

## Questions

*How do current trends in the employment of researchers affect career patterns, researcher development, and professional identities among social science researchers? What are the complexities behind the generic trend towards increased reliance on fixed-term contracts in the social sciences in the recent past? Has the trend continued over the past two years? Are new trends emerging? What developments and forms of action are feasible and recommendable for the future?*

The conference is supported by the Centre for Excellence in Preparing for Academic Practice and the Social Sciences Division, University of Oxford



**Research Staff Forum  
Department of Education  
University of Oxford**

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Research Staff  
Forum  
Department of  
Education  
University of  
Oxford

**Fixed-term  
employment in social  
science research:  
new directions in the  
research economy**

**Day conference**



**Date: 13 May 2009  
Time: 10am – 5pm  
Manor Road Building, Lecture  
Theatre**

## Aims

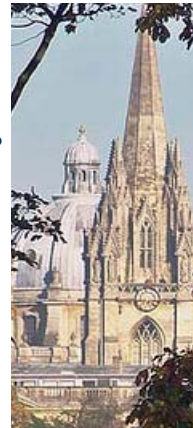
The main aim of the conference is to contribute to the development of more open and research-informed dialogue about being a contract researcher and carrying out fixed-term research in a range of social science disciplines and institutions. It will provide a forum to review existing evidence about fixed-term employment in research, from several angles: that of contract researchers themselves, and their career experiences and identities; that of institutions as employers; that of research governance; and that of the disciplines/ fields as a whole.

## Programme

10:00- 10:30 Registration and coffee  
10:30- 10:40 Introduction (Alis Oancea)  
10:40- 11:30 Occupational identity and the lived experience of undertaking contract research (Jacquelyn Allen Collinson)  
11:30- 12:20 The demographic profile of social sciences (David Mills )  
12:20- 13:00 Lunch  
13:00- 13:50 The next generation of social scientists (Lynn McAlpine)  
13:50 – 14:40 Contract researchers, career development, and capacity building (Zoe Fowler)  
14:40 – 15:00 Coffee  
15:00 – 15:50 Discussants (1. institutional; 2. professional; 3. legal; 4. public policy angles)  
15:50 – 17:00 Panel discussion (plenary)

## "Flexibilisation" of labour?

The social sciences are changing. Structural changes have stimulated new forms of research collaborations and of researcher mobility. Changes in the funding and assessment system for higher education research and the current financial constraints seem likely to contribute to increasingly transient forms of research collaboration and of employment in research. Interdisciplinary, applied, policy and consultancy research are increasingly prominent parts of the social science 'research economy'.



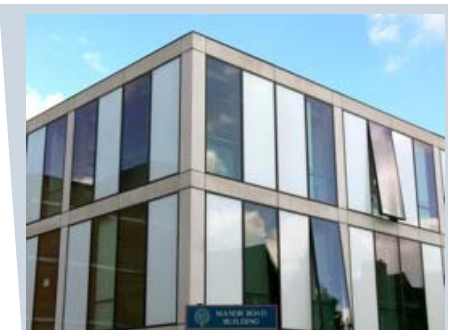
These changes have fuelled 'flexibilisation' and migration of research labour within and beyond the UK. But what research evidence is there to substantiate these trends, and what are their implications, not just for institutions and research systems, but for individual research staff, their lives and academic identities?

### What next?

Mills et al (2005: 7) noted a trend since the mid-90's of an increasing proportion of staff in the social sciences employed on fixed-term research contracts (from 23% in 1994/4, to 28% in 2003/4), with the insecurity that such contracts entail for individuals. The ESRC's Teaching and Learning Research Programme argued for more sustained efforts towards achieving better recognition of the central role ("structural status") of contract researchers in their institutions, greater visibility and increased transparency about opportunities for contract researchers, and a shift towards "inclusiveness" in the discourses, language, and moral code

of undertaking research. Over the last half decade, UK and European documents, including the 2008 UK Funders and Employers Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers have made some progress in addressing these issues, but more efforts are needed to integrate the research evidence available and reflect on directions for future action.

The proposed conference will be the beginning of a series that would bring together in a systematic manner existent interdisciplinary research on fixed-term employment in research.



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