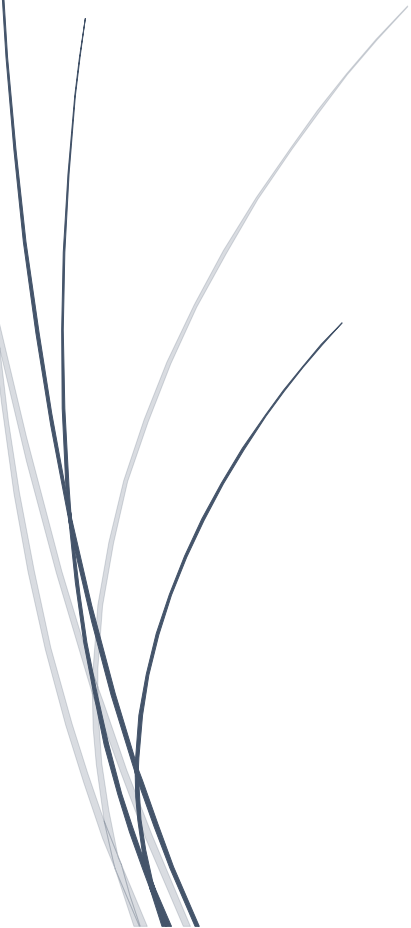




November 2019

# You Matter

The Australian Historical Association's  
Casualisation Survey



An AHA survey on casualisation within the  
History discipline at Australian universities by  
Dr Romain Fathi & Dr Lyndon Megarrity

***You Matter: The Australian Historical Association's Casualisation Survey***

**Preface**

One of the central activities of the AHA is to monitor the state of the history discipline in Australia from the perspective of teaching and research as well as fostering a wider engagement by the profession.

Toward this end, there have been several reports produced by AHA members charting the shifting conditions of employment for historians within universities and beyond them.<sup>1</sup> This report considers the major shift which has occurred in recent times regarding the employment of historians and academics more generally and that is the significant casualisation of the academic workforce.

While there are many studies on casualisation charting the reasons for its emergence – the rise of the neo-liberal corporate university; successive Government cuts; shifting University funding priorities and so on – what is missing in the information we have is the perspective from casual staff members themselves. More details are needed about the direct experience of casualisation in terms of professional opportunities, financial restraints, as well its impact on mental health and well-being. This report captures what is often not reflected in the numbers: the direct experience on the ground.

Why is this important? Regrettably casualisation is here to stay. This material clearly identifies the deleterious impact of casualisation in the short and long term, but it also suggests strategies into the future. The response to the rapid and unstoppable rise of casualisation has often led to despair of what can be done about it. There clearly needs to be a cultural shift about how casual staff members in our discipline are perceived and treated within the tertiary sector. We can start with pay, which is atrocious. A genuine career path for casual academics is also long overdue and consideration should be given to it. More broadly, this is an urgent matter for discussion to highlight the problematic conditions the next generation of historians will face. The recommendations in the report are practical, immediate and can be achieved at the local level. The report also invites further discussion of what organisations, institutions and academics can do to address the issues raised in the report.

On behalf of the AHA executive, I wish to warmly and sincerely thank the authors of *You Matter*, Romain Fathi and Lyndon Megarrity, for their unfailing commitment and dedication to producing it for the AHA. They have devoted many, many unpaid hours to it and have delivered a wide-ranging and thorough examination of the issues. Having had extensive experience as casual academics themselves, they are perfectly positioned to undertake this significant endeavour to address a serious problem confronting our profession into the future. Romain and Lyndon are to be congratulated on producing such a substantial body of work to assist us in this vital task.

I do hope *You Matter* will generate a wide ranging discussion towards achieving action.

Joy Damousi  
AHA President

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<sup>1</sup> Including Norman Etherington, “The Historical Profession in our Universities: Trends and Prospects”, *Australian Historical Association Bulletin*, no. 83, 1996; Jill Roe, “History at the Crossroads”, *Australian Historical Association Bulletin*, no. 95, Summer 2002/3; Carly Millar and Mark Peel, “Australian Historical Association 2003-4 History Curriculum Review – Final Report to the AHA Executive”, 2004; Martin Crotty and Paul Sendziuk, “The State of the Discipline: University History in Australia and New Zealand, Report to the Australian Historical Association Executive”, 2018.

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# You Matter

## The Australian Historical Association's Casualisation Survey

A report presented by Romain Fathi and Lyndon Megarrity to the Executive of the Australian Historical Association, November 2019.<sup>1</sup>

**Acknowledgements:** The authors wish to thank the 153 scholars who took the time to voluntarily provide feedback on their experiences as casual workers in the History discipline in Australia. While the survey was anonymous, they too are the authors of this report.

### I. General Background to the Casualisation Survey

On behalf of the Australian Historical Association's (AHA) Executive, Dr Romain Fathi and Dr Lyndon Megarrity conducted a survey on the experiences of casual academics in the History discipline regarding the nature of their employment, and its impact upon their career path and personal life. The initiative was designed to facilitate discussion about casualisation in the History discipline in the tertiary education sector, as well as to consider ways that permanent academic staff, university departments, the Australian Historical Association and other stakeholders could address the problems encountered by casual teaching and research staff.

In this survey, a casual position was defined as a non-tenured, non-permanent position at any Australian university or equivalent tertiary education organisation. This includes contracts which are paid by the hour, semester-based contracts, part-time and full-time contracts, and fixed term contracts. What unites each of these types of job positions is their temporary, impermanent nature. We adopted a broad definition of casualisation in order to capture all the experiences temporary work can encompass.

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<sup>1</sup> [romain.fathi@flinders.edu.au](mailto:romain.fathi@flinders.edu.au) and [lyndon.megarrity@jcu.edu.au](mailto:lyndon.megarrity@jcu.edu.au)

The survey included a question where respondents could nominate the nature of their casual work, thus allowing us to differentiate among the different types of casual employees.

Using Google Forms, our anonymous electronic survey was open for completion by casual history staff between 1 and 31 March 2019.<sup>2</sup> The survey was advertised several times in the AHA's newsletter when it was opened, through an email sent to AHA members, and it was also advertised more broadly on social media by the AHA executive, AHA members and non-members alike. The survey was opened to all casual employees in the History discipline at an Australian tertiary education institution regardless of whether or not they were members of the AHA.

There were 153 respondents who met all the requirements of the survey and it was from these responses that relevant data was collated and analysed.<sup>3</sup> The amount of data provided by the participants was significant – about 50,000 words of comments beyond statistical data. What follows is a synthetic report presenting key patterns identified in the participants' responses.

The survey report provides a fresh look at the experiences of casually paid historians in Australian universities. It also highlights constructive ideas for improving their terms and conditions of employment. Comments and suggestions from survey respondents are included in the form of indented quotations from anonymous individual responses.

### ***The changing landscape of Australia's university sector***

Painting the full picture of the financial situation of the university system in Australia is far beyond the scope and ambition of this report. However, the changing nature of Australia's university sector has had direct impacts upon casualisation in the tertiary education system, and needs to be briefly presented to give context to the findings of this report.

First, it must be acknowledged that securing a permanent position in a tertiary education institution has always been a challenge, even when the university sector dramatically expanded in the 1970s. It was and remains a highly competitive sector. However, the Australian Government's reductions to university funding during the second half of the 1990s encouraged a stronger reliance on international student fees to improve the financial position of universities, as well as a greater dependence on casualisation of staff to reduce costs.

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<sup>2</sup> Google Forms is a free computerised program designed to conduct and process online surveys.

<sup>3</sup> There were originally 156 responses. Three were removed from consideration because they were from overseas universities, whereas the focus of this survey was on Australian universities.

In recent times, the trend towards increased reliance on casualisation has continued to be marked, and is in part a reaction of administrators to budgetary pressures and upheaval in the tertiary sector. Universities Australia (UA) – the peak body for Australia’s universities – has noted that while the overall amount of funding available to universities in Australia has grown,<sup>4</sup> the nature and sources of income available for universities has been subject to rapid change. This has created uncertainty and insecurity within the university sector, and has made long term financial planning difficult. While the overall dollar figure of tertiary funding under the Commonwealth Grants Scheme (CGS) rose by 59% between 2009 and 2015 due to the then federal Government’s policy of increasing domestic student enrolment rates, funding per student (per Commonwealth-supported places [CSP]), increased by less than 1% in real terms, when inflation is taken into account.<sup>5</sup>

In late 2017, the Commonwealth Government re-introduced caps to Commonwealth-supported places (CSP) for domestic students,<sup>6</sup> encouraging universities to maximise their enrolment of full-fee paying international students, a direction which has generated some concerns within the academy.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, financing Australian universities through international student fees is exposing the Australian tertiary education system to external market pressures and fluctuations of international demand that could have negative repercussions for domestic universities.<sup>8</sup> The re-introduction of caps on government-funded places ended the demand-driven system introduced in 2010, further altering the financial landscape for universities and ushering in yet another period of uncertainty. The newest proposal flagged in 2019 is to introduce a new Commonwealth Government tertiary education policy centred on performance-based funding. The Education Minister commissioned a report, and on 2 October 2019 announced the new system for performance-based funding to be implemented from 2020.<sup>9</sup>

The major public debates on the future of the Australian tertiary sector have frequently revolved around the proportion of direct government funding into the university sector, as opposed to private contribution, or student debt (backed by

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<sup>4</sup> The stated sum represents the combination of funding coming from the public sector, the private sector and student debt.

<sup>5</sup> Universities Australia (UA), *The Facts on University Funding*, UA paper dated April 2017, accessed from UA website: <https://www.universitiesaustralia.edu.au/submission/the-facts-on-university-funding/>

<sup>6</sup> Emmaline Bexley, “Government funding will be tied to uni performance from 2020: what does this mean, and what are the challenges?”, *The Conversation*, 9 August 2019 [online Australian version].

<sup>7</sup> As tertiary education is Australia’s third largest export industry, this concern has been widely echoed in the press. See for instance: “Australian universities risk catastrophe due to over-reliance on Chinese students, expert warns”, *ABC News* [online], 21 August 2019; “Overseas students have delivered a cash bonanza to universities, but at what cost?”, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 24 August 2019.

<sup>8</sup> On international students in the Australian university sector, please refer to the Grattan Institute’s report by Andrew Norton and Ittima Cherastidtham, *Mapping Australian Higher Education 2018*: <https://grattan.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/907-Mapping-Australian-higher-education-2018.pdf>, accessed September 2019.

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.education.gov.au/performance-based-funding-commonwealth-grant-scheme>.

government through HELP, formerly known as HECS).<sup>10</sup> Indeed, since the late 1980s, the Australian Government has sought to increase the proportion of the tertiary education system's costs financed through student fees rather than through direct taxpayers' money. In addition, since 2012 and 2013, two programs that previously funded university infrastructure (buildings and maintenance costs) were discontinued, with public investment in university infrastructure declining from "almost \$1.4 billion in 2009-10 to around \$170 million in 2016-17".<sup>11</sup>

Furthermore, universities have been under increased pressure to find funding for their commitment to research beyond what successive federal governments have been prepared to commit. For instance, indirect costs not met by research grants remain a burden for tertiary administrators. In 2009, it was estimated that "universities had to find an additional 85 cents from other sources for every dollar of competitive grant funding they receive" from the Commonwealth; In 2017 UA noted that the indirect costs remained "static at around 23 cents per competitive [grant] dollar."<sup>12</sup> It should also be noted that the prioritisation of research as a measure of university status and performance has also contributed to casualisation, as permanent staff have been able to buy out teaching through research grants, or by hiring casuals for specific parts of their research projects.

