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into Higher Education*

Academic profession, contingent employment and career pathways during a crisis

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Disclaimer: The views expressed in this report are the authors' and do not necessarily reflect those of the Society for Research into Higher Education

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Executive Summary

This project explored the career pathways and lived experiences of academics in contingent employment (on temporary or casual contracts) during the Covid-19 crisis. Lockdown policies have led to an unprecedented employment crisis with serious consequences for professionals in insecure work (ILO, 2020). One of the hardest-hit groups is academics on temporary, contingent contracts (Collini, 2020).

There is a growing trend for Higher Education institutions to rely on temporary, contingent labour. Mirroring changes in the labour market more generally, as in the 'gig economy', contingent academics may be employed under a fixed-term or short-term contract, including zero-hours (UCU 2016).

The study followed a qualitative approach, with a multimodal research design (Bell et al, 2018). The study was multimodal, in that we collected two forms of empirical evidence: interview transcripts and mobile diaries (Greenwood et al., 2019). We conducted interviews with 45 academics on temporary contracts (teaching, research, or both), to understand their ongoing career experiences and negotiations in the short-term. We also interviewed 10 academics in managerial and decision-making positions. The interviews were combined with visual methods (photo elicitation and videos), collected through mobile diary research (Brown et al, 2010) with a sub-sample of participants for three months. Using a solicited diary, participants recorded their use of time, thoughts and feelings via a combination of written word, verbal and visual data (Rose, 2007).

Our findings are presented under four main themes:

- Impact of Covid-19 on career development
- Impact of Covid-19 on academic work
- Impact of Covid-19 crisis on belongingness, well-being and health
- Coping with the challenges of the Covid-19 crisis

Key findings:

- The precarity that contingent academics experience has been extended and transformed in the wake of the Covid-19 crisis. Contractual precarity exacerbated struggles to "make ends meet". Participants also reported psychological and affective precarity as career anxiety along with a constant threat to lives, increased. Career development became even more difficult for contingent academics, as opportunities for new, even precarious, positions and networking were greatly reduced.
- Contingent academics felt depleted of their physical and emotional resources during the Covid-19 crisis. Confined in crowded homes or where space separation is impossible, they must adapt to technological changes and accelerated workloads.
- The pandemic exacerbated the gendered inequalities that women contingent academics experience. Racialized and gender-specific biological pressures as well as the lack of welfare, child-, and elderly care systems further depleted women's resources, who bear the burden of caring responsibilities.
- Contingent academics reported a lack of support and "an element of forgetfulness" by the HE institutions in relation to contingent academic staff during the Covid-19 pandemic.
 - Despite the challenges faced, our participants developed coping strategies to counteract the negative impacts of the pandemic. These included

seeking support from peers and individual colleagues; making specific temporal and spatial arrangements that allowed them to navigate the changes at work and life circumstances; seeking and nurturing communities of coping.

- Different approaches to overall career management were adopted. Most of the participants continued to apply for short-term positions in HE. However, this resulted in (i) higher levels of stress, (ii) increased mobility with implications for personal and family life, and (iii) periods of unemployment. One-third of the participants were applying for roles outside academia, particularly in the public sector. Among those who pursued this option, concerns about transferable skills and suitability were raised. Overall, the Covid-19 crisis disrupted careers and led to identity instability.

Recommendations for Higher Education institutions:

- HE institutions need to recognise the diversity of contingent academic staff and attend to their specific needs, especially in Covid-19 recovery plans.
- HE institutions need to make sure contingent staff are included in all communications and counteract any demarcations and activities that contribute to contingent staff's sense of being non-citizens within the academic community.
- HE institutions must develop, organise and provide access to career development initiatives and training, especially for women academics.
- HE institutions need to improve the support provided for international academics who may be dependent on visa, or have no family/ peer support in the country.

Recommendations for funding bodies:

- Create a safety net for contingent academics who work on funded projects.
- Support and fund research into the future of contingent academic work is required. In particular, there is need to support research to investigate the structures and practices that allow for academic careers to be sustainable, taking into consideration the long-term impact of the Covid-19 crisis . This should also address the type of support required and transferability of skills.

Aim and Research Questions

UK universities are increasingly reliant on temporary staff (Megoran and Mason, 2020) and currently 54% of all academic staff in UK universities are in contingent employment (on temporary or casual contracts).

