



The University of Manchester  
H34 Sackville Street Building  
Oxford Road  
Manchester  
M13 9PL

13<sup>th</sup> February 2020

Professor Dame Nancy Rothwell  
President and Vice-Chancellor  
The University of Manchester

Dear Nancy,

I am writing to you on behalf of the UMUCU Executive Committee and our UCU branch members in response to your President's weekly update on 5 December where you said the following about fixed term contracts:

*"I have received many emails from students about the current strike. I am very concerned that some wrote that most of our staff are on fixed-term (described as 'precarious') contracts. This is not the case. It is true that our PhD students are now on staff contracts (as opposed to being treated as casual staff) which we and the unions see as a benefit. PhD students are always on a defined length of contract for the duration of their PhD. Apart from PhD students, virtually all other staff on fixed-term contracts are research staff whose work is externally funded and of finite duration."*

We are aware of a number of professional support staff currently employed on fixed-term contracts, including staff from IT Services (71 staff) and staff from Library services (35). We are also aware of a number of teaching-focused staff, Language Tutors and Teaching Assistants who are not PhD students but who are employed on fixed-term contracts. All of these staff are involved in supporting students throughout their time at the University. Given that there is no sign of student numbers going down, there is no justification for these staff being employed on fixed term contracts. Current figures from HESA show the University of Manchester to have 2,180 research only staff but 2,470 total staff on fixed term contracts. We think you'll agree that this leaves 290 staff that cannot be research staff whose work is externally funded and of finite duration.

We also question the accuracy of your assertion that PhD students are always on a defined length contract for the length of their PhD. Students on scholarships have a scholarship for their length of PhD but this is not an employment contract. PhD students we have spoken to are on contracts for each specific task they complete and each time they are allocated a further task, they have to submit all their details again to HR to receive another contract.

We appreciate that you have since apologised and in your message on 9 December stated that you *"did not clearly state the value and importance of staff on fixed-term contracts who deliver great value to our teaching and research; and their inevitable concerns about their future careers"*. We urge you to learn more about the conditions under which your employees are working, and to work with us to ensure that they are all able to do their jobs well and live securely. We are still learning about the diverse employment situations of the

many fixed-term staff at Manchester (including those on 'atypical' contracts, who are not even counted in the HESA figures), but our research suggests that fixed-term status negatively impacts mental health and makes life very difficult, including for those on research contracts, as is outlined here:

[https://www.theguardian.com/education/2019/nov/29/im-striking-because-insecure-academiccontracts-are-ruining-my-mental-health?CMP=share\\_btn\\_fb&fbclid=IwAR3p2udkell2XUdUGTcQ\\_BYfX7S3mOzJy\\_lzm4NT12nqVImhtus4ezSDHA](https://www.theguardian.com/education/2019/nov/29/im-striking-because-insecure-academiccontracts-are-ruining-my-mental-health?CMP=share_btn_fb&fbclid=IwAR3p2udkell2XUdUGTcQ_BYfX7S3mOzJy_lzm4NT12nqVImhtus4ezSDHA)

In many cases much more could be done to improve job security – for example, pooling of research funds or transferring long term research staff to core funds. Our preliminary research also suggests that the Redeployment Register, as important as it is, is not always used, and that many senior staff are not aware of its existence. As of Sept 2019, 53% of jobs advertised by the University of Manchester were fixed-term as opposed to open-ended contracts. This indicates to us that far from acknowledging job insecurity as a problem for staff and students alike, you and the Senior Leadership Team are set on a path to casualise more jobs.

Our talented, dedicated staff deserve better. Please work with us to stop casualisation in areas, such as IT services and Languages where it is happening, and to increase job security for everyone working for the University and its students. We cannot truly say we are committed to Social Responsibility unless that commitment is extended to our own staff.

We and our members, with whom we will share this correspondence, look forward to your reply.

Yours sincerely,



Dr Adam Ozanne  
UMUCU Branch Secretary  
School of Social Sciences

cc. Edward Astle, Chair of the Board of Governors  
Patrick Hackett, Registrar, Secretary and Chief Operating Officer