In short, higher education administrators have faced and continue to face a difficult problem: sharp increases in domestic student enrolments have created a mass education system that needs to be funded (alongside other goals such as research, innovation, infrastructure and so on) while direct government support is being reined in and universities search for alternative sources of income (the international student market or private sector funding for instance). The tertiary sector in Australia has addressed uncertain levels of regular funding for research and teaching in a number of ways. As we have noted earlier, one partial solution to budget uncertainty has been the employment of casual staff as a cost-saving measure.

Casual contracts are by no means a new solution to university budgetary pressures, and have been a strong feature of academic life throughout the first two decades of the twenty-first century. However, the total number of academic casual staff has risen sharply in recent years. According to the Grattan Institute in 2018, "On a full-time equivalent basis, casual staff are 23 per cent of the university academic workforce. On a headcount basis, casually-employed academics are probably a majority of the academic workforce."<sup>13</sup> So rather than hiring more permanent staff to answer the

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<sup>10</sup> HECS, or the Higher Education Contributions Scheme was introduced in 1989 and later revamped under the name HELP, the Higher Education Loan Program.

<sup>11</sup> Universities Australia, *The Facts on University Funding*, 6.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 8. N.B. The 2009 estimate cited by the UA is from an independent 2009 report by Allen Consulting Group to the Commonwealth Department of Innovation, Industry, Science and Research.

<sup>13</sup> Norton and Cherastidham, *Mapping Australian Higher Education 2018*, 37.

demand in tertiary education, universities have increased their pool of available casual staff together with the overall volume of work that they perform.

This situation has created a degree of division between permanent and casual academic staff, with permanent staff enjoying the benefits of full-time (or permanent part-time) wages, social status, paid sick and vacation leave, career development and institutional encouragement for individual research: benefits which the casual staff, for the most part, must do without. The career path for academics is now very unclear, and many academics are trapped in what Brown et al. have called the “paradox of casual permanency.”<sup>14</sup> Echoing university trends across the globe, the academic jobs remain there, but less and less on the permanent basis that allows the individual to be secure, prosper and achieve all they wish to achieve in their career. Notably, this phenomenon has been accompanied by a significant increase of professional and executive staff roles (marketing, compliance and regulatory work, etc.).

The personal impacts of casualisation on the historical discipline is the focus of this report.<sup>15</sup> To our knowledge, this survey, given the volume of participants, is the largest survey about casualisation undertaken in the History discipline in Australia.

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<sup>14</sup> Tony Brown, James Goodman and Keiko Yasukawa, “Academic Casualisation in Australia: Class divisions in the university”, *Journal of Industrial Relations*, 52, No. 1, (2010): 169-182. The literature on casualisation in the tertiary education workforce is growing and has been consulted in preparing this section. See for example Robyn May, David Peetz, and Glenda Strachan “The Casual Academic Workforce and Labour Market Segmentation in Australia”, *Labour & Industry: a journal of the social and economic relations of work* 23, No. 3 (2013): 258-75; Kristin Natalier, Erika Altman, Mark Bahnisch, Tom Barnes, Suzanne Egan, Christine Malatzky, Christian Mauri and Dan Woodman, “TASA Working Document: Responses to Contingent Labour in Academia”, The Australian Sociological Association (TASA), 2016, available on TASA’s website: [www.tasa.org.au](http://www.tasa.org.au) ; Greg McCarthy, Xianlin Song & Kanishka Jayasuriya, “The Proletarianisation of Academic Labour in Australia”, *Higher Education Research & Development*, 36 No.5 (2017): 1017-1030.

<sup>15</sup> A broader historical and theoretical analysis of casualisation is present in Amy Thomas, Hannah Forsyth, and Andrew G. Bonnell, “‘The dice are loaded’: History, solidarity and precarity in Australian universities”, accepted for publication in *History Australia* on 30 July 2019.



## II. Data Analysis of the Responses to the Survey

### *Our respondents: statistics and demographic observations*

The 153 participants to this survey were located at 32 Australian Universities and 4 colleges, representing all Australian states, along with the Australian Capital Territory (ACT).<sup>16</sup> The substantial number of voluntary participants and their geographic locations make this survey representative of the experience of casual workers in the History discipline in the tertiary education sector in Australia. Participants were frequently engaged in performing casual work at more than one university at a time, often at two universities and, more rarely, at three or more. Similarly, some worked across disciplines, including, but not limited to, political science, languages, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander studies, Asian studies, sport studies, education, business, communication, media studies, sociology and architecture.

Of the 153 participants to the survey, 100% were in a casual position. 64% identified as female, 33.3% as male, 2% as non-binary and 0.7% as genderqueer. Two participants were of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander origin, representing 1.3% of the cohort. 78.4% of all respondents were born in Australia, while 21.6% were not.

The age range of the cohort was also gathered as part of the survey. No participant declared being under 20 years of age. Participants aged between 20 and 25 represented 3.9% of respondents, with those aged between 26 and 30 representing 20.3% of the cohort. The age bracket with the largest number of participants was the 31 to 35 age group, with 24.2% of the total respondents. Those surveyed who were aged between 36 and 40 represented 12.4% of the respondents, those aged 41 to 50, 21.6%, those between 51 and 60, 11.8%, and those aged 61 or over represented 5.9% of the participants. This means that almost half (48.4%) of the cohort sat in the 20 to 35 age group. It is interesting to note that the numbers from the 31 to 35 years old cohort are twice as large as those of the 36 to 40 years old cohort. This element, coupled with the round sandglass shape of the overall age distribution of the cohort, indicates that casual

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<sup>16</sup> No participant declared working in the Northern Territory (NT). However, we cannot conclusively state that casuals from the NT did not take part in the survey because a) a few participants preferred not naming their university and b) because other universities than Charles Darwin University have campuses in the NT, but participants generally did not disclose the campus of their respective university at which they were based. The institutions listed by respondents (in no particular order) included: Western Sydney University, Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology, Southern Cross University, James Cook University, Monash University, University of Queensland, Swinburne University, Flinders University, University of Tasmania, University of Melbourne, University of Wollongong, University of Sydney, Federation University, Victoria University, University of Canberra, University of New England, University of Adelaide, University of South Australia, University of Southern Queensland, Murdoch University, Curtin University, Macquarie University, University of New South Wales, Charles Sturt University, University of Technology Sydney, Deakin University, Australian National University, La Trobe University, Griffith University, University of Newcastle, University of Western Australia, Australian Catholic University, Melbourne Polytechnic, St Cyril's Orthodox College, Ridley Theological College, and Champion College.

work in the History discipline is mostly undertaken early on, or later on, in one's career, but much less so mid-career.

### ***Qualifications and career paths***

Among the respondents, 32.7% were PhD candidates, and 67.3% were not. Among those who were not PhD candidates, the overwhelming majority (94%) held a PhD degree. This survey indicates that about two-thirds of the casuals in the history discipline who participated to the survey held a PhD degree, a highly qualified cohort. Yet, significantly, there were great variations as to when the PhD degree was granted. Among those casuals who held a PhD, 2.9% gained their degree between 1976 and 2000, 14.7% between 2000 and 2010, 30.4% between 2011 and 2015 and 52% – over half of the cohort – between 2016 and March 2019. Casuals who gained their PhD in 2017 alone represented 18.6% of the cohort. These figures clearly indicate that casualisation is most common among those who are within 3 years out of their PhD. In fact, there were twice as many casuals with a PhD awarded in 2017 than there were with one awarded in 2016. After this three-year time frame, the number of casuals who remain in the History discipline thin up significantly.

Until a comprehensive survey on professional life post PhD is conducted, it is difficult to interpret these figures. However, given the qualitative feedback, it becomes clear that more than three years of casual work in the History discipline or thereabout post-PhD becomes untenable financially, professionally and emotionally for the vast majority of historians. Many either turn to other sectors of the economy, or become permanent members of staff in a university. Given the limited number of permanent positions in History in the tertiary education system both in Australia and overseas, the latter may represent a minority. But again, until a post-PhD life survey is conducted, it is difficult to prove this assumption given the fact that some historians who hold a PhD go straight into other professions once their doctorate is conferred, and therefore have a different experience to those who do casual work in history with the ambition to pursue an academic career. What the data indicates in this survey, however, is that most PhD history graduates who continue to be casually employed in the Australian tertiary education sector do so for about 3 years post-conferral. After that time, fewer of them appear to continue down the path of casual work in the History discipline.

### ***Volume and nature of casual work***

Of the 153 respondents, only 9.8% indicated that they were in a full-time contract position while 90.2% were not. 84.3% of the respondents were not entitled to sick leave and/or annual leave, and nearly half of them were on contract paid by the hour (46.4%), otherwise known as “claim as you go” – the most precarious type of contracts in terms of financial security. Then came those on a semester-based casual contract (37.3%), the

second largest cohort. These two categories alone represent nearly 84% of the respondents. This indicates that the most commonly shared experience of casual employment in the History discipline in Australia is the casual work with the lowest overall pay, and the lowest financial and professional stability and predictability of income. Among the other respondents, 5.2% were on a year-long fixed-term contract, 2.6% on a 2-year fixed-term contract, 3.9% on a 3-year fixed-term contract and 4.6% on a 3 to 5-year fixed-term contract.

To the question “Does your university have a policy to convert a 2 or 3-year full time contract into a tenured position?”, 1.3% of respondents responded “yes”, 29.4% “no”, and 69.3% “I don’t know”. As highlighted in the qualitative feedback, several casuals have observed that in some teaching subjects, the need for casuals to take on tutorials, lecturing and even subject coordination is recurrent year after year. This means that in some situations, there appears to be a strong case for the hiring of more permanent staff to cover recurrent teaching needs.

The case for rehiring casuals as permanent staff is further explained in a recent article in *The Saturday Paper* – published anonymously (for fear of repercussions) by a university casual. It is worth quoting at length:

Last year, a truck driver employed as a casual in the mining industry took his employer to the Federal Court to argue he was entitled to annual leave, and the court found in his favour. The case rested on the nature of his working arrangements – they were regular and predictable, with the employee working a seven-day-on, seven-day-off continuous roster, which was set in advance for a year. The court found he was not a casual employee. *Prima facie*, this decision has implications for casual academic work.

The court ruled that the “essence of casualness” is that there is “no firm advance [mutual] commitment ... to continuing and indefinite work according to an agreed pattern of work”. The common characteristics of casual work were described as irregular work patterns, uncertainty as to the period over which employment was offered, discontinuity, intermittency of work and unpredictability. Casual academic work has none of these features. If it did, the teaching programs at Australian universities would be rendered completely unsustainable.<sup>17</sup>

The above quote suggests that a key task for the AHA, academic departments and union bodies such as the NTEU is to highlight the problematic aspects of casualisation within the tertiary sector, and to advocate for the conversion of recurrent

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<sup>17</sup> Anonymous, “Casualisation of Academic Teaching”, *The Saturday Paper*, 27 July - 2 August 2019.

semester-based contracts into 2 to 3-year contracts, or even into permanent positions, be they in balanced roles or teaching specialists roles.

With regard to the nature of the work performed, 67.3% of respondents were in teaching and/or marking contracts, 19.6% in research or project assistant contracts (research for someone else), 9.2% in research-only contracts for their own research and 3.9% in balanced roles that include teaching, research and administration. Overall, nearly 87% of the work undertaken is for someone else – students or other staff – and, as such, it contributes to casuals’ professional development but not their own research footprint.