The aim of this project was to explore the career pathways of academics in contingent employment (on temporary or casual contracts) during the Covid-19 crisis. The UK Higher Education (HE) sector is one of the hardest-hit areas by the Covid-19 crisis, suffering great losses (Drayton and Waltmann, 2020). Although UK universities are increasingly reliant on temporary staff (Bryson, 2013), contingent academics 'have fallen through the cracks' (Collini, 2020) due to tenuous links with their institutions, and face increasing employment uncertainty.

Research Questions

This study was guided by three interrelated research questions:

1. What are the challenges contingent academics face in developing their careers in HE?
2. How do they negotiate these challenges and make sense of their career progression in HE during a crisis?
3. How do experiences of contingent employment during crisis impact on one's academic identity?

Literature Review: Contingent academic careers

The Covid-19 pandemic has had serious consequences for professionals in insecure work (ILO, 2020). The Higher Education sector has been hard hit by the pandemic crisis (Greenberg and Hibbert, 2020), and within the sector, academics on temporary, contingent contracts have been the most vulnerable (Muller and Nathan, 2020). Mirroring changes in the labour market more generally, as in the 'gig economy', contingent academics may be employed under a fixed-term or short-term contract, including zero-hours (UCU 2016). They are usually employed either for teaching and/or research duties. Their skills and qualifications vary. Many have a PhD qualification, are working towards one, or have equivalent professional or specialist experience. While academia has gone through a dramatic transformation in recent years (Dany et al, 2011) as a result of changes in funding mechanisms and increased marketization, the pandemic crisis calls into question how academic careers are structured and managed. Contingent labour in higher education manifests itself predominantly in fixed-term, sessional contracts and so-called zero-hours or hourly paid contracts, with no guaranteed hours of employment (UCU, 2019).

The consistent and widespread trend of increasing marketization of higher education in many parts of the world, whereby student tuition fees have escalated, and university management structures have become increasingly corporate-oriented has been well established and analysed (e.g., Ross et al. 2019). The neo-liberalization of universities can be understood within a wider policy context guided by adherence to free market values, profit, and corporate interests (Ross et al, 2020; Harvey 2007).

This trend is linked to the vast increase of precarious contracts in higher education and the increasing stark division between permanent and contingent forms of employment among academic staff (Stromquist, 2017). This situation, which has been described as 'the adjunct crisis' (Clark, 2019), is consistent across many countries. In 2019, contingent staff (adjunct faculty) comprised 76% of teaching faculty on the United States are part-time or adjunct (AAUP, 2019). In the United Kingdom, 54% of all academic staff in universities are on contingent contracts of employment (Vicary and Jones, 2017, UCU, 2019). In Australia too, a majority of academic staff works under contingent contracts (Andrews et al, 2016). Similar situations have been reported in other countries too (e.g., Hirslund et al. 2018), receiving less support than their full-time counterparts (AAUP, 2019).

Sadlier (2022) notes that despite this unfair and difficult situation, the voice and perspective of contingent workers are largely absent from this inquiry into their experience and advocacy. Nevertheless, there is a growing number of studies that demonstrate the material and psychological precarity experienced by contingent academics, as they have to do more with less.

Contingent academics often engage in hope labour, that is, "unpaid or under-compensated labour undertaken in the present, usually for exposure or experience, with the hope that future work may follow" (Mackenzie and McKinlay, 2020, p.1). However, they often feel unsupported themselves and dropped in at the deep end (Gill, 2014), receiving less support than their full-time counterparts (AAUP, 2019). This triggers frustration, feelings of injustice and disenfranchisement from academia (Bristow et al;

2019). Those in non-permanent, contingent contractual situations are more vulnerable to anxiety-inducing practices, such as audit, ranking and performance assessment systems.

Further, research shows how contingent academic staff experience financial hardship because they receive low pay (AAUP, 2019; Witt and Gearin, 2021); and often lack retirement and health benefits (AAUP, 2019; Murray, 2019). Some first-person accounts, both in academic (Whelan, 2021) and general publications speak of 'extreme' situations of 'suffering' where contingent academic staff had to rely on food stamps (Quick, 2014) or resort to sleeping in a tent (Fazarckerley, 2021).

