

**Supporting Early Career Researchers
in Higher Education in Europe:
The Role of Employers and Trade Unions**



Final Report
February 2015

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14 December 2015

Is it right to work unpaid for the benefit of your research career?

Rob Hardwick (02 July 2012)

Postdoctoral salaries and PhD stipends have undoubtedly improved considerably in recent years, but a culture of acceptance of voluntary research work persists across UK institutions.



Europe's early career researchers gloomy over prospects

Long hours, job insecurity and need for mentoring noted in global survey of young scientists

January 30 2014

December 11, 2014

21st-Century Postdocs: (Still) Underpaid and Overworked

Why advertise research jobs if you've already picked your winner?

There's no point in advertising a research job if a good internal candidate has already been lined up, says our anonymous academic

UCL network to flag up struggles of junior staff

Group to lobby coalition to highlight plight of well educated but broke early career researchers

September 25 2014

Should academics lose out financially for taking maternity leave?

The risks of taking maternity leave as an early career academic are never made clear. One postdoc shares her story

Researchers' 'unrealistic' hopes of academic careers

Fewer than half of those new to research can expect long-term academic careers

September 12 2013

Should PhD students be classed as employees?

The Rise of the Post-Post-Postdoc

Universities need to be transparent about how they allocate teaching hours

The current system exploits graduate teaching assistants, excludes them from discussions and often treats them as a lower class of teachers

- [Graduate teaching assistants deserve more than £4.40 per student per week](#)

Fixed-term posts still the norm for researchers

November 23 2007

The perils of juggling motherhood and academia

When Patty Ramirez became pregnant during her PhD she assumed she could 'have it all'. The reality was far more stressful

June 4 2015

Literature Review Findings

Challenges for early career researchers (ECR)

- **Funding and contract type** - securing a stable job and funding for research
- **Working conditions** – terms and conditions of employment; coping with workloads; achieving work-life balance; overcoming feelings of isolation.
- **Career development and progression** - career guidance on progressing within and outside academia; developing transferrable skills; establishing networks; international and inter-sectoral mobility.

Literature Review Findings

Support mechanisms for ECRs. Uneven across EU states.

Concerns about oversupply of PhDs and underemployment.

Gender discrimination. Continuing issues, especially in terms of academic progression to professor

Attraction of a research career. Researchers very satisfied with career in terms of autonomy, intellectual challenge and employer reputation

However – lower satisfaction with pay, opportunities for advancement and job security