### ***Paid and unpaid work***

With regard to the amount of paid hours per week on average, the respondents indicated that 30% of them were paid for 1 to 5 hours of work, 27.5% for 5 to 10 hours, 20.8% for 10 to 20 hours, 8.5% for 20 to 30 hours, 3.3% for 30 to 38 hours, 9.2% for 38 hours (full time) and 0.7% for over 38 hours. This means that at least 21.7% of the respondents were paid for above 20 hours of work per week, while the majority of them (57.5%) are paid for up to 10 hours of work per week. However, 86.9% of the respondents declared that the hours for which they were paid required “invisible” and unpaid extra hours of work to be completed (such as, but not limited to: additional research, administrative tasks not included in their position description, preparation for tutorials which go over the preparation time for which they were paid, and spending far more time on marking than what was stated on the contract). Only 13.1% deemed that they were paid exactly the numbers of hours they had worked. This figure is alarming because it highlights the amount of unpaid and unrecognised labour that goes into casual work in the History discipline in Australia. This is one of the most recurrent observations made by this survey’s participants.

Of the 86.9% who declared working more than the hours they were paid for to fulfil the work for these paid hours, 5.9% declared that it took them less than an extra 2 hours per week, 37.8% declared it took them an additional 3 to 5 hours a week, 34.8% between 5 and 10 hours per week, 17% between 10 and 20 hours per week, 4.5% more than 20 hours per week. Altogether, at a national level, this represents a significant number of unpaid hours performed by casuals in the History discipline. Casuals often feel that they have little option but to complete these extra hours of unpaid work in order to be re-employed or to ensure future employment. Several have indicated that this state of affairs made them feel exploited, overworked and underpaid.

It is important to note that the “invisible hours” in tertiary institutions are being worked by experienced professionals. 55.5% of the casuals surveyed had been a casual in the history discipline for over 3 years (usually starting casual work before being awarded their PhD). 32% of the respondents declared having been a casual in the history

discipline for 1 to 3 years, and 10.5% for less than a year (2% answered not applicable). This means that the number of unpaid hours they perform has kept on adding up and increasing over the years: these are unpaid hours of work for which they receive no payment, no superannuation and no annual or sick leave. This also means that the majority of casuals perform over three years of casual work, though, as we observed, the majority do not continue casual work after three years post PhD completion.

In summary, the data collected and analysed for this survey indicates that for most casuals in the History discipline, their period as a casual worker commences during their PhD candidature, and sometimes continues after the PhD's conferral, usually for about three or so years. A significant number of respondents declared having entered into well over 20 contracts over the years, often juggling multiple contracts at the same time, sometimes across different institutions.

### ***Staying “research active”***

83% of respondents declared that they tried to remain “research active” beyond their casual position, while 3.3% only answered “no” and 13.7% “not applicable” – possibly the 9.2% of research-only casuals (for their own research) in addition to the 3.9% of those in a balanced role that includes research. In the 83% of respondents who declared that they tried to remain “research active” beyond their casual position, 18.2% declared that they dedicated an average of 5 hours or less of unpaid work per week for their own research, 24.6% 10 hours or less, 20.7% 20 hours or less, 19.5% more than 20 hours.

Of all 153 respondents, 22.9% combined casual work with childcare responsibilities, 9.8% with carer's responsibilities, and 2% preferred not to declare that responsibility. 7.8% of all respondents also declared having a disability which affected their casual work. Several respondents noted that these varied circumstances could have negative impacts upon their research.

### ***Support and recognition***

73.2% of respondents indicated that they had another source of income or support beyond their casual work, while 26.8% did not. Among those 73.2% who declared another source of income or support beyond their casual work, that source primarily came from another part-time job (39.5%) or from a partner (32.5%). Other sources of income included either Government pensions/benefits (10.5%) or “other” (10.5%), 4.4% from parents and/or relatives, and 2.6% from another full-time job. These findings indicate not only that casual work in the History discipline is paid below the level of the hours effectively worked, but also that pursuing this employment option will cost the casual worker further money as she or he is put in a situation where they need to subsidise their own research in the hope of securing a permanent academic position.

And for those who do not become full-time academics, this investment in a hoped-for career trajectory unfortunately does *not* bring its expected returns but instead, its cost in opportunity has to be borne down the track in terms of financial capital and superannuation, or lack thereof.

68.6% of respondents stated that they were not invited to departmental/school meetings while 31.4% declared they were invited. 62.7% of casuals were provided with a desk or office space while 37.3% were not. Thus, whilst most casuals have a space to work on campus, most, however, are not invited to take part in the life of the discipline at departmental/school meetings. Yet, ironically, among those casuals who also declared having an honorary position (33.3% of the cohort), 52.9% stated that their research was counted toward their university's Excellence in Research for Australia (ERA) rankings.

### ***What about gender?***

For the most part, gender differences in responses provided between men and women respondents were limited. Where they existed, they highlighted a difference in degree rather than in the overall nature of the specifics of their situation as casual workers in the History discipline. For instance, in general, women did slightly more paid hours on a weekly basis than men; they were also slightly more likely than men not to remain a casual for more than 3 years. Women also declared spending more hours of unpaid work on their own research than men. When indicating if they had another source of income, women were more likely than men to rank "a partner" first (F:26.5% vs M:21.6%), ahead of "another part time job" (F:24.5% vs M:39%), while it was the opposite for men. Women were more likely to have carer's responsibilities than men – 6% of the male cohort had carer's responsibilities, compared to 11% of the female respondents. Women were also marginally more likely than men to have childcare responsibilities (21.6% for men, 23.2% for women). Two women and one man did stress that casual work affected their decision with regard to having children. They commented on the lack of stable income, as well as the difficulty of predicting their future personal and professional circumstances, including their location, as factors resulting from their casual employment that prompted extra-cautiousness about committing to parenthood.

The fact that more women (twice as many as men) chose to answer this voluntary survey cannot be interpreted as clear evidence that more women than men are employed as casuals in the History discipline, because the total figure of casual workers in the discipline and their gender cannot be established with absolute certainty. In addition, we do not have a way of knowing the gender breakdown of Australian PhD graduates in history each year. Still, the discrepancy among respondents who identified as female (64%) and those who identified as male (33.3%) (with 2% of respondents identifying as non-binary and 0.7% genderqueer) indicates that nearly twice as many

women wished to contribute to the survey, perhaps because gender equality in the workplace remains an area of significant underperformance in Australia.<sup>18</sup>

Although differences between men and women in responses to the survey existed, gender commonalities were a more distinctive feature of this investigation. Overall, the fact that the differences in responses provided by men and women through the survey were often within the order of a few points of percentage indicates that the defining aspect of their experience is not framed by gender but, rather, by the nature and precariousness of casual work that affects them beyond their gender. Women and men expressed similar concerns over their working conditions, and common anxieties with regard to their career path.

In general, more “structural” aspects of casual work show remarkable similarities between women and men. There are few differences between the two genders when it comes to the proportion of casuals who are paid by the hour or hired on a semester-based contract (the majority). Slightly more women among respondents were on 1-year or 3 to 5-year contracts, but again, this is a variation of less than a few points of percentage. Similarly, the proportion of men and women in teaching and marking contracts, research and project assistant contracts, research only contracts and balanced roles was rather similar, with marginally more women in balanced roles, or on research only contracts, and marginally more men in teaching and marking contracts or research / project assistant contracts. To the question “how many ‘invisible’ hours per week do you think you do to be able to achieve the work required by your paid hours?”, men and women answered in similar ways, with women declaring doing slightly more hours. Overall there is no singularly dominant gender reflected in the types of contracts given, the work performed, or the extra hours of unpaid work needed to satisfactorily complete the work.

The real strikingly gendered distinctions that participants faced were not so much in terms of worked hours, responsibilities, nature of the contract or other “structural” matters but, rather, with regards to age and more practical issues. For instance, the largest cohort of female participants (24 respondents) was in the 41 to 50 age group, with the second largest cohort (18 respondents) aged between 26 and 30. In contrast, the largest male cohort (17 respondents) was represented by the 31 to 35 age group, and then, in second (13 participants) by the 26 to 30 age group. Given the age groups and the most commonly shared years of PhD conferral in the female and male groups, female respondents to this survey were more likely to have started a PhD later on in life.

In addition, while 41% of male casual workers stated that they were invited to departmental/school meetings, this was only the case for 25% of female respondents. Indeed, while the majority of casual staff are not invited to departmental/school

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<sup>18</sup> Australian Human Rights Commission, “Face the facts: Gender Equality 2018”, <https://www.humanrights.gov.au/our-work/education/face-facts-gender-equality-2018> accessed September 2019.

meetings, it is even more so the norm for women. Another marked difference between men and women when being a casual staff in the History discipline has to do with the provision of a desk or an office space. 70% of male respondents were provided with either, a ratio which falls to 61% for women. While many of the realities of casual employment are relatively evenly experienced by men and women in the History discipline in Australia, in this cohort men were more likely to be integrated to the life of their schools/departments than women through the provision of a desk and higher rates of invitations to discipline/school meetings. There is therefore a case to be made for History departments/schools to be more mindful about the career and work needs of the female casual workers they employ, and the importance of providing them with equal access to office space and invitations to discipline meetings.<sup>19</sup>

Among the three respondents who identified as non-binary and the respondent who identified as genderqueer, none declared that their non-gendered identification was a source of discrimination, nor could their answers be the basis for definitive statements about the experience of other non-binary and genderqueer individuals. One non-binary participant, however, pointed out that in their experience women were more often encouraged to take up unpaid labour presented to them as “opportunities”.

### ***What about discrimination?***

Two participants were of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander origin, representing 1.3% of the cohort. In their responses, neither discussed their origin as being a positive or negative factor with regard to working as a casual in the History discipline, nor could their answers set them apart from more general trends identified in other respondents’ responses. Similarly, the 21.6% of respondents who were not born in Australia did not report facing discrimination. One respondent, however, declared that being a recent migrant meant the absence of social and professional networks, making their situation even more precarious and difficult. It is important to note that the survey did not specifically ask participants to comment on discrimination based on their ethnic or national origin. While the qualitative open-ended questions at the end of the survey provided a space for participants to comment on this issue if they chose to, they were not directly invited to reflect upon it in their responses.

The types of discrimination which were reported in the survey did not in fact relate to individuals’ backgrounds but, rather, pertained to the casuals’ working conditions and their age. At the intersection of gender and discrimination, two female

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<sup>19</sup> A recent report found that women in the Australian tertiary education sector face significant levels of abuse and discrimination. See the Australian Women’s History Network (AWHN) working group’s report by Katherine Ellinghaus, Nikki Henningham, Andy Kaladelfos, Alana Piper, Laura Rademaker, Anne Rees, Jordana Silverstein, Mary Tomsic and Naomi Wolfe: AWHN, “‘It destroyed my research career’: survey of sexual and gender-based discrimination and abuse in Australian Academia”, July 2018, <http://www.auswhn.org.au/awhn/sexual-gender-based-abuse-discrimination-academia-australia-survey/>, accessed September 2019.



participants in the 51-60 age group experienced age discrimination, with one reporting: “As an older ECR [early career researcher] I have faced age discrimination where younger casual colleagues are prioritised for opportunities”.

