The Charter is supported by a range of statutes and regulations. Employment statutes cover redundancy, disciplinary, dismissal and grievance procedures and are incorporated into employment contracts.

**Planning policy**

Workforce planning 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) [3]. UCEA produces an annual Higher Education Workforce Survey; the 2018 [7] version reported that higher education employment levels have fared relatively well when compared to the wider economy over the past ten years.

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 website.

**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, who also do some teaching of undergraduates
- newly appointed as a teaching fellow 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) 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 classified/graded 2.1 or above (see the subheading ‘Certification’ in the article entitled ‘Bachelor’) in the subject to be taught is normally a minimum requirement and a master’s degree 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.

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. An example is available from this link on the Queen’s University Belfast 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 in UK HEIs, which came into force in July 2003. 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. **Level 1** (generally research and postgraduate teachers – 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. **Level 2** (generally 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. **Level 3** (generally 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. **Level 4** (generally 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. **Level 5** (Heads of Department or Professors): 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)* [17], full-time academic staff were paid an annual salary of £51,043 (€57,291.81*) at the median in 2018. The pay premium for higher education teaching staff over other teaching occupations has increased over the past decade with secondary school teachers earning 75% of their median earnings compared to 89% 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 2019/20 New JNCHES pay settlement, together with an outline of the negotiation process that operated, is available on the *Universities and Colleges Employers Association (UCEA)* [18] website.

The background to and key features of the Framework Agreement are described by the UCEA in a review [19] 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 [20], 13 September 2019.

**Working time and holidays**

The hours of work for academic staff are not regulated. Higher education institutions (HEIs) do not have specified contractual teaching hours for their academic staff. Teaching hours can vary according to the subject being taught and the range of teaching and learning methods involved. Institutions may however, have a general guide for the expected number of teaching hours per week; at St Mary’s University College, for example, this is within a band of 14 to 18 hours per week on average over a year.
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). 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’ [21] 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 [15] 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 [22] 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 [10]
- 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) [23], part of Advance HE [24], a sector agency whose remit includes promoting learning and teaching in higher education. 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) [25]. It leads to one of four levels of HEA Fellowship. For further information, see the section ‘UK Professional Standards Framework (UKPSF)’ [26] in the article on ‘Continuing Professional Development’.

Retirement and pensions

The Teachers’ Pension Scheme is the most common pension scheme for academic staff working in higher education institutions (HEIs) in Northern Ireland. This is the same scheme as for school teachers. For information on this, see the section ‘Retirement and Pensions’ in the article on ‘Conditions of Service for Teachers Working in Early Childhood and School Education’.

The pension scheme for academic staff working at Queen’s University Belfast is the Universities Superannuation Scheme (USS) [27].

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 one-off cash lump sum of 3 times the total benefits they have accrued. 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 outlined below.

- 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 4% 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% of their USS Retirement Income Builder benefits, providing they agree to reduce their hours by at least 20%. 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 [28], which works as part of the organisation Advance HE [24] to advance equality and diversity in higher education institutions,
provides guidance on the implications of age discrimination legislation on retirement, pensions and redundancy arrangements in the higher education sector.

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Links
[3] https://www.ucea.ac.uk/
[5] https://www.qub.ac.uk/
[6] https://www.ulster.ac.uk/home
[9] https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/glossary-75_en#Doctorate
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[22] https://www.hesa.ac.uk/support/definitions/staff
[23] https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/
[24] https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/
[25] https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/ukpsf