EU initiatives

European Charter for Researchers

Code of Conduct for Recruitment of Researchers

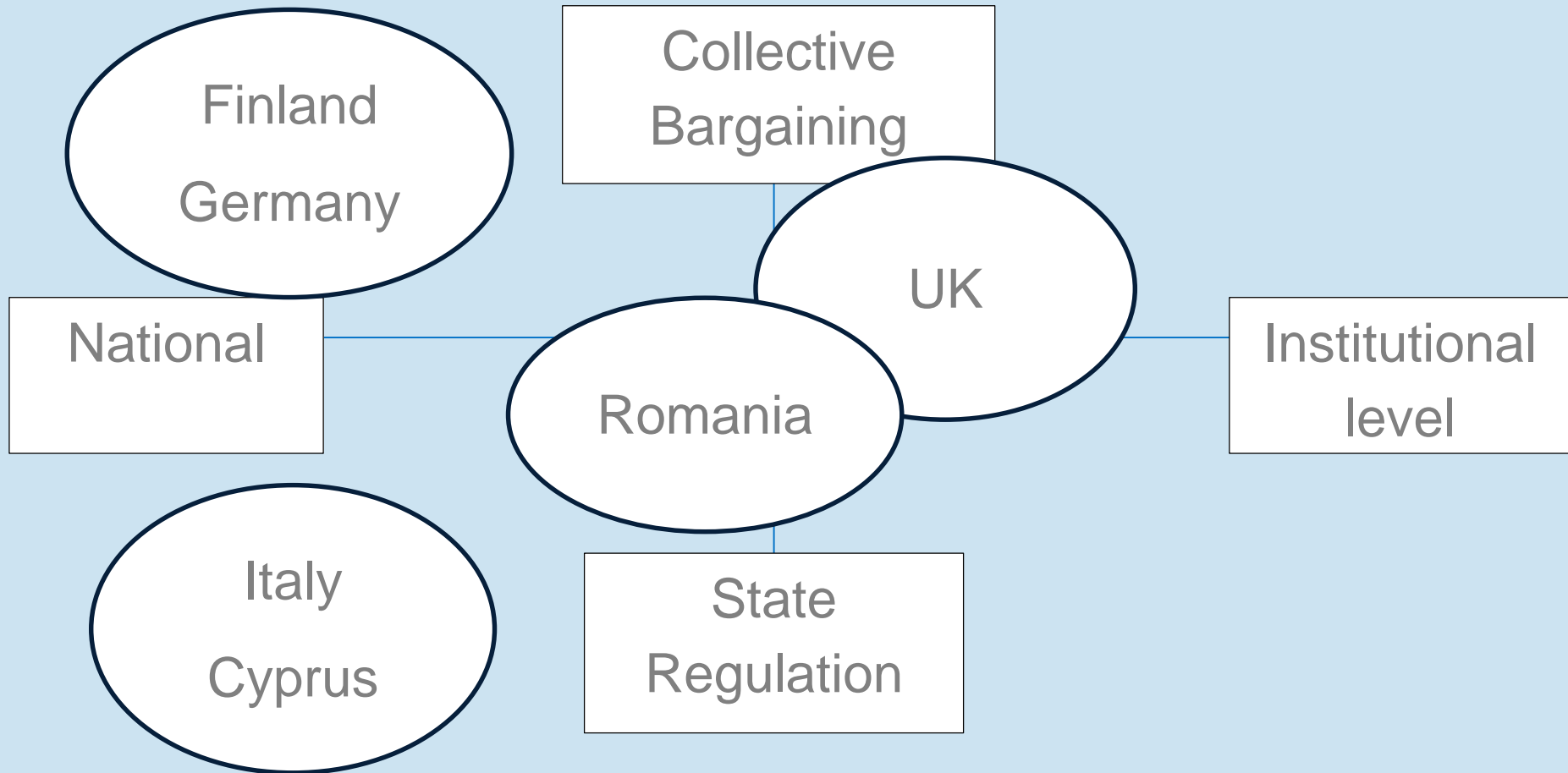
HR Strategy on Researchers (HRS4R)