Many casuals, both men and women, also felt that the inequality of treatment between permanent staff and casual staff was a type of discrimination. One used the term “discrimination” while many more shared personal stories and experiences to express unjust, prejudicial or just plain indifferent treatment based on their casual status. These reported situations ranged from the symbolic (e.g. not having one’s lecturer position appropriately acknowledged on a conference name tag because of its temporary nature), to the exploitative (e.g. unfair loading of unpaid extra work). Again, while clearly the personal experiences of individual casuals varied in some respects, it is essentially their position of casual worker and all the negatives they associated it with that is the defining common experience.

### ***Profiling the typical casual in the History discipline today***

Overall, among the 153 participants in this survey, the typical casual worker in the History discipline is a woman, born in Australia, who is not of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander origin. She works at a university, is aged somewhere between 31 and 35, and received her PhD in 2017. She is not in a full-time position, is not entitled to sick leave or annual leave, is paid by the hour (claim as you go) for her teaching and marking contracts, does between 1 and 5 hours of paid work per week, with an additional 2 to 5 extra hours of unpaid “invisible” work, and has been employed in a casual position for over three years. She remains research active by dedicating ten hours or less of unpaid work for her own academic research, has another source of income or support through another part-time job, has no carer or childcare responsibility, does not have a disability, is not invited to departmental/school meetings, but is provided with a desk or an office space.

If women-only completed surveys (98 in total) are isolated from the survey’s results, the typical profile is different. The typical respondent who identified as female is born in Australia, is not of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander origin, works at a university, is aged between 41 and 50, holds a PhD, awarded in 2018, is not in a full time position, is contracted for teaching and/or marking, is paid by the hour (claim as you go), does between 5 and 10 hours of paid work, has been a casual worker in history for over three years, is equally as likely to do between 2 and 5 hours of extra unpaid work through “invisible” hours as she is of doing 5 to 10 unpaid hours, remains research active with 20 hours or less of unpaid work on her own research, has another source of income or support through a partner, is not in a situation of disability or handicap, is not invited to departmental/school meetings, and is provided with a desk or an office space.

As for the typical respondent who identified as male (51 in total), he is born in Australia, is not of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander origin, is aged between 31 and 35, holds a PhD awarded in 2017, is not in a full-time position, is contracted for teaching and/or marking, is paid by the hour (claim as you go), does between 1 and 5 hours of paid work, has been a casual worker in history for over three years, mostly does between 2 and 5 hours of extra unpaid work through “invisible” hours, remains research active with 10 hours or less of unpaid work on his own research, has another source of income or support through another part time job, does not have a disability, is not invited to departmental/school meetings, and is provided with a desk or an office space.

### III. The Personal Impacts of Casualisation: A Qualitative Analysis

#### *Positive Experiences of Casual Employment*

The flexibility of class preparation hours suits me well. I enjoy teaching, and this is one way to incorporate it into work without being in front of a class all day every day - I don't think I could manage that. The variety of work involved being a research assistant also appeals to me. I've learned a lot about different aspects of academia - including service and administration - that I did not get through the PhD. I like the ad hoc nature of the research I do for my supervisor.

Overall, responses to the survey's question "What are the positives about your casual work experience?" were by far much less developed (about 2,800 words in total) than those to the question "What are the negatives about your casual work experience?" (about 8,300 words). Several participants questioned the relevance of being asked about the "positives" of casual work, one writing: "There are no positives to exploitation." Nonetheless, most survey participants listed a number of positive aspects of their casual employment. Overall, these included:

- Gaining experience in teaching and administration at tertiary level
- The flexibility of casual working hours
- Making a contribution to student development
- Income to support research
- Library access and institutional affiliation
- Travel opportunities
- Working on new and interesting projects
- Collaborating with other academics

While pragmatic considerations, such as getting a foot in the door of academia, featured prominently within survey responses, participants also valued the idea of being part of an academic community and expressed a strong commitment to face-to-face teaching. A sense that casual staff can make a difference to the world, and to the academic growth of their students, provides a tangible sense of self-worth for many casuals:

[I value] The chance to teach and the students I interact with ... engaging with undergraduate students and seeing them progress; building the academic CV. I have been very lucky to work with academics that are aware of the difficult nature of casual contract work and work with me to ensure I am only doing the work I am paid to do. It has also provided me valuable work experience.

On the other hand, as one respondent reported, the positive feelings associated with casual academic employment can be tinged with uncertainty about the future:

I really do enjoy teaching. I love working with students. It's a challenge but very rewarding ... I've been lucky enough to teach in courses that correlate to my research interests, and usually for staff who I have a friendly professional relationship with ... There are positives with the flexibility in regards to time (though this can also be a negative...) ... Even reflecting on the positive feels bittersweet though. Each course I approach with the mindset that it will be my last ...

### ***Negative aspects of casual employment***

These days the price of working in academia is years of casual work, lots of free labour, and a huge investment into preparing for a career that you are most likely to never have. This creates a situation where people regularly offer you “opportunities”, which are good for a CV, but which are underpaid and overworked. It reinforces a hierarchy between casuals and full timers, regardless of the integrity of the work performed by them.

Many of the negative experiences mentioned in the survey results will come as no surprise to those who have followed the debates on the casualisation of the university sector.

Among the major themes are:

### ***Job insecurity***

It was highlighted that contracts were frequently offered just before the start of the semester, and, at times, even when the semester had already started. This makes it difficult to make long-term plans for one's career, home life and family. Casual staff also noted the long periods over the summer break when no teaching or marking is contracted. The insecurity of casualisation is further demonstrated by staff feeling compelled to snatch each opportunity that comes up, and feeling powerless to disagree with marking and other teaching decisions for fear of never being asked to teach again. That same feeling made some respondents reluctant to discuss the terms of their contract and their pay rates with their employers.

### ***Drawbacks of casual conditions of employment***

The vast majority of casual staff are unable to access sick leave, annual leave or university parental leave; there are no guarantees of further employment; and no institutional acknowledgement that the casual staff member has career plans that might need guidance or nurturing. Casuals have limited access to support from universities for attending conferences, applying for research and teaching grants, and other academic activities.

12 participants out of 153 (7.8%) had a disability or illness which affected their casual work. These participants often explained that the inability to access sick leave and other permanent benefits is a concern to them. Several also highlighted practical issues of concern:

Departments need to take seriously their responsibilities, and recognise that hot desking is a specific source of problem for disabled people - I require very specific conditions and cannot waste time every morning setting them up, especially as not all desks will be suitable for my needs. I have been routinely ignored on this, seen as trying to flout regulations or playing some special needs card as an irritant.

### ***“Invisible” work, and hours that are unpaid***

For reasons ranging from professional pride to fear of losing a job, many casual academics feel compelled to ignore the advice of some permanent academics, which is to “only work the hours you are paid for.” In reality, providing useful feedback to students often takes more time than the small amount of time allotted for each student. Similarly, in order to maintain high standards, many casual staff spend unpaid time conducting necessary academic tasks. These duties include student consultations, answering student emails, mastering online teaching platforms, attending lectures without pay at the request of the course convenor, dealing with academic misconduct related to individual students, subject-related staff meetings, class preparation (e.g. reading course materials and developing lectures and tutorials), and writing reference letters. Each participant in the survey had different experiences, but most could relate to the following example of a “suite” of invisible work and hours:

Answering copious student emails, encountering students in the corridors and expanding many minutes (sometimes an hour) providing FREE help and advice, trying to get paid - our web kiosk system requires a lot of time and patience to enter hours so you can actually get paid!! Marking! - we get paid very little for a task that

requires time and care. I would, on average, spend 30mins or more on a student essay providing considered comments and assigning a fair grade when I only get paid for 15. We are provided very little professional development, so I spend my own time developing techniques, strategies etc. to enhance my teaching practice.

One participant wrote that in her experience, gender played a role in how much invisible work an early career researcher on a casual contract was expected to do:

Huge amounts of professional service - organising seminars, sitting on committees, running reading groups, organising conferences, mentoring more junior scholars. I also do a large amount of media work which is enormously time-consuming and unpaid (though probably not “invisible”). Obviously this is all highly gendered - so often I see women and femmes, including myself, being encouraged to be grateful for “opportunities” that are actually unpaid labour with limited, if any, career benefit. The male ECRs I know have significantly fewer “opportunities” of these kind.

### ***Lack of recognition and status within the wider academic community***

Despite good will on both sides, there is a strong professional divide between permanent and casual staff. With institutional attention and policy firmly focused on permanent staff, there is little social or cultural recognition of the skills and long-term experiences of casual employees and the benefits that come with them. Some casual staff noted the failure of the system to value their thoughts and suggestions regarding teaching and learning. Indeed, the lack of recognition and status can lead to casual staff feeling isolated and not really part of the academic community. This can be all the more frustrating as tasks performed by casual and permanent staff are often similar (tutoring, marking, topic coordination etc.).

### ***Challenges to career progression***

Marking, teaching and research assistance are time consuming. It is difficult to make progress on a book or article that might improve one’s employment chances because teaching preparation and marking gobble up much of the casual staff member’s available hours. Of course, this is a challenge for many permanent staff as well, but for casuals there is often no real career pathway which might lead to more secure, permanent or semi-permanent work. Instead, many casual staff become stuck in a repeated cycle of casual contracts, keeping academic ambitions alive but because of the nature of casual work, finding career advancement difficult to achieve:

I need paid work in order to access child care. So without a job, I cannot get child care and therefore also cannot do my own research. But teaching work doesn't leave a lot of time for my own research, so I end up stuck in a loop of low paid teaching jobs and it's difficult to move on to research positions when I can't publish prolifically.

### ***Stress***

Casual work often creates great stress. In the age of casualisation, keeping alive your dream of being an historian involves juggling many balls in the air, including the need to secure sufficient income to pay the bills, the need to find time to pursue historical projects while maintaining a heavy casual workload, as well as constantly living with a sense of insecurity and precariousness. The instability and uncertainty of casualisation has created intense anxiety for many casual staff. Further, the lack of a career path that comes with going from contract to contract each semester can be demoralising, especially when combined with the fear that the work will dry up one day. As a participant explained:

The precarity has a huge effect on one's life - I think it severely harmed my mental health and also my ability to make long-term commitments to anything or anyone. My life was really on hold for a long time post-PhD. I still feel like I'm not a proper member of my department, and that no one views me as a proper member. The undervaluing of work and expertise; the ways that bad jobs are lumped on me; the ways that I can't speak up or assert myself because I need future employment. Casual work is a blight, it harms people's lives.

Other aspects of this precarity were highlighted by participants, such as the difficulty to obtain a credit card or a loan. As one participant explained: "The bank won't lend me money, I don't have any clear future and it makes 10+ years of post-grad education and language training seem futile". Low superannuation (or not being able to consolidate superannuation when working across different sectors) was also identified as a source of great concern among the respondents.

### ***Mental health***

Many studies have demonstrated the impact PhD candidatures can have on mental health, and the recommendations they issue can also apply to post-PhD life while pursuing an academic career as a casual. Well-being and mental health were issues openly discussed by a small but significant proportion of respondents. But there were also stories of just getting by: in other words, the difficulties of surviving financially

and emotionally as a casual staff member. Those stories can be difficult to tell in an environment such as academia where scholars seek to be at their best and where a plethora of buzz words such as “striving”, “excellence”, and “world-leading” permeate the air, creating self-restraint and even guilt and isolation among some respondents. One noted:

My mental health has been destroyed over the last few years due to the stress of constant work and the chronic anxiety of precarity. I have suffered from clinical depression, anxiety, disordered eating and ongoing suicidal ideation. I have lost relationships and not had the time or energy to establish new ones. I feel constantly humiliated and infantilised at work, as I desperately try to convince someone - anyone - to give me an ongoing job. *Despite my three degrees, despite my multiple awards, despite my long list of publications and years of service to this profession, I am still treated like a dispensable workhorse who will be discarded without second thought the moment my contract runs out.*

Yet while I am struggling to cope with this situation, I feel immense pressure to be seen to be “coping”, due to the ableism that pervades academia. In a fiercely competitive game, in which our currency is our brains, I am terrified to risk admitting that my brain is in anything less than tiptop shape. I am exhausted from performing competence and calm while inside I am a hot mess of fear and shame.