Another cluster of themes revolve around the boundaries between contingent academics and academia or other academics. In this vein, studies have shown how they feel they are not treated like professionals (Bakley and Brodersen, 2018); feel isolated (Witt and Gearin, 2021; Kimmel and Fairchild, 2017) and feel as outsiders within academia (Bakley and Brodersen, 2018; Nolan-Bock, 2018). Research has also shown how they are often seen as having low engagement (Leon, 2021); struggle with workloads, lack of autonomy and collegiality (Ott and Cisneros, 2015); often experience poor mental health (Loveday, 2018; Morrish, 2019). Recently, Mason and Megoran push the argument forward and argue that 'casualization is fundamentally dehumanizing' for contingent academics (Mason and Megoran 2021, p.39).

A lack of career prospects is compounded by contingent academics' detachment from the institution/organisation, and this arguably precludes them from making a long-term commitment to one college or university (de Graaf-Zijl, 2012;). Very weak integration into the departments and institutions, dwindling academic support and limited prospects of professional development presuppose a divided workforce in higher education (Bolton, et al., 2012). Weak integration was laid bare in the first stages of the Covid pandemic in the way Higher Education institutions used the crisis as an opportunity to terminate short-term contracts (Collini 2020), implement hiring freezes and cancel new hires (Ahmed et al. 2020).

The precarity of contingent academic work is experienced differently by different groups. It has been demonstrated how academic work is organised around a male ideal (Fotaki, 2013) in the gendered neoliberal university (Acker, 1990). Women are disproportionately found in teaching and administrative roles that are less likely to lead to progression than research routes, that are masculinised (Crabtree and Shiel 2019). Levels and quality of career support are often gendered, and they influence academics' ambition and productivity (Baker, 2006). A great proportion of contingent academics are women (Vicary and Jones, 2017) who simultaneously navigate career and family demands (Lopes and Dewan, 2015) and this is also a heavily age-differentiated group (AdvanceHE, 2019). Many are young, 'early career' academics, already experiencing an 'epidemic of poor mental health' (Morrish, 2019). Women academics who have children are being particularly affected by the pandemic crisis (Shalaby et al. 2021) and sole authored articles by women are down substantially since the start of the pandemic (Flaherty, 2020).

Our findings show these transformations, exacerbated by the Covid-19 crisis, result in serious negative effects on employee well-being and barriers to pursuing a traditional academic career. Due to the shrinking job market and their lack of international mobility, Covid -19 is likely to have long-run impacts on contingent academics' career progressions (Branicki, 2020).

Our research contributes to this growing body of literature on contingent academic work by providing in-depth insights into the effects of the Covid -19 crisis on the lives and career experiences of contingent academics. Through biographical accounts, our study reveals how the Covid-19 pandemic not only exacerbated, but also created new material, affective, and spatio-temporal boundaries for precarious academics, leading to their further marginalisation within Higher Education institutions. This is aggravated by intersectional vulnerabilities, with implications for career development and management. By analysing the experiences of contingent academics in a period of crisis, this study provides new theoretical and methodological knowledge in this area, contributing to building more inclusive HE workplaces.

Methodology

The study followed a qualitative approach, with a multimodal research design (Bell et al, 2018). The qualitative approach adopted yielded detailed and nuanced data on the lived experiences of those in contingent academic careers, enabling us to locate micro-social interactions in their socio-economic context to understand the broader impacts of the Covid-19 outbreak on individuals, families, workplaces and the HE sector as a whole.

The study was multimodal, in that we collected two forms of empirical evidence: interview transcripts and mobile diaries (Greenwood et al., 2019).

Interviews

Interviews provided insights into substantive events and experiences, to form the basis of detailed consideration of the interplay between contexts and actions (Bourdieu, 1990).

A non-probabilistic, purposive sampling method was used (Guest et al., 2006), as the aim was not to achieve statistical representativeness, but to capture the anticipated heterogeneity of participant experiences and the richness of the sample population. Following the design of the interview guide we disseminated the call for participants (August-September 2020) using our existing organisational networks, including links to various universities, listservs and professional networks, such as the British Sociological Association (BSA), British Academy of Management (BAM) and British Universities Industrial Relations Association (BUIRA), and trade union networks.