European Framework for Research Careers

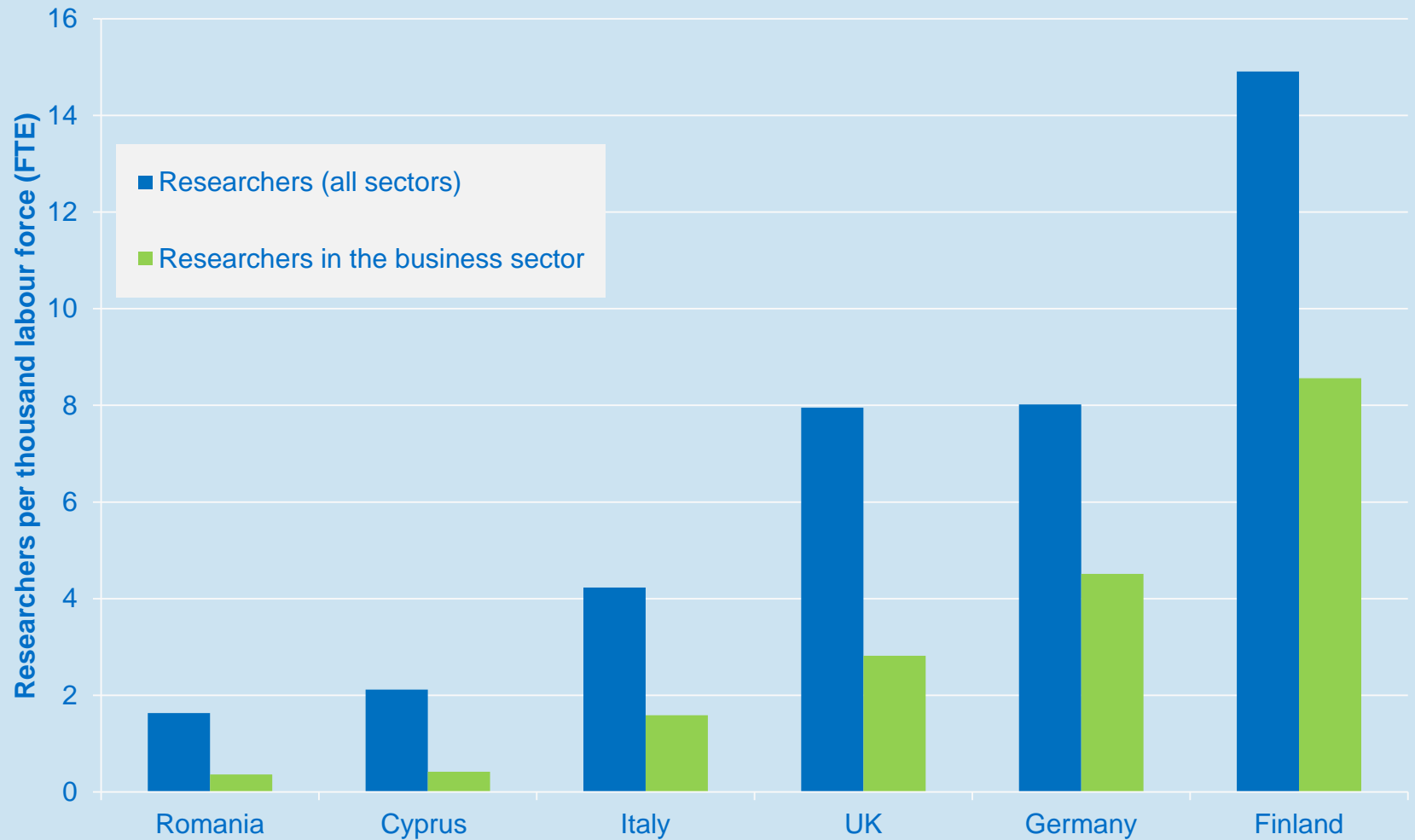
RESAVER

HE employment relations in the six countries

Six case studies: Cyprus, Finland, Germany, Italy, Romania, United Kingdom (46% of EU by population)