These experiences - which are widespread and structural - debase my and our humanity.<sup>20</sup>

But a similar proportion of respondents discussed their love and passion for history, research, teaching, primary sources. In fact, the same participant quoted above also explained:

First, I love researching and writing history. I love the thrill of discovery new stories in the archives, the intellectual challenge of mounting an argument, and the craft of writing.

Second, I believe in the importance of history. Our world is in crisis and we need to understand, more than ever, how we got to this point. It is critical that we historicise and thereby denaturalise the status quo, and also that we expose the alternatives and paths not taken from the

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<sup>20</sup> Italicised by the authors of this report. This part of the quote goes to the heart of the survey: individual academic achievement can become lost in the academic community because of the low status of casual work.



past. This is hugely important cultural work and I can think of no better use of my time.

In many ways, this scholar's testimony reflected a more general trend of people who are dedicated, passionate and convinced by the moral and ethical necessity of education, research and history. Nevertheless, these same people often find themselves faced with the dilemma of remaining in casual work indefinitely, or, alternatively, giving up their passion for teaching and research and finding a more secure job in another profession.

### *Casual Work: The Personal Impact*

**In summary**, it is the uncertainty, the precariousness, and the disproportionate amount of work being performed vis-à-vis its pay which make conditions of casual employment so difficult to manage. For many respondents, casual employment is designed to be a stepping stone towards full employment, and is often the only stepping stone available to many emerging academics. But casual employment is subject to the finances and the shifting priorities of university administrations, as one respondent pointed out:

Often you will not know if there is any work on offer until a week or so before semester starts ... This makes it very difficult to plan out your budget and your own research schedule. Sometimes, you may wish to hold out to see if you are offered any work, but if you are not, then you may have left your run a bit late to try and find other sources of income. It just means that there is a constant fear and insecurity when it comes to finances ... Our university is currently experiencing broad curriculum changes that are sudden and brutal, taking even the academics by surprise. When such restructuring occurs, casual staff and prospective students hoping to obtain scholarships are the first to be struck off the list as the money dries up.

#### **IV. How can Academic Institutions and other relevant organisations support casual staff in the History discipline?**

This section reflects on but also builds upon survey responses. These suggestions did not come up as a result of the aforementioned question being asked in the survey. Rather, they emerged in the qualitative open-ended questions section of the survey where respondents came up with ideas as to how the casual staff's working conditions and experiences could be improved by existing bodies and organisations.

##### ***What role could casual and permanent academics play to address casualisation?***

Isolation and atomisation of the workforce, together with fear of repercussions, are key factors which enable some universities to impose unfair working conditions on casual workers. Greater awareness at the department level regarding the realities of casualisation may remedy to this situation to some degree. Indeed, keeping the lines of communication open between casuals and permanent staff members is vital. At school or department level, casuals as a whole group could gain from formally discussing the nature of contracts and the problems associated with casualisation with the school or department (preferably as part of the departmental meeting process).

It is important at this point to acknowledge that institutions don't conspire against casuals. Rather, the employment of casual staff at universities tends to focus on cost-saving considerations: the professional development of casual academics is generally not an institutional priority. Barely any respondent indicated that their institution invested in their long-term development. Furthermore, with the types of contracts assigned for teaching and marking, employers are generally not bound to do so. Although it is unlikely that casuals in the History discipline could change the casualisation model under which universities operate, regular and committed discussion of casual terms and conditions at the departmental level by all stakeholders may have an incremental impact upon the contracts which casual staff sign and the negotiated benefits associated with them.

Ways must also be found to allow casuals to pursue the research which is vital both for individual career prospects and the intellectual diversity of the discipline. For instance, casuals should identify if their research is counted toward the ERA ranking of their school. They should identify the rate of casuals' research put forward in the school's most recent ERA submission. This may provide an incentive for the school to set up funding schemes (conferences, publication etc.) to financially support and recognise casuals' research, as some participants suggested.

Several participants discussed group solidarity as being a key means to better the work conditions of casuals. But some also highlighted that solidarity should not exclusively be observed among casuals but also be practised by those in permanent positions:

Senior people need to recognise how much worse the job market has become, and refuse to participate in enforcing casualisation. It shouldn't be seen as the default, first-choice option. Other fields offer more postdocs, and then more continuing positions. The same needs to become true for History. Senior people need to be offering more positions that go for at least one year, and have proper entitlements (proper super & leave). There just needs to be more support in general, more solidarity from the top down.

While some participants have highlighted the supportive and mentoring role of permanent staff, some have also indicated, as per the testimony above, that permanent staff should be more mindful about casuals' employment conditions. Permanent staff are in a position where they can support casuals, and voice their concerns with far fewer repercussions than there would be for casuals themselves. Arranging for casuals to be paid for consultation times with students (and other tasks for which they are not currently remunerated) is a practical action which can be taken by permanent staff when they request casual teaching from their school. Some permanent staff are proactive in making sure that the casual staff they work with are paid fairly, but some participants also indicated that more solidarity between permanent and casual staff would improve the workplace for everyone.

### ***What about the Australian Historical Association?***

The AHA is the peak national organisation of historians – academic, professional and independent – working in all fields of history. In general, participants were positive about the fact that the AHA organised this “Casualisation Survey” and wished to advocate for better working conditions for casuals. It was also highlighted that the AHA counts casuals and ECRs among its Executive, representing a degree of diversity with regard to professional conditions among historians. Several participants highlighted the efforts made by the AHA to support casuals in history, and ECRs in particular, with the AHA's ECR blog, the AHA-Copyright Agency Early Career Researcher Mentorship Scheme, and the Jill Roe Early Career Researcher AHA Conference Scholarship Scheme. Participants also made suggestions as to what the AHA could do beyond existing programs to support casual staffs in history. Some of the most constructive of recurrent suggestions proposed that the AHA:

- 1) Voice the concerns of casuals in the academic workforce more proactively
- 2) Lower its membership price in the “Concession: Casual” category
- 3) Encourage the formation of casual networks

- 4) Through its various means of communication, publicise jobs for historians not just in the academic sphere but in the private and government sectors; and alert AHA members not just to job vacancies in permanent positions but also to what is available in terms of short term contracts, research work and so on.
- 5) Lower the casual concession rate to facilitate attendance at the AHA's annual conference.

This report recommends that each of these suggestions be considered by the AHA's executive and responded to in view of passing relevant motions at its 2020 Annual General Meeting.

### ***What about the National Tertiary Education Union?***

Several participants expressed diverging views on the NTEU. For instance, a participant noted that the "NTEU is now advocating for more secure contracts and for clearer pathways to conversion to permanency", while another expressed their disappointment with the union in relation to casual staff in the university sector. Overall, about 10% of the respondents explicitly recommended to "join the NTEU" or to "join your union" in order to secure better work conditions for casuals and to "agitate for change". These participants expressed the view that getting involved with the union or providing feedback to the union was an important element in improving casuals' working conditions. At the national level, unions or other bodies could also campaign to influence government policy to consider levels of casual work in the academic sector when funding each university, whereby universities setting up a good example with lower casualisation rates, attractive work opportunities for emerging and mid-career historians, and better employment practices, would be incentivised financially by the Federal Government.

### ***What about Graduate Research Schools or similar bodies within universities?***

In recent years, some universities' graduate schools have developed seminars and workshops to prepare their graduates to the job market beyond the academic sector. This was driven by government's focus on employability and PhD candidates' demands for such programs, and has also been happening at faculty, department and school levels. While these are positive initiatives, participants' responses suggest that 'reality checks' ought to be conducted early on with aspiring historians. PhD candidates should be informed as early as possible of the extreme difficulty of securing a permanent position in academia, and of the nature of casual employment, as well as the need to think carefully about their future plans. While it is an individual's responsibility to secure information about their career's path, established historians and higher education institutions share a collective responsibility to provide PhD candidates with factual information about their prospects of becoming an academic historian. When PhD candidates get into what some have described as the "trap" of casual teaching, they can

develop a level of disenchantment towards academia and wish that they had known beforehand of the job market situation in the academic sector. This bitterness could be avoided if universities and Graduate Research Schools were more pro-active in connecting current candidates and recent graduates to alumni or others who have successfully made the transition from doctoral studies to full-time professional work. These links to the historical profession and other research-oriented vocations will undoubtedly assist ECRs to identify useful mentors and be more strategic in their search for work. In addition, seminars/workshops are needed for PhD candidates and ECRs to prepare them for job opportunities both within and outside academia.

## **V. Keeping mind, body and soul together: advice to present and future casual staff *from* casual staff**

Know your worth and don't be afraid to speak out if you are overwhelmed or not receiving the support you would like. Talk to other casual workers, share your grievances, and remind yourself of the things you love about the work you are doing. If you can't think of any, leave. Don't let the tantalising wages keep you locked in a cycle of precarious work and an uncertain future, especially when the people you are working closely with and who care about you are often not the ones with any control over your future.

We have discussed some constructive ways to change attitudes towards casual staff and improve conditions. Some reforms can be easily adopted by institutions because they are symbolic, others will involve big changes in cultural attitudes and financial policies, a process that will take years. While we continue to fight for change, how can casual staff keep mind, body and soul together? The survey's participants were not shy about offering suggestions. These included:

- 1. Don't blame yourself for structural issues:** Casualisation has become a norm at most universities, and much of the uncertainty and poor conditions is currently based around that system of casualisation, a situation which is not your fault. Some advocate joining the National Tertiary Education Union to fight for casual rights. Others advise that if you want to hold on to your dream of being an historian, the reality is that you must be prepared to accept the inevitable financial and emotional stress that comes with casual work. There is no comfort in knowing that it is a very tough sector yet discussing these issues with peers can alleviate the feeling of isolation and alienation at times felt by casual staff, and perhaps promote the development of collective strategies to ensure fair treatment and remuneration.
- 2. Think positively and be kind:** There isn't much point going into competition with other academics for limited resources. Forming networks, participating in departmental seminars and developing support groups are activities which will make a difficult semester more bearable. Take pride in yourself and your achievements, and don't make university the only thing in your life that gives you self-worth.
- 3. Know your worth:** Don't do anything without payment, and speak out if you are not receiving the support you need to do your job. Realise how important your work is and take pride in it. Keep focused on your goals.