We then conducted interviews with 45 academics on temporary contracts to understand their ongoing career experiences and negotiations in the short-term. Our sample consisted of academics from different disciplines and types of universities. It also reflects contingent academics' diversity in terms of contractual duties (teaching, research, or both), age group, country of origin, career stage, and personal situation. We also achieved a regional balance across the UK. This enabled us to capture the anticipated heterogeneity of participant experience and richness of the sample population rather than to create statistically representative groupings (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007). Although our call was open to all academics in contingent contracts across all disciplines, a majority of those who accepted the call for participants were women based in Humanities and Social Science Schools from various backgrounds and diversity of experience, accentuating the fact that contingent academic work is gendered.

Participant ages varied from the early 20s to the late 50s. Three participants were still finishing their PhDs at the time of the interview, while working in teaching and/or research at, at least, one university. Career stage also varied from early career academics of less than a year to more established academics, being in the sector for 17 years. Table 1 details our participants' profile.

Interviews were conducted by the PI And Co-I, online via Zoom or Teams. Interviews lasted between 25 minutes and two hours and have all been transcribed verbatim. As our call for participants was widely advertised and enthusiastically received, we also interviewed people from other countries, such as Australia and Switzerland. It is worth

noticing, however, that these are a couple of cases from countries that share similar working practices with the UK, and in this respect, they complement our sample.

We also interviewed 11 academics in managerial and decision-making positions, as outlined in Table 2. The aim of these interviews was to support and complement our sample to better understand employer responses to the management of this crisis. We recruited these participants from professional networks, and acknowledge that our access was somewhat limited, given our own career stage and positionality. Yet, we managed to achieve a sample of academics in senior and managerial positions across England and Scotland and from a variety of university types and disciplines.

As our aim was to gather vivid accounts of participants' experiences, we ensured that the questions focused on situations and activities specific to their worlds (Gioia et al, 2013). Taking career history into account, interviews focused on the impact of the Covid-19 crisis and global lockdown on participants' employment, in/exclusion from institutional support, career changes, job search processes, and skills needs and development, as well as work-life balance and psychological well-being. A narrative approach was used, with participants making sense of their experiences through narration (Czarniawska, 2004). By telling their stories, individuals interpreted events and bestow them with – or, at times, relieve them of – meaning. Interviews were analysed thematically (Braun and Clarke, 2006) using NVivo12.

Table 1: Interview participants' profile – contingent academics

Pseudonym	Country of origin	Gender	Age range	Caring responsibilities	University type *	Years in contingent roles
Amelia	British	F	21-30	2 child.; relative	1	2
Amy	British	F	31-40	None	1	7
Anne	British	F	51-60	None	1,2	6
Audrey	North American	F	31-40	None	2	2
Aurore	French	F	41-50	2 child.	1,2	17
Daniela	Peruvian	F	41-50	None	1	2
Ellie	British	F		1 child	1	6
Emma	British	F	41-50	1 child	1	7
Gracinda	Brazilian	F	51-60	None	2	10
Hazel	British	F	31-40	None	1	11
Helena	Greek	F	23-30	None	1	3
Hope	British	F	31-40	None	1	1
Hunter	British	F	41-50	None	1	3
Inez	Spanish	F	31-40	None	2	4
Jayla	Indian	F	31-40	None	1	4
Josie	British	F	23-30	1 child	1	4.5
Julie	British	F	31-40	1 child	1	10
Kaara	Italian	F	21-30	None	1	0.5
Kate	Finnish	F	41-50	None	2	0.5
Katherine	British	F	31-40	None	1	2

Kayla	Austrian	F	21-30	None	2,1	10
Kim	British/American	F	31-40	1 child	1	9
Leslie	British	F	31-40	1 child	1	3
Lucie	Australian	F	41-50	2 child.	1	12
Morgan	British	F	41-50	1 child	1	11
Nin	Thai	F	41-50	1 child	1	14
Paola	Spanish	F	31-40	relatives	2	6
Polly	Greek	F	21-30	None	1	1
Rose	British	F		Partner	1	8
Rowan	British	F	31-40	None	1	10
Sarah	British	F	41-50	None	1	5.5
Sharon	British	F	31-40	None	1	7
Stella	British	F	21-30	None	1	3
Susan	British	F	51-60	None	2	7
Theresa	Indian	F	31-40	None	2	3
Cheng	Malasian	M	21-30	None	1	9
Abid	Nigerian	M	21-30	None	1	2
Alan	Scottish	M	31-40	None	1	3
Neil	British	M	41-50	None	1	12
Anthony	British	M	31-40	1 child	1	5