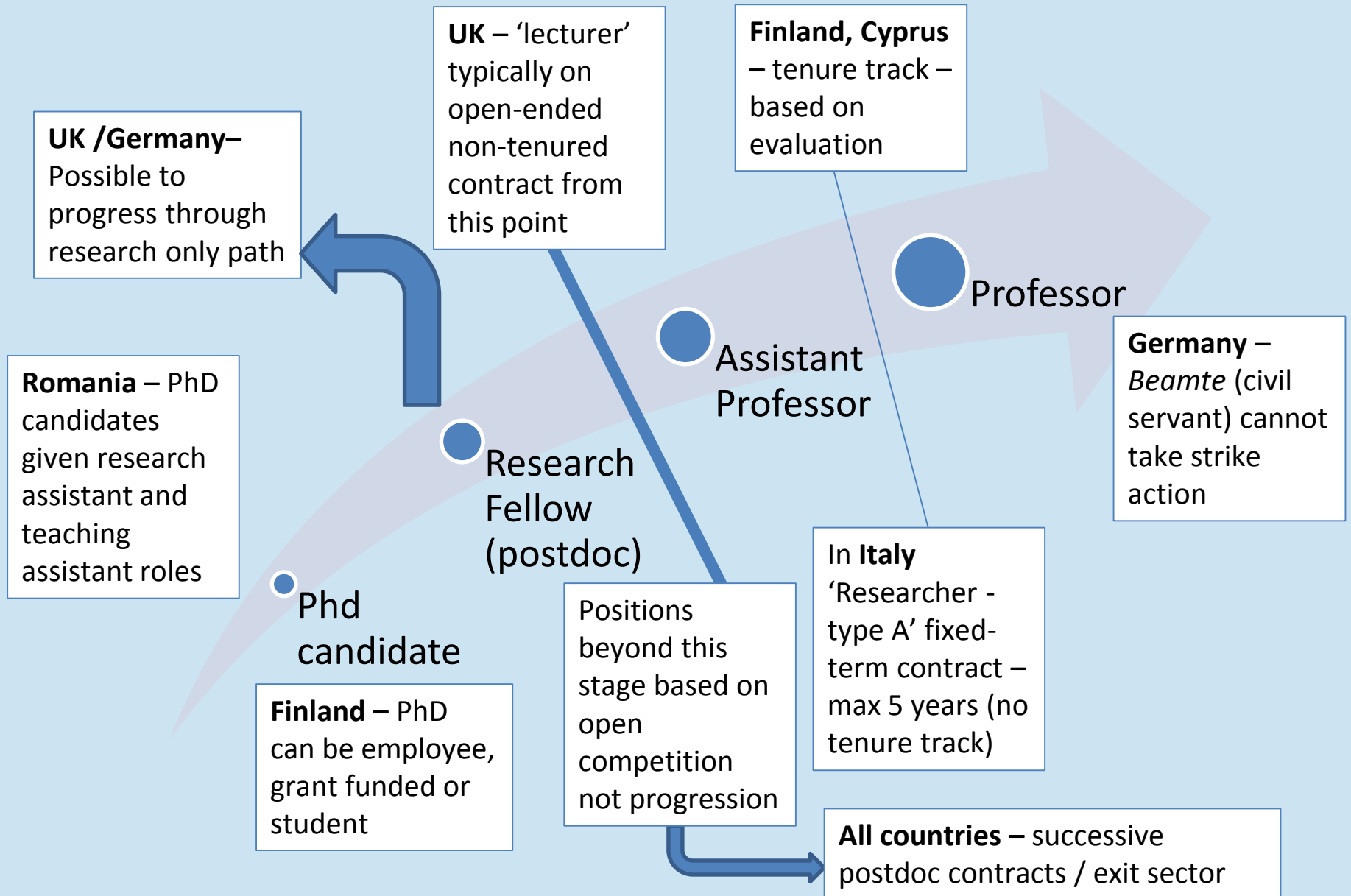


Research careers in industry



Source: Eurostat

Research careers in higher education



Key challenges for ECRs

Fixed-term contracts

- Fundamental issue for trade unions

Workload and the balance between research and other duties

- Importance of recognition and balance
- Work-life balance

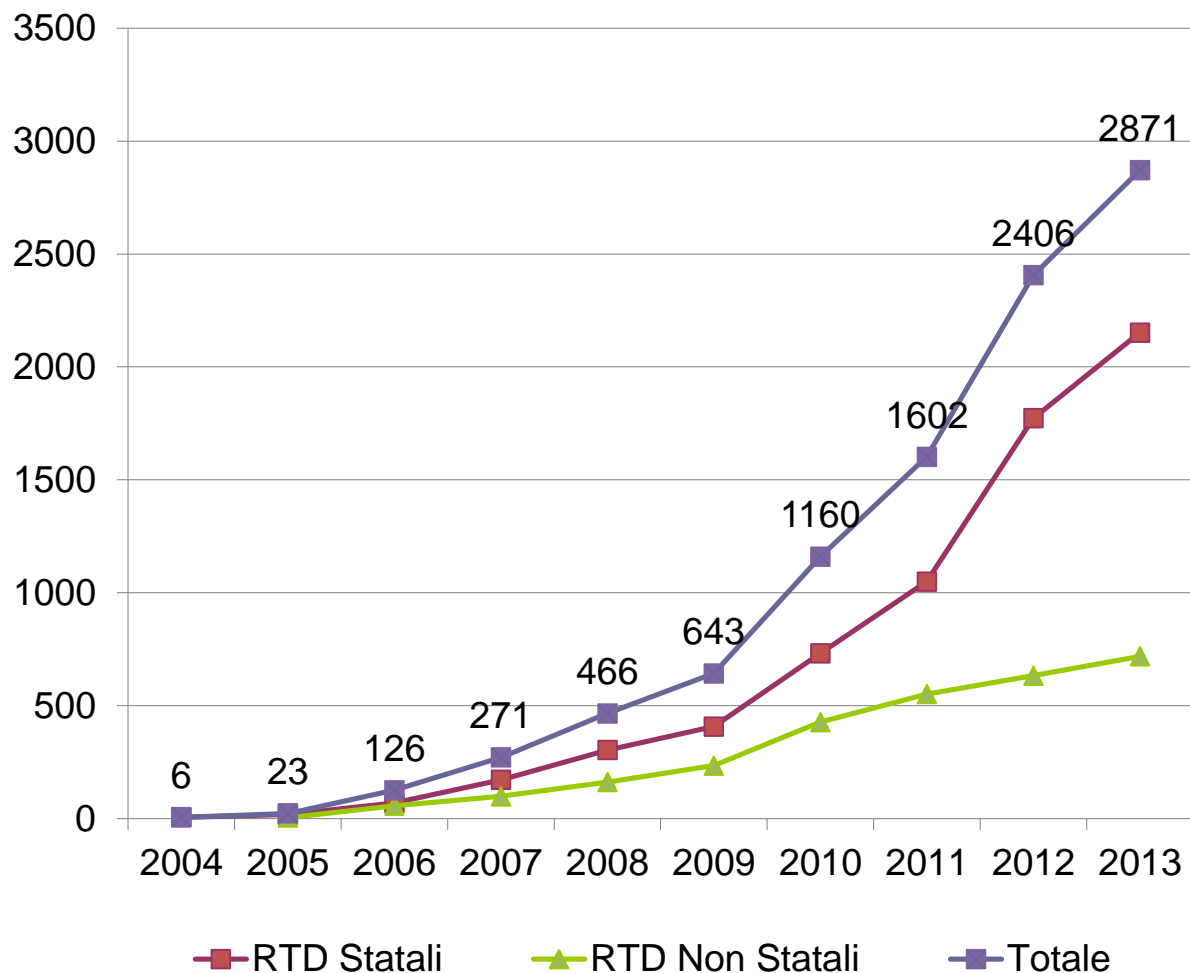