- 4. Decide on your purpose and plan your career path:** Many casuals advise that you need to be strategic in thinking about your career. Casual work may ultimately lose its appeal when other things in your life, such as family, need to become your main priority. Go into the casual system with your eyes open and with a clear timeframe. Casuals also advise that you should decide how long you are prepared to endure the uncertainty of casual life and develop a back-up plan if you are unable to continue work at university. University itself can be a training ground that gives you experience in a range of skills such as handling the media and managing people. These skills can lead to other career paths backed up by additional training. Remember that there are careers outside academia that can use your skills of writing, research and teaching. With a PhD, you are a rare and valuable product on the job market.
- 5. Take care of your mental health:** You need to avoid doing too much work. If you do too much, then you risk burning out, and losing sight of other important things in your life. Be assertive and stand up to the pressure – both externally and internally – to do more work than is appropriate for your work-life balance.
- 6. General advice:** Survey participants also had a number of suggestions for casual academics as they navigated employment prospects. For example, casual staff need to keep striving to publish research, because otherwise their careers could stall. Furthermore, there was a sense that it is not what you know, it is who you know that counts. If you keep in touch with people at the department, and tell them of your availability, you may have a better chance at gaining employment than those who have not made time to make those links.

## VI. The Casualisation Survey Report's Recommendations

- 1. Pay casuals more fully for what they do:** Student consultations and mastering online teaching platforms both take time which should be acknowledged financially in each contract, along with other 'invisible' casual tasks such as attending meetings and lectures (by request of the co-ordinator). Payment for marking and teaching (preparation time in particular) should also adequately reflect the time spent on each task.
- 2. More certainty and job security overall:** Longer contracts which allow for payment during semester and teaching breaks would increase job security. A university administrative culture which issues contracts well in advance of the beginning of semester would also be beneficial. This would avoid situations where casuals are not paid until a number of weeks into semester and where they cannot commit to other work opportunities or make research travel plans until they find out about casual employment at the university.
- 3. Greater levels of support for academic careers and job pathways for casual staff:** This would involve greater understanding and empathy for the aspirations of casuals to work full-time in the profession. Increased numbers of paid Honorary Fellowships for recently completed PhDs would provide some acknowledgement of professional goals, as would the reduction of fees for casuals to participate in conferences.
- 4. Acknowledgement of casualisation's impact on research productivity:** The Australian Research Council and other grant-funding organisations need to acknowledge and take into a consideration the fact that casual teaching is intensive and has an unavoidable impact on the capacity to produce research and publications. In addition, individual research hours should be granted within teaching and research contracts so that the employee is encouraged to remain 'research active'.
- 5. Offer more permanent jobs:** Departments should offer more permanent part-time contracts when work is of an ongoing nature, rather than going through a continual churn of casual contracts each semester. Creating permanent positions should be a financial priority for universities, given that casual work is insecure and poorly remunerated, yet increasingly relied upon by the tertiary education system.



- 6. Greater acknowledgement by permanent staff and institutions concerning the commitment, experiences and knowledge of casual staff:** Consultation on teaching and curriculum design, team teaching and sharing skills and experiences are all possible means of helping the casual worker feel committed to the subject, their colleagues and their institution. Initiatives that may help casual staff feel acknowledged and valued include the provision of small research grants to help casuals remain research active, the active promotion of the achievements of casual staff by departments, as well as putting casual staffs' names and photos on university webpages and departmental boards, without indicating that they are casual staff.
- 7. Institutions need to take active steps to ensure that the endemic culture of casualisation is reduced, and where casual work is unavoidable, the terms and conditions need to be improved for the casual worker.** For example, to reduce casualisation levels, a greater number of postdoctoral opportunities and permanent positions could be made available to train staff. With regard to future terms and conditions of casual employment, longer lead times for casual contracts and mentoring/paid training for teaching roles are institutional reforms which could and should be implemented by universities.
- 8. Providing financial incentives for casual staff to credit their publications to the university.** When a casual staff member's publications are counted as part of an ERA submission, the school or the university should provide some financial support toward research costs, conference attendance and publication.
- 9. That the AHA's executive discuss and report on the following five suggestions made by survey participants as to how it can further support casual staff in history:** i). Voice the concerns of casuals in the academic workforce more proactively; ii). Lower its membership price in the "Concession: Casual" category; iii). Encourage the formation of casual networks; iv). Through its various means of communication, publicise jobs for historians not just in the academic sphere but in the private and government sectors; and alert AHA members not just to job vacancies in permanent positions but also to what is available in terms of short term contracts, research work and so on. v). Lower the casual concession rate to facilitate attendance at the AHA's annual conference.
- 10. That the AHA organises another survey on life post PhD in History.** It is important that those who engage in a PhD in History are able to see where PhD graduates have taken their lives and career to after completion. The proposed PhD survey could include questions on employment, salary levels, the pros and cons of having completed a PhD in History, etc.

**11. Make the casualisation panel or stream a permanent feature of the AHA's annual conference.** The "casualisation" panel or stream which has been a welcomed addition to the AHA's annual conference in recent years should become a more permanent feature of the annual conference. Such a stream could become a space for casuals to discuss their conditions and whether or not universities have made efforts to address casuals' concerns. It is recommended that the panel proposes one or two key suggestions per year to implement nationally in order to incrementally reform casuals' employment conditions.

## VII. Final Remarks

If you are passionate about academic work then be prepared to earn very little for the thought and effort you will give to this work. Be prepared for financial and emotional stress each semester, not knowing whether or not you will be offered work. Be prepared to be intensely frustrated by demoralising bureaucratic and administrative processes. Many of your students will appreciate your scholarship and passion which may keep you going back for more. Get together with other casual academics and attempt to challenge the gross underpayment and under-acknowledgement of casual academic work.

As stated elsewhere, the issues surrounding casualisation discussed in this survey are generally not new. A 2008 report on casualisation for the Australian Learning and Teaching Council stated that “sessional teachers make a significant but largely invisible contribution to the quality of teaching and learning in higher education” and noted that “many sessional teachers continue to feel their contribution is undervalued.”<sup>21</sup> That this theme continues to resonate with so many people is testament to the continued struggle by casual staff to make their voices heard in a system that largely privileges permanent staff. We hope that our report will act to increase understanding of casualisation in the historical profession, and to highlight possible ways and means of ensuring that casually employed historians feel that their good work matters to their institution and those outside it. Ultimately, this report affirms the fact that casual staff matter as both individuals and academics:

*You matter.* Whenever you can and have the emotional energy to do so, demand your right to exist and to be taken seriously. Lift others up.<sup>22</sup>

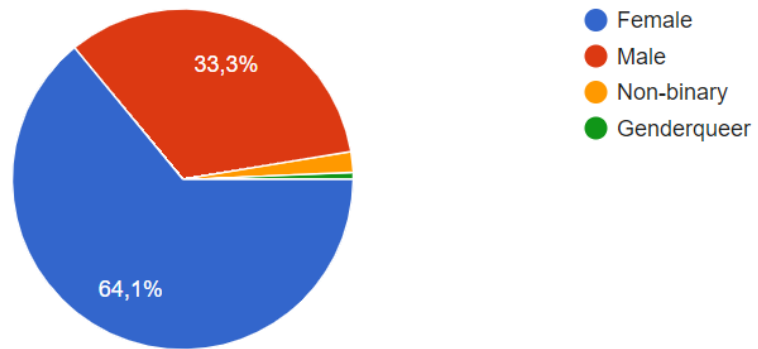
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<sup>21</sup>A. Percy et al., *The RED Report, Recognition – Enhancement – Development: The contribution of sessional teachers to higher education*, Sydney: Australian Learning and Teaching Council, 2008: 1-2, <https://ro.uow.edu.au/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=https://www.google.com/&httpsredir=1&article=1139&context=asdpapers>.

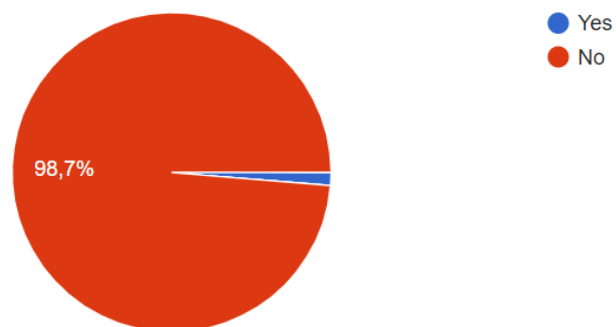
<sup>22</sup> Italics added to the respondent’s answer by the authors. The title of this report (You Matter), also originates from this quote.

## VIII. Appendix A: graphs illustrating survey results

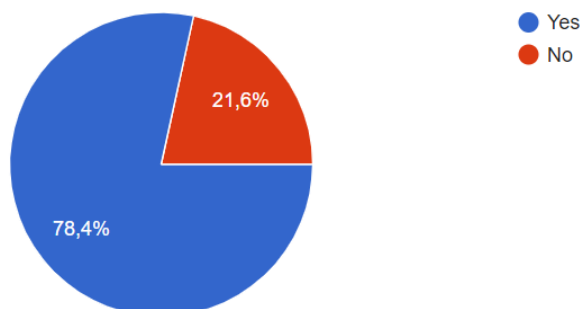
What gender do you identify with?



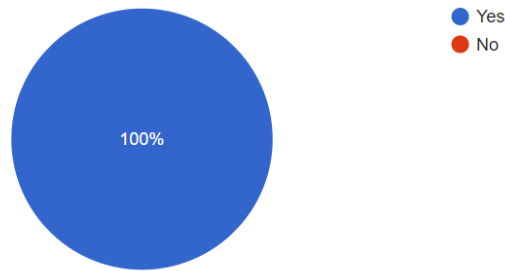
Are you of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander origin?



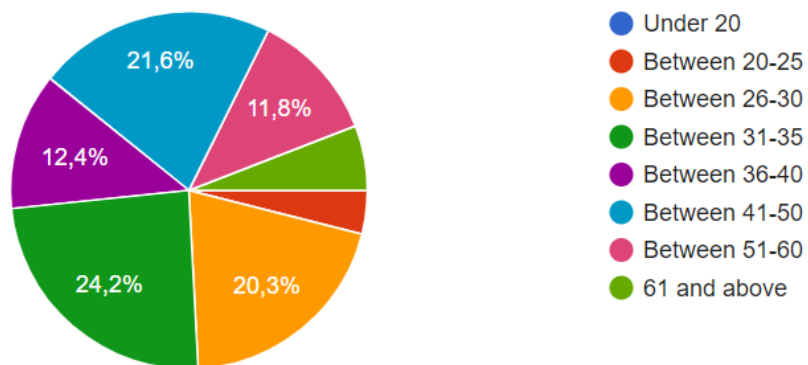
Were you born in Australia?



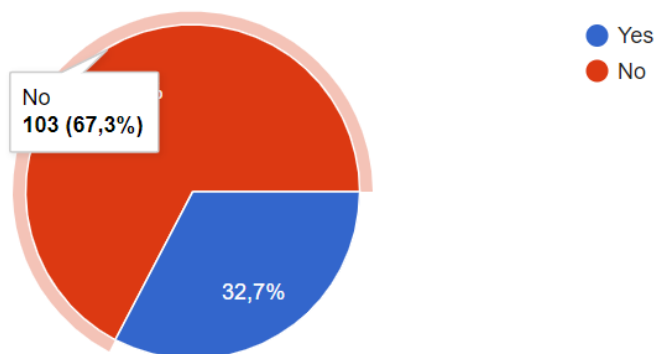
Are you in a casual position? In this survey, a casual position is understood as a non-tenured position (non-permanent). If you answer 'no' please note that you will be taken back to page one of the survey as this survey is designed for people currently in a casual position. If you answer 'yes', you will be able to continue on



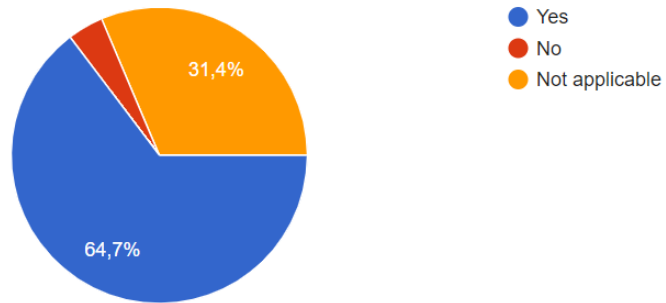
What is your age?