Table 2: Participants' profile – HE Managers

Pseudonym	Gender	University type *	Role
Amanda	F	2	Dean
Frederick	M	1	Programme Leader
George	M	1	Interim School Director: Executive and Professional Education
Harper	F	1	Associate Dean
Hayley	F	2	Subject Associate Head of Department
Jacqueline	F	2	Associate Dean
John	M	1	Associate Dean
Miles	M	1	Deputy Director - Education & Recruitment
River	F	2	Associate Dean
Samantha	F	2	Associate Head of Department
Summer	F	1	Deputy Subject Group Head

* 1- research intensive university; 2 – teaching intensive university

Mobile Diaries

The interviews were combined with visual methods (photo elicitation and videos), which allowed for subjective experiences and feelings to be expressed outside the boundaries of language (Leavy, 2018).

Uniquely, we employed the principles of ethnographic research (Yanow, 2009) with contingent academics and engaged in mobile diary research (Brown et al, 2010) with a sub-sample of participants for three months. Using a solicited diary, participants recorded their use of time, thoughts and feelings via a combination of written word, verbal and visual data (photo elicitation and video) (Rose, 2007). This allowed for real-time expressions of emotion that could not be elicited through interviews alone (Gilmore and Kenny, 2014). It also gave participants increased voice, thereby generating powerful insights into their lived experience (Bell and Davison, 2013). Indeemo, a specialist smartphone application, compliant with ethical and data protection requirements, was used to collect diary data. We used semiotics to analyse images and video material collected (Schroeder, 2006). Given the duration and engagement needed, participants were incentivised with a £30 voucher.

Ethical Considerations

The study involved human participants, so the project required ethical approval. An application for ethics review by the PI's University Ethics Committee was submitted and research did not commence until ethical approval was granted. The interviews did not involve those younger than 18, and they did not involve any physical or psychological risk for the participants or the researchers. Informed consent, in writing, was obtained from all participants for the interviews, diary data and audio-visual recordings. To preserve participants' anonymity, pseudonyms are used in all publications. The Indeemo application used in diary research meets all ethical requirements and is consistent with GDPR issues.

The data were collected, processed, analysed and stored consistently with GDPR. For the purpose of sharing of data across the two universities, the PI university made available a GDPR compliant shared repository, based in the UK, with access limited only to the researchers participating in the process. In line with specific GDPR provisions related to research activities, the data will be stored after the end of the project to ensure future checks and re-analysis of data, made necessary by publications and revisions processes.

Findings

Our analysis of findings showed how the material and psychological precarity that contingent academics experience has been extended and transformed in the wake of the Covid-19 crisis.

We present the findings across key themes, including insights from contingent academics and managers:

Impact of Covid-19 on career development

Reports of the Covid-19 pandemic halting career development and opportunities are widespread in our findings. Changes to the job market that exacerbated the precariousness of this group of academics were also acknowledged by many of the HE managers that we interviewed. The pandemic affected the job market to the extent that even precarious jobs became unavailable, at least in the first phases of the pandemic. Most academic managers we interviewed for this study talked about how their institutions quickly implemented a hiring freeze. Many fractional, and fixed-term contracts were not renewed, with the result that many contingent academics were 'cut loose in a very hostile environment' (John, Associate Dean). The mobile diary entry below, from a woman precarious academic shows the uncertainty and lack of available jobs during the pandemic:

18 Jun 2021 · 20:52 (21:52)

I am almost at the end of my contract. 4 months and it will be ended. There is no real possibility to get it extended at the moment. There is a lot of uncertainty regarding the future. I am already looking at new jobs and it is both frustrating to not be able to find much and also not knowing what to look for outside of academia.

The career prospects for international contingent academics depending on visa sponsorship were aggravated, highlighting the intersectional vulnerabilities (Crenshaw, 1991) of our participants. As our participants reported, it was not enough if a job was advertised; it had to be a job that could support visa sponsorship. This was key for international academics, with serious implications not only for career development but also for their whole life. In some cases, not being able to have a job with visa sponsorship meant not being eligible to live in the UK, even after having completed a full postgraduate education here.