Transitions and managing expectations

Level of awareness of careers outside HE

Equity of treatment with other staff

Mentoring and the role of line managers

Temporary researcher contracts in Italy, 2004-2013



35 – average age

6.2 – average number of research contracts

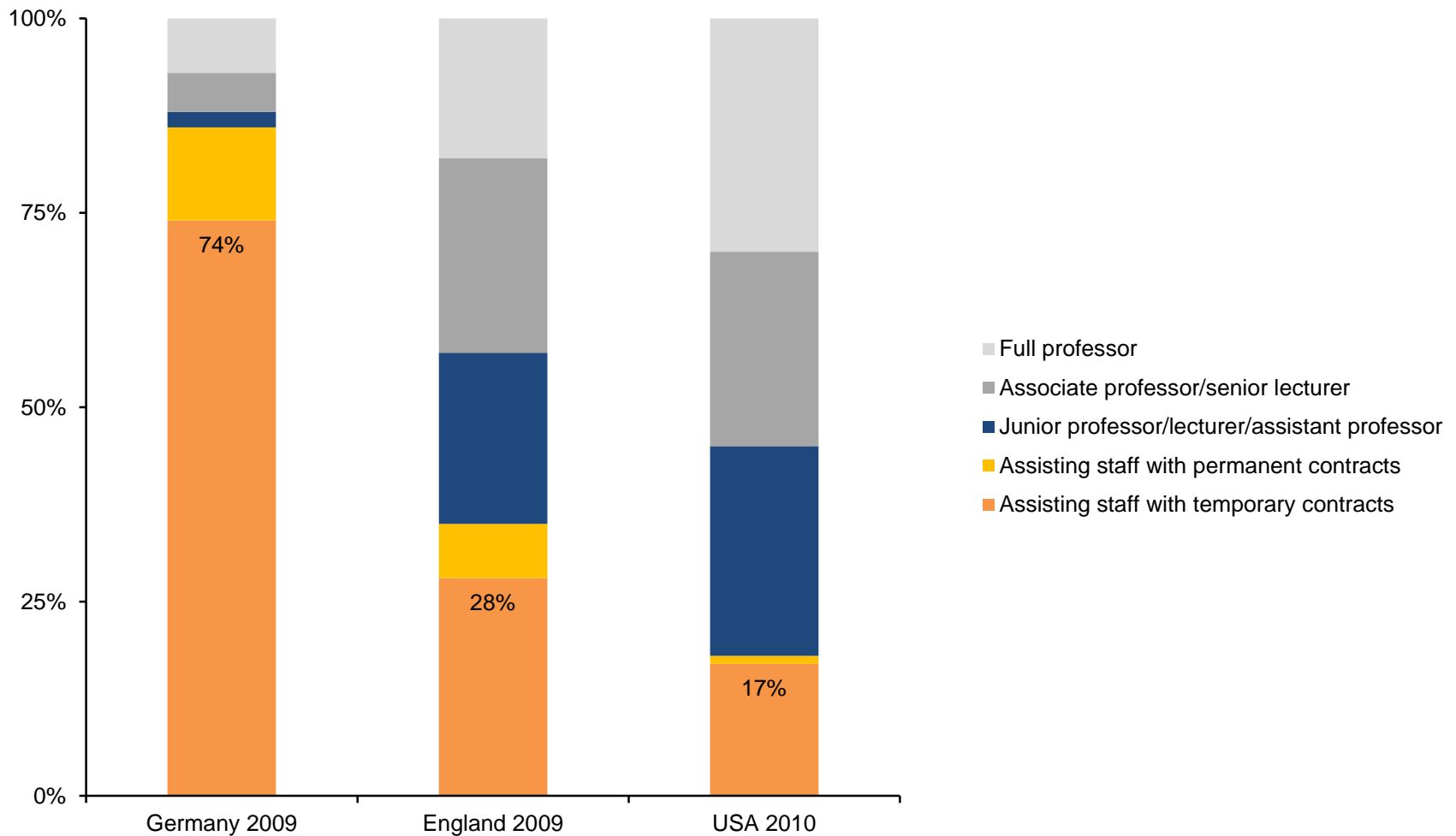
10.4% have had between 13 and 30 temporary contracts