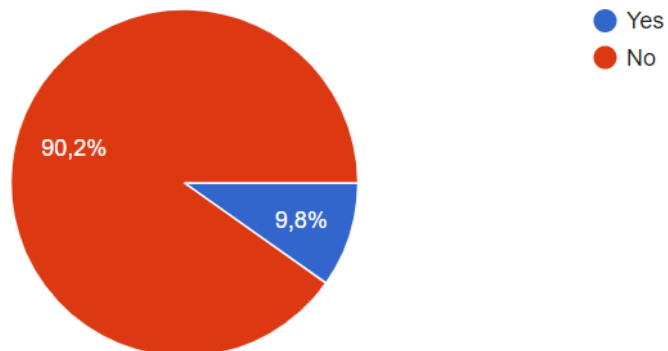
Are you a PhD candidate?



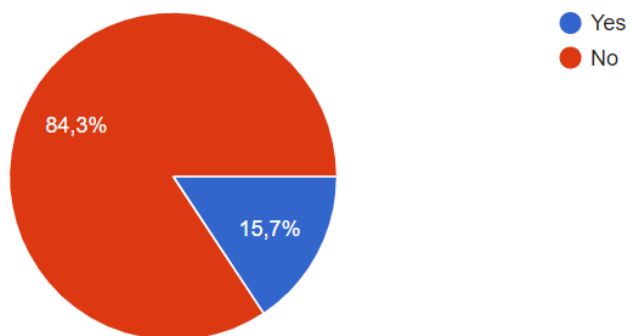
If you are not a PhD candidate, have you completed a PhD in the past?  
(if you are a PhD candidate now, please answer 'not applicable')



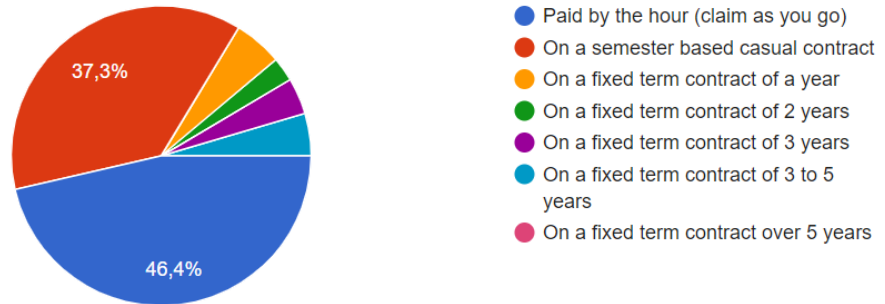
Are you in a full-time position?



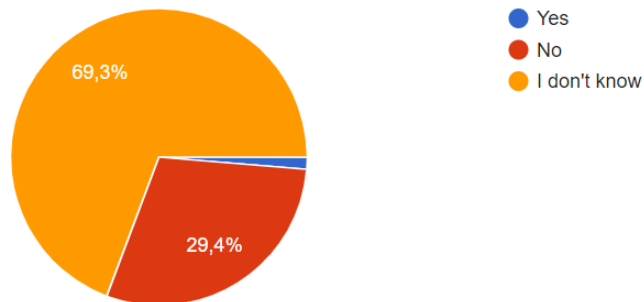
Are you entitled to paid sick leave and annual leave?



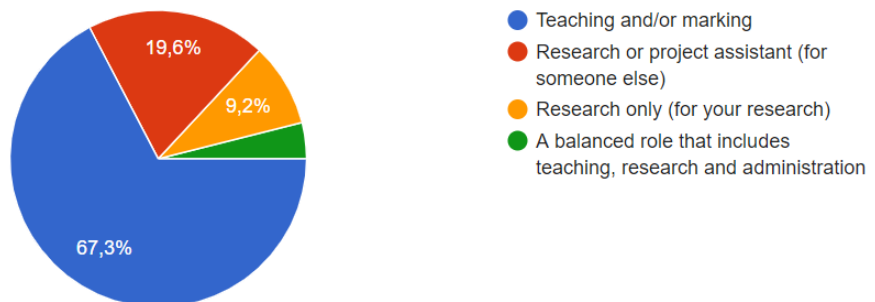
Currently, are you in a casual position that is: (choose one)



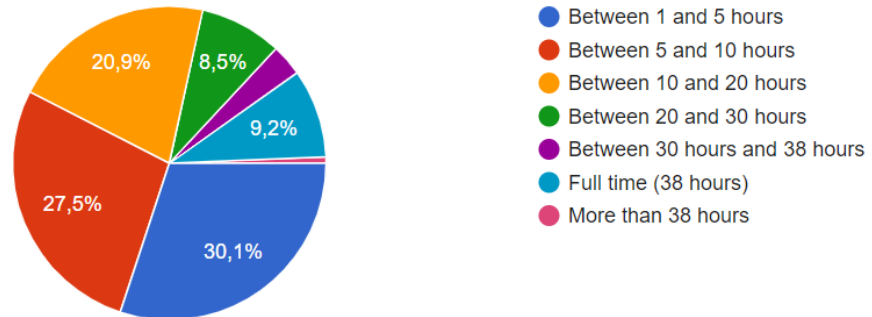
Does your university have a policy to convert a 2 or 3 year full time contract into a tenured position?



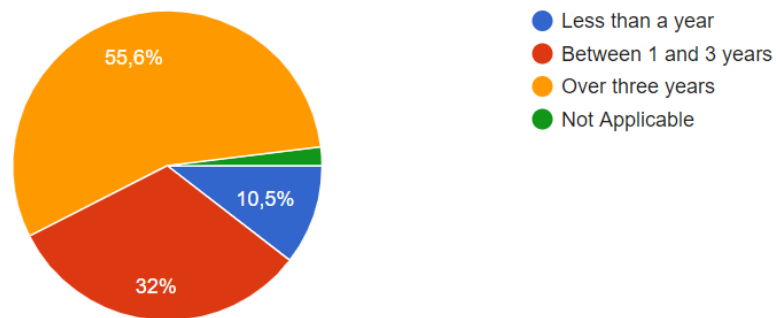
Currently, is your casual position in: (pick one)



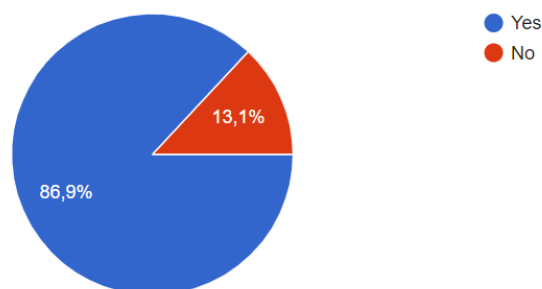
On average, how many hours per week are you paid for in your current casual position in History?



How long have you been employed as a casual staff member in the history discipline?

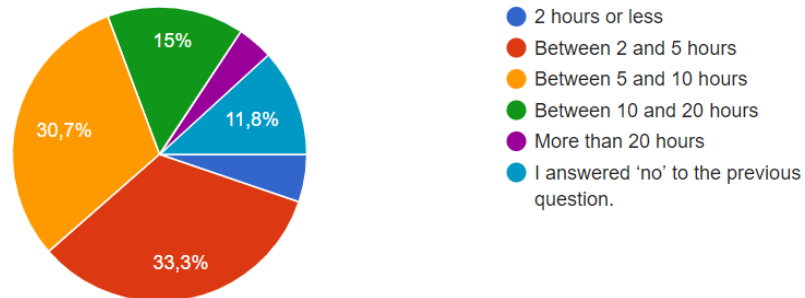


Do you believe that the hours you are paid for require 'invisible' and unpaid hours of work to be completed? (such as, but not limited to: additional research, administrative tasks not included in your position description, preparation for tutorials which go over the preparation time you are paid for, spending more time on marking that you are paid for.)

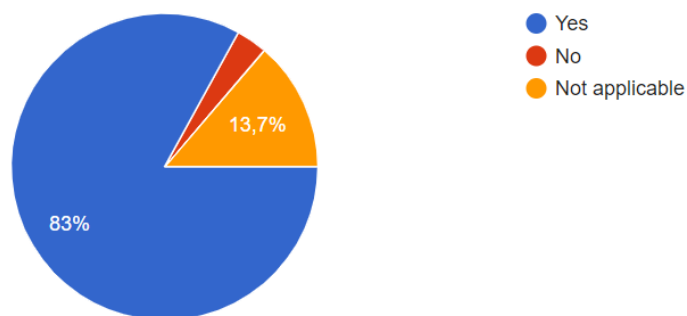




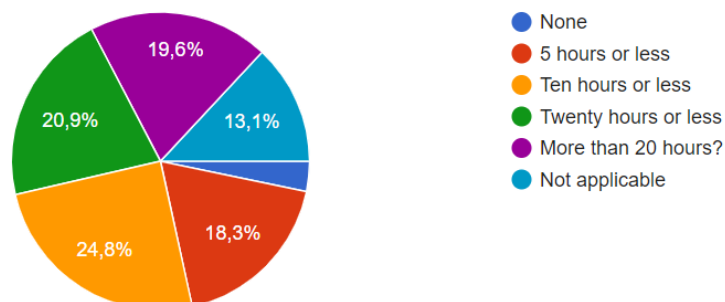
If you answered yes to the previous question, how many 'invisible' hours per week do you think you do to be able to achieve the work required by your paid hours?



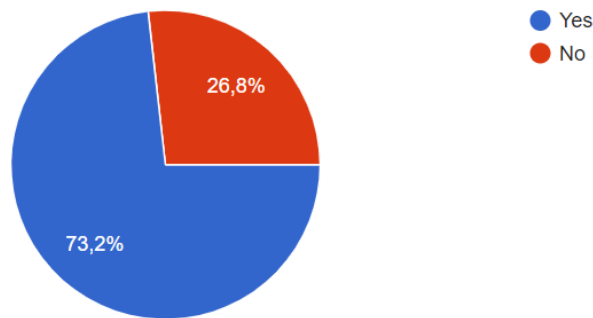
Do you try to remain 'research active' beyond your casual position (Answer 'Not Applicable' to this question if your contract is research related)



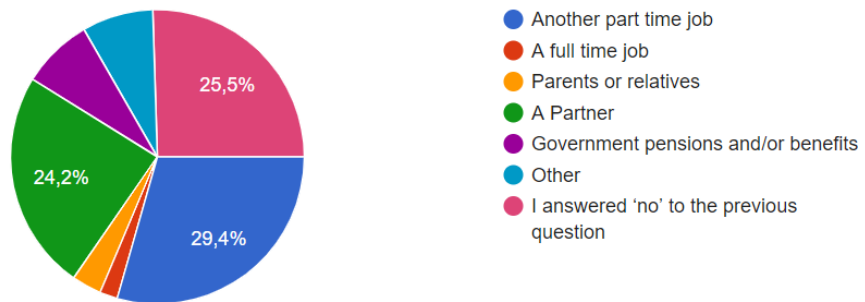
How many unpaid hours per week on average do you dedicate to your research? (Answer "Not Applicable" to this question if your contract is research related)



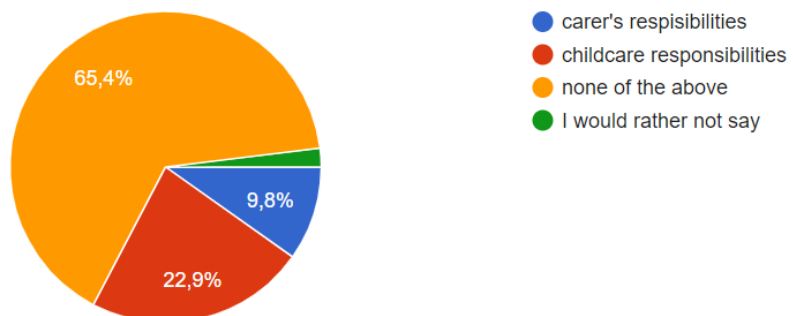
Do you have another source of income or support?