In many cases, the pandemic intensified the contractual precarity experienced and the struggles to “make ends meet” as some of the options that were available to them ceased to exist. For example, some participants on research-only contracts relied heavily on external funding, as they do not receive a salary from the institution. However, external funding was dissolved during the first phases of the pandemic. The lack of financial support has been harder for those from lower, socio-economic backgrounds or living alone.

It also became clear from our interviews that career development became even more difficult for contingent academics, as opportunities for networking were greatly reduced. Many contingent academics in our sample reflected on the digital transformation that affected their ‘usual’ mode of networking, mostly through attending conferences. Restricted mobility and many conferences either being cancelled or happening online, meant that women academics with childcare responsibilities found it particularly hard to engage in career development activities.

Academics on contingent contracts and managers we interviewed pointed to the fact that although some funding bodies put some mechanisms in place (e.g. pausing or extending reporting timeframes) more needs to be done, as the pandemic put many research activities on hold; this will have an impact on people’s experience and CVs. One of our participants specifically called on funding bodies to adjust their qualifying criteria to recognise the impact of the pandemic, such as, for example, the criteria in place to be defined as an early career academic.

Impact of Covid-19 on academic work

Participants explained how they felt depleted of their physical and emotional resources during the Covid-19 crisis. Confined in crowded homes or where space separation is impossible, they must adapt to technological changes and accelerated workloads.

Participants reported how technology complicated communication with colleagues and students resulting in longer working days. The continuous demand for online presence resulted in emotional exhaustion, disrupting the rhythms of life and careers of women contingent academics. That was even sometimes the case for those who had contracted Covid-19, with some people still having difficulties with daily activities and experiencing symptoms such as chronic fatigue, weakness, and cognitive difficulties several months later

The blurring of spatio-temporal boundaries during the Covid-19 crisis made visible and public the erosion of the fictional private-public boundaries, as work and private times, and spaces were completely conflated in lockdowns. The intensified workload brought into stark relief the gendered inequalities women contingent academics experience. Racialized and gender-specific biological pressures as well as the lack of welfare, child-, and elderly care systems further deplete women’s resources. For those women with caring responsibilities, workdays were extended to juggle work and caring responsibilities in confined spaces.

Impact of Covid-19 crisis on belongingness, well-being and health

Apparent throughout participants' accounts is the lack of support received and "an element of forgetfulness" by the university during this time. One way that this is manifested is through exclusion from institutional communications, especially in the first months of the pandemic when communications were crucial for contingent academics' well-being, sense of community and ultimate survival. The perception of not being seen and acknowledged by others may result in self-denigration, and lack of belongingness (Verhaeghe, 2012), which inevitably affects academic work and motivation.

Beyond formal communications, the Covid -19 crisis further amplified the boundaries between contingent academics and other academics in the institution. In many of our interviews, participants articulated how they felt the contingent nature of their contract with the academic institution puts them in a liminal position in relation to the academic community. Being contingent in terms of contract means is not quite part of the academic community, undermining feelings of worth, as the mobile diary entry below shows:

After juggling some caring duties and a blip of anxiety over a health investigation, I am left with a short window to complete a job application. I sent details to an informal mentor, who was so very encouraging, but I have been struck with the horror of finishing the cover letter and feeling like it's such a waste of time: that they will not be interested in my experience; that I am a useless candidate; that I would be incapable of managing anyway. After a day of tears and a long, long sleep I feel somewhat better and know I will complete it and submit today. Lots of this is tangled in mental health issues which existed well before the pandemic but have certainly been exacerbated by feeling isolated from other people at work... then again, my hourly paid work is done, so the precariousness of a limited contact means I don't really have a support network anyway.