1 in 3 working outside HE don't use professional skills acquired during PhD and postdoc

53% 'can't imagine their professional future'

Source: FLC CGIL
(Italian trade union for academic staff)

Academic staff by contract level, Germany, England and USA



Source: http://www.gew.de/Binaries/Binary65439/WiKo10_Reinhardt_Kreckel.pdf

Specific issues

Country	Challenges
Cyprus	Very limited opportunities for research in the private sector Research culture is only just being established Limited funding for postdoc opportunities
Finland	Low outward and inward mobility Serial use of fixed-term contracts Status of PhD students
Germany	Restrictions to academic career progression ECRs find it difficult to change career paths ECRs feel undervalued in academia
Italy	Gelmini reform (2010) Cuts to HEI budgets affecting ECR opportunities Significant increase in fixed-term and casual contracts
Romania	History of underinvestment in research Reliance on EU funding Low salaries
United Kingdom	High level of competition for ECR posts Union level of concern about 'casualisation'

Implementation and impact of the Charter & Code and HRS4R

	Declarations of Endorsement C&C	HR Excellence in Research (HRS4R)
Cyprus	13	2
Finland	14	7
Germany	14	1
Italy	66	7
Romania	9	2
United Kingdom	16*	91

- Trade unions supportive of C&C but do not appear to be involved in HRS4R process
- Lack of awareness in some countries (e.g. Germany) & endorsement without action (e.g. Italy)
- Employers - variability in approaches to HRS4R - comprehensive approach versus box marking

Practical actions to address ECR challenges (1)

Recognising duties and achieving an appropriate balance between teaching and research

Supportive mentoring and line management

Increasing visibility of research opportunities and providing support with proposals

Improving transferrable skills (and awareness of these)

Mobility grants to improve international networks

Practical actions to address ECR challenges (2)

Improving collaboration and relationships between universities and industry and research institutes

Increasing demand for higher-level skills in industry

Improving awareness of careers outside HE and managing expectations about careers in HE

- Monitoring PhD and postdoc career progression

Considering representation of ECRs within academic governance structures

Increasing trade union membership among ECRs

Specified time for training and development

The role of trade unions - examples

FLC (Italy) – funded research on experiences of early career researchers

UCU (UK) – Involved in development of the Concordat. Provides resources on understanding contracts and navigating early career stage, surveys to identify key issues, ‘anti-casualisation week’

FUURT (Finland) – Network for early stage researchers, reduced membership fees, member surveys to understand key issues, and seminars on careers in academia

GEW (Germany) – Templin Manifesto for better working conditions, advice on social security for PhDs

What can social partners do together?

Supporting Charter & Code and HRS4R

- Invite trade unions to be involved in HRS4R activities – gap analysis, action planning etc.

Establish platforms for dialogue about research careers and ECRs (where there are none)

Work in partnership to understand challenges and improve the evidence base

Peer learning from existing approaches such as the Hamburg Code of Conduct and the UK Concordat

UCEA dissemination

London conference – 21 November 2014- full presentation on findings

<http://www.ucea.ac.uk/en/empres/rs/ecr.cfm>

Publication of report on UCEA website

Dissemination to over 160 HEIs in the UK

Vitae Conference – 8 September 2015, Manchester – workshop session with the University College Union (UCU) covering findings of the research

<https://www.vitae.ac.uk/events/vitae-researcher-development-international-conference-2015>

Research Fortnight – June 2015 – article by Laurence Hopkins

<https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/entering-social-dialogue-early-careers-laurence-hopkins?trk=prof-post> (reprint with permission)

Manchester Policy Week – 4 November 2015 - Rethinking Research Funding - presentation on the findings of research and participation in panel discussion on research careers.

<https://rethinkingukresearch.wordpress.com/>

Vitae special papers series – write up of research (forthcoming in January 2016)



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