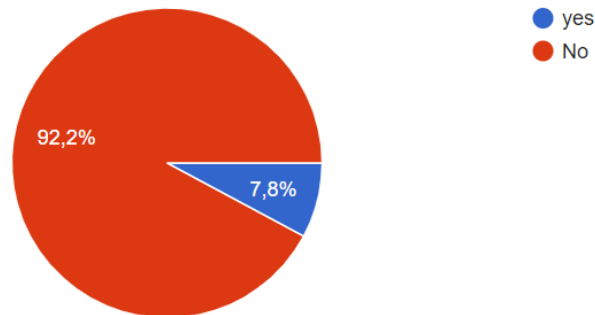
If you have answered 'yes' to the previous question (Do you have another source or income or support?), please select that source of income among the following options:



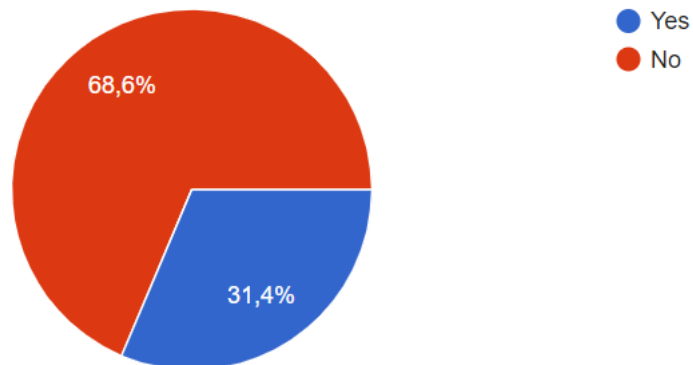
Do you combine casual work with:



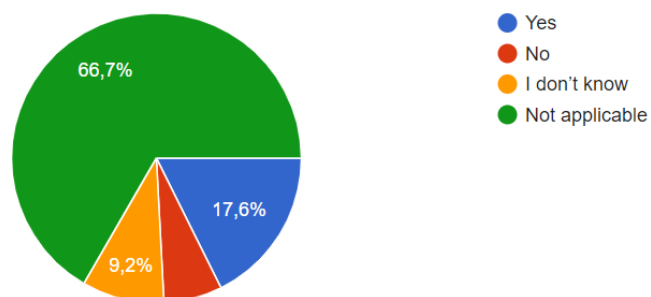
Are you or do you identify as being in a situation of disability and/or handicap which affects your casual work?



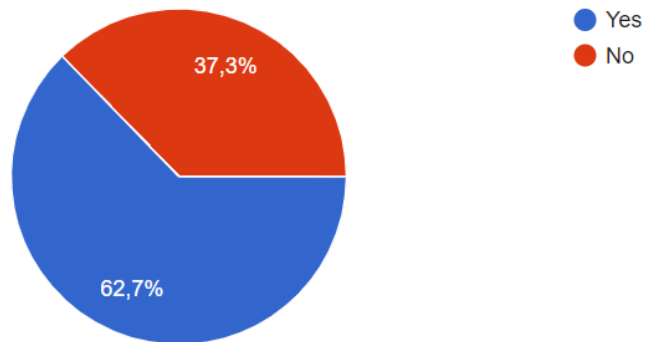
Are you invited to departmental/school meetings?



If you have a honorary position, is your research output counted towards ERA submissions in the discipline?



Are you provided with a desk or an office space?



## IX. Appendix B: the survey's questions

### Casualisation Survey (History)

#### Casualisation Survey (History)

##### Purpose of the survey:

- To gain more direct understanding of the experiences of casual academics regarding the nature of their employment and its impact on their career path.
- To consider ways in which problems encountered by casual teaching and research staff could be addressed.
- To facilitate wider discussion regarding casualisation among the History profession and beyond.
- The survey is specifically designed to identify and address issues relating to casualisation within the history discipline at tertiary institutions. Nonetheless, casual staff whose tertiary training has been chiefly in the field of history and who are currently working in other disciplines or workplaces are encouraged to complete those questions that apply to their circumstances.

##### Terms and Conditions:

Answers provided to this survey are anonymous. This survey is conducted by Dr Romain Fathi and Dr Lyndon Megarrity, on behalf of the Australian Historical Association Executive. Romain and Lyndon are current members of the AHA Executive Committee (2018-20), Teaching and Learning Portfolio. Once the survey is closed, it will be deleted from Google Forms and the CSV file will be retained by Drs Fathi and Megarrity on a password protected platform until they have produced a report or other material for the Executive Committee of the AHA, after which time (or shortly thereafter) the file will be erased. It is the goal of the AHA to make public the report obtained from the data. The Executive Committee may also wish to publish information in journals or media outlets about the outcomes of the survey. By taking part in this survey you agree to these terms and conditions. While the survey is anonymous, there are many questions where you can provide qualitative answers. We do not wish to limit the scope of your answers. However, be aware that if you provide details of particular incidents or stories, it is possible that other people aware of those incidents would be able to identify you.

##### N.B. How the term 'casual position' is defined in this survey:

In this survey, a casual position at an Australian university or equivalent organisation is understood broadly as a non-tenured position (non-permanent). This includes contracts with work paid by the hour, full time and part time contracts, semester based contracts, or fixed term positions regardless of the length of the contract.

It is anticipated that a report on the survey be submitted to the AHA's Executive Committee in December 2019 for release in the new year.

#### \*Compulsory

##### 1. What gender do you identify with? \*

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##### 2. Are you of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander origin? \*

Yes

No

##### 3. Were you born in Australia? \*

Yes

No

4. What tertiary institution/s are you affiliated with? \*

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5. Are you in a casual position? In this survey, a casual position is understood as a non-tenured position (non-permanent). If you answer 'no' please note that you will be taken back to page one of the survey as this survey is designed for people currently in a casual position. If you answer 'yes', you will be able to continue on \*

- Yes  
 No

## You have identified yourself as being in a casual position and can continue with the survey

6. What is your age? \*

- Under 20  
 Between 20-25  
 Between 26-30  
 Between 31-35  
 Between 36-40  
 Between 41-50  
 Between 51-60  
 61 and above

7. Are you a PhD candidate? \*

- Yes  
 No

8. If you are not a PhD candidate, have you completed a PhD in the past? (if you are a PhD candidate now, please answer 'not applicable') \*

- Yes  
 No  
 Not applicable

9. If you hold a PhD, in which year was it awarded to you? (if you don't hold a PhD qualification, please answer 'not applicable')  
Enter year or NA \*

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10. Are you in a full-time position? \*

- Yes  
 No

11. Are you entitled to paid sick leave and annual leave? \*

- Yes  
 No

12. Currently, are you in a casual position that is: (choose one) \*

- Paid by the hour (claim as you go)  
 On a semester based casual contract  
 On a fixed term contract of a year  
 On a fixed term contract of 2 years  
 On a fixed term contract of 3 years  
 On a fixed term contract of 3 to 5 years  
 On a fixed term contract over 5 years

13. Does your university have a policy to convert a 2 or 3 year full time contract into a

- Yes  
 No  
 I don't know

14. Currently, is your casual position in: (pick one) \*

- Teaching and/or marking  
 Research or project assistant (for someone else)  
 Research only (for your research)  
 A balanced role that includes teaching, research and administration

15. On average, how many hours per week are you paid for in your current casual position in

- Between 1 and 5 hours  
 Between 5 and 10 hours  
 Between 10 and 20 hours  
 Between 20 and 30 hours  
 Between 30 hours and 38 hours  
 Full time (38 hours)  
 More than 38 hours

16. How long have you been employed as a casual staff member in the history discipline? \*

- Less than a year
- Between 1 and 3 years
- Over three years
- Not Applicable

17. How many contracts have you had? \*

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18. Do you believe that the hours you are paid for require 'invisible' and unpaid hours of work to be completed? (such as, but not limited to: additional research, administrative tasks not included in your position description, preparation for tutorials which go over the preparation time you are paid for, spending more time on marking that you are paid for.) \*

- Yes
- No

19. If you answered yes to the previous question, how many 'invisible' hours per week do

- 2 hours or less
- Between 2 and 5 hours
- Between 5 and 10 hours
- Between 10 and 20 hours
- More than 20 hours
- I answered 'no' to the previous question.

20. Do you try to remain 'research active' beyond your casual position (Answer 'Not

- Yes
- No
- Not applicable

21. How many unpaid hours per week on average do you dedicate to your research? (Answer

- None
- 5 hours or less
- Ten hours or less
- Twenty hours or less
- More than 20 hours?
- Not applicable



22. Do you have another source of income or support? \*

- Yes
- No

23. If you have answered 'yes' to the previous question (Do you have another source or income or support?), please select that source of income among the following options: \*

- Another part time job
- A full time job
- Parents or relatives
- A Partner
- Government pensions and/or benefits
- Other
- I answered 'no' to the previous question

24. Do you combine casual work with: \*

- carer's responsibilities
- childcare responsibilities
- none of the above
- I would rather not say

25. Are you or do you identify as being in a situation of disability and/or handicap which

- yes
- No

26. If you have answered yes to the previous question, can you identify solutions that may be able to alleviate your disability as a casual at the work place? - this is an open question, if you have answered no to the previous question (ie. you are not in a situation of handicap) please write NA \*

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27. Are you invited to departmental/school meetings? \*

- Yes
- No

28. If you have a honorary position, is your research output counted towards ERA submissions in the discipline? \*

- Yes
- No
- I don't know
- Not applicable

29. Are you provided with a desk or an office space? \*

- Yes
- No

30. Why are you a casual? Why do you do it? \*

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31. What are the positives about your casual work experience? \*

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32. What are the negatives about your casual work experience? \*

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33. Have your casual contracts been strictly within the history profession, or have you had casual contracts in other disciplines? If so, please name those disciplines or roles within the university. \*

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34. If you answered 'yes' in Question 12 ('Do you believe that the hours you are paid for require 'invisible' and unpaid hours of work to be completed?'), please describe the type of work you consider to be 'invisible' and unpaid. \*

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35. Has your work been principally teaching, or have you also been involved with research assistance, conference management or other departmental activities? Please list the other activities. \*

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36. If you try to remain 'research active' as a casual academic teacher, what kind of research are you engaged in (e.g. journal articles, further study, book preparation etc.)? \*

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37. What could be done to improve the experience and career path of historians in casual employment? \*

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38. Do you have any advice to give to other historians in a casual position in the field? \*

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39. Are there any other observations you may wish to share? \*

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**THANK YOU for your time! Feel free to advertise the survey in your network to encourage the participation of a wide range of casuals in the History discipline.**

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