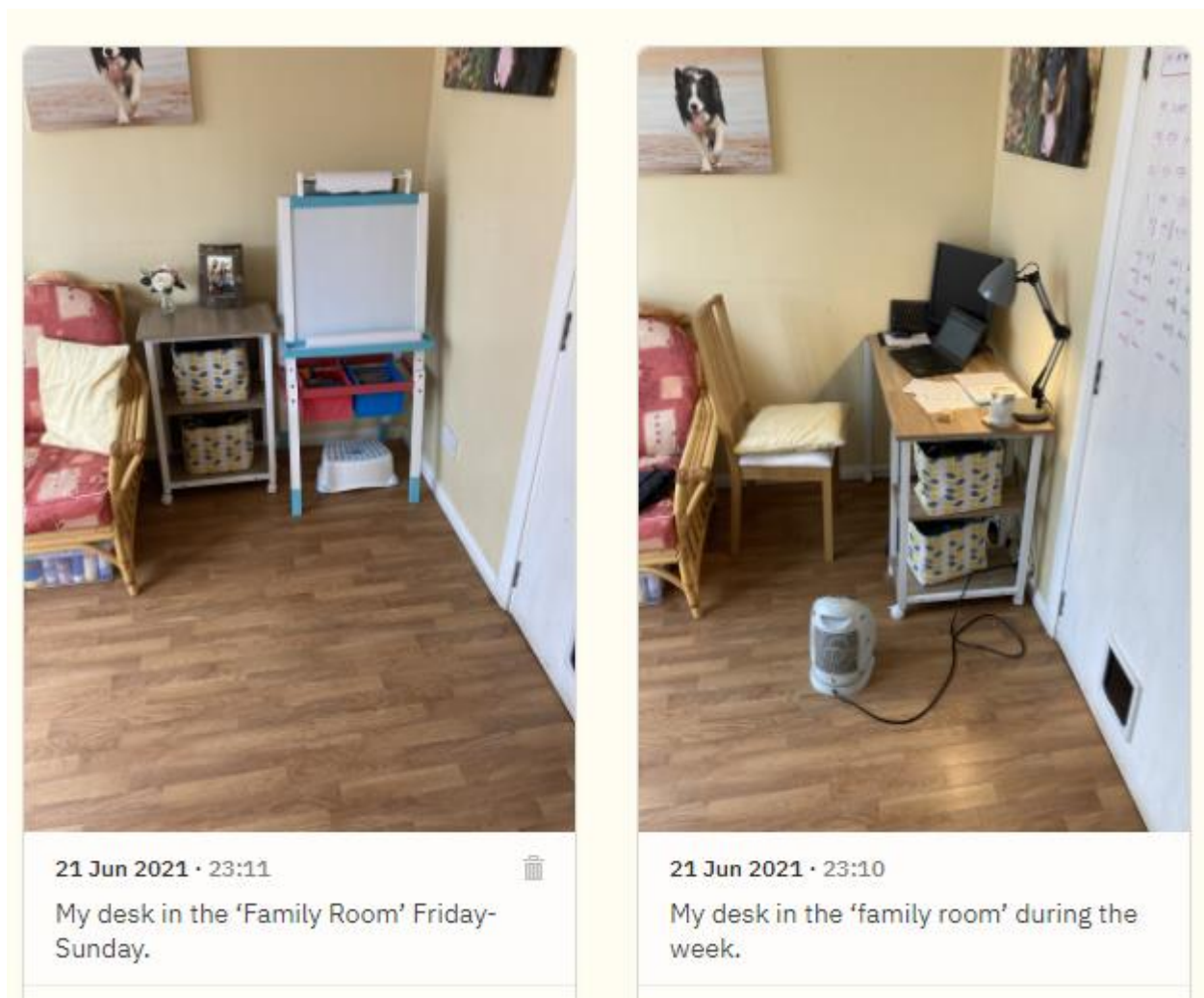
Many of our participants expressed the intense bodily effect of the Covid-19 crisis and illness and the knock-on effect on careers. Covid -19 has triggered existing conditions such as endometriosis, have been aggravated or participants suffered from long Covid. That was even sometimes the case for those who had contracted Covid-19, with some people still having difficulties with daily activities and experiencing symptoms such as chronic fatigue, weakness, and cognitive difficulties several months later. Similarly, other participants discuss how they continued to work through the pain, even though it has a debilitating effect on their ability to function. Participants discuss how in many cases there was no recognition that these people may need extra support. This is evident in the account of one of the academic managers which shows how they had little or no knowledge.

Coping with the challenges of the Covid-19 crisis

Despite the challenges faced, our participants demonstrated resilience and developed different ways to negotiate the ill effects of the pandemic.

First, despite the lack of support from the institutions (whether research or teaching intensive) , in many cases, they received support from individual colleagues who stepped up to help with workloads and communication.

