Recognising Long-Term Casualised Academics in the Funding Landscape

Evidence-based report on exclusionary and discriminatory funding criteria

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EDICa Flexible Fund Workstream 2 project:

In Their Own Time: Challenging Conventional Funding Structures to Include Intersectionally Underrepresented Casualised Academics
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Executive Summary

This report examines how UK research funding structures systematically exclude long-term casualised academics (LTCAs), i.e. those employed on temporary[1] teaching and/or research contracts for over eight years. LTCAs constitute around a third of the research workforce, yet remain absent from career frameworks and funding policy.

Our analysis of major funders reveals that, despite commitments to inclusion, eligibility criteria continue to create structural barriers for LTCAs. The two main challenges they face are the definition of career stage for fellowships and the employment status required for leadership roles in grants. Definitions of career stages like early or mid-career researchers still implicitly assume linear career paths (whether or not metrics like 'years since PhD' are used), often overlooking how part-time work, caring responsibilities, disability, bullying or the impact of insecure roles – common experiences for LTCAs – affect career progression. In addition, the current funding criteria facilitates the exploitation of the LTCAs' intellectual contributions: as they are excluded from leadership roles on grant proposals, colleagues in secure positions are often named as principal investigators instead, on work to which they have not made the primary contribution.

While some funders have made positive strides, systemic barriers remain, undermining equity, research quality and integrity. We encourage funders to collaborate with us to refine these criteria, ensuring that all researchers, regardless of their employment status or career path, can fully participate in and lead impactful research. This report demonstrates that without such changes, funders risk perpetuating inequitable and exploitative systems.

Key Recommendations

Funders and higher education institutions must work together to move beyond rhetorics and implement structural change. We recommend that:

- **Eligibility be based on expertise, not contract type.** Academics on temporary contracts must be able to apply as PIs.
- **Career stage be self-defined.** Replace strict definition of 'early career' or 'mid-career' with contextual, narrative definitions.
- **Contracts not be tied to award conditions.** Remove requirements for employment to extend beyond project end dates.
- **Leadership be re-imagined.** Enable team-based applications, allow co-led models and recognise that an 'experienced leader' can be on a temporary contract.
- **Transparency be increased.** Publish disaggregated success rate data by contract type, age, race, gender and disability.

[1] 'Temporary' contracts include zero-hour, hourly, fractional fixed-term and so-called open-ended contracts that terminate when grant funding expire, just as conventional fixed-term contracts. These have different names, including but not limited to 'open-ended with review/ end date' or 'finite-funded permanent contracts'.

1. Introduction

Securing research funding is critical to shaping academic careers. Yet, despite recent commitments from major UK funders to foster a more inclusive research culture (e.g. Royal Society 2019; Wellcome 2020; UKRI 2024), research shows that funding structures systematically disadvantage long-term casualised academics (LTCAs) (Menard and Shinton 2022; Menard 2025), i.e. those employed on temporary teaching and/or research-only contracts for eight years or more.

Although LTCAs make up an estimated one-third of the precariously employed research workforce (Mellors-Bourne and Metcalfe 2017) they are invisible in institutional policy and funding discourse. They are frequently mislabelled as 'early career researchers' (ECRs), a misnomer that conceals the persistence of long-term precarity in academia (Menard 2022; Bonello and Wånggren 2023). Both length and scale of casualisation in UK higher education are staggering: it is the second most casualised sector after hospitality (Office for National Statistics 2023). Thirty-five percent of teaching-only staff and 64% of research-only staff are on fixed-term contracts. Four percent of teaching-only staff are on zero-hours contracts, 36% on hourly contracts and an additional 59,000 'atypical' workers are employed on other casualised terms (UCU 2025).

For casualised academics staff, career maintenance or progression often depends on preparing funding applications in their own time, as their contracts rarely cover these activities. However, for those with additional demands on their time, such as disabled academics or those with caring responsibilities, the result is unmanageable workloads, and only those who can work in their own time can apply for awards. As such, the funding system reinforces the inequalities already embedded within academia. The entrenched expectation that academics must consistently work beyond their contracted duties disproportionately penalises those unable to sacrifice their wellbeing to meet these unwritten demands.

This report draws on a comparative analysis of major funders to examine what mechanisms exclude LTCAs from funding opportunities. It proposes recommendations to make funding more inclusive, equitable and reflective of the realities of contemporary academic labour. This report is part of the EDICA-funded project *In Their Own Time: Challenging Conventional Funding Structures to Include Intersectionally Underrepresented Casualised Academics* (In Their Own Time 