Second, many participants reflected on the temporal and spatial arrangements that allowed them to navigate the changes at work and life circumstances. This was enabled by various resources and self-care actions, such as different computers/laptops for work and other aspects of life or closing doors to home offices when finishing work.



Finally, our participants talked about the importance of communities of coping. They described how engagement and communication with friends and peers, provided a space, albeit virtual, where they gathered and benefited from allowed for solidarity and support. Such reciprocal interactions allowed them to find sense of purpose in their lives, including work.

In terms of broader career development, most participants continued to apply for short-term positions in HE or were hoping for their contracts to be renewed at the time of the interview. This created uncertainty, increased material reliance on parents and/or partners, and resulted in extended periods of unemployment. This affected heavily the lives of some of our international participants who relied heavily on visa sponsorship to continue to live in the country, as explained earlier. For those able to start a new position during the crisis, this meant in many cases that they have to relocate, affecting family life. As relocation was not an option for everyone, particularly women with children, some of participants explored opportunities locally, outside academia. At the time of the interviews, one-third of the participants were applying for roles outside academia, particularly in the public sector. However, among those who pursued this option, concerns about transferable skills and suitability were raised.

Such material and affective changes impacted the identity and subjectivities of contingent academics, leading to identity insecurity and a liminal sense of self, due to the inability to secure stable identities.

Project Outputs to date

We have presented some preliminary findings of this study at various academics conferences and workshops:

- Lopes, A and Meliou E, 2021, Intersectionality and the Academic Profession: Contingent Employment and Career Pathways During a Crisis, 15th Conference of the European Sociological Association, August 2021, Barcelona/hybrid.
- Meliou, E and Lopes, A 2022, Who cares? Organizational care and the intersectional negotiations of the COVID-19 crisis of contingent academics. Academy of Management Learning & Education Paper Development Workshop November 2021, online.
- Meliou, E and Lopes, A 2022, Who cares? Asymmetries of care and the negotiations of women contingent academics during the COVID-19 crisis. Organization Studies Workshop, May 2022, Chania.

We have submitted an article drawing on this study to a Special Issue of AMLE:

- Meliou, E and Lopes, A, who cares? Women contingent academics and the ethics of care during the covid-19 crisis. *Academy of Management Learning & Education* (submitted, under review).

Planned outputs:

- Academic and practitioner papers. We aim to publish more papers to engage in broader discussions about the academic profession, contingent employment and career management. Also, we anticipate developing an article from non-academic audience that summarises our findings.

Recommendations

The findings of this study lead us to formulate some recommendations:

For Higher Education institutions

1. HE institutions need to recognise the diversity in terms of gender, ethnicity, age and ability of contingent academic staff and attend to their specific needs. These forms of work are often performed by women contingent academics, and institutions need to be attentive to and recognise their caring needs. Related actions need to be included in Covid-19 recovery plans.
2. Counteract workplace 'ostracism' (Robinson, O'Reilly, & Wang, 2013). They can make sure contingent staff are included in all communications. Efforts must be done to counteract any demarcations and activities that contribute to contingent staff's sense of being non-citizens within the academic community.
3. HE managers and HR departments can also support women contingent academics by developing, organising and providing access to career development initiatives and training, as our work has shown the extent to which many usual practices have been disrupted by the pandemic, hitting women contingent academics disproportionately.
4. HE institutions need to put mechanisms in place to better support international academics. Our research revealed challenges this group of academics experienced, which were exacerbated during the covid-19 pandemic.

For Funding bodies

1. Create a safety net for contingent academics who work on funded projects. Our findings showed how many of them depend on external funding which, in many cases, was not available during the pandemic.
- 2.
3. Review funding qualifying criteria, e.g. what constitutes an Early Career Academic, to account for the detrimental impact the pandemic has had on research activities, particularly for those on precarious, contingent contractual situations
4. Research into the future of contingent academic work is required. Most funded projects in the UK and globally from UKRI and charities include short-term research positions (e.g., postdocs, research fellowships etc). Our research shows that the rising precarity in the HE sector calls into question the accumulated benefits of short-term contracts for career development. However, there is no research looking into the sustainability of careers, following such positions. We recommend that future research be funded to investigate the structures and practices that allow for sustainable academic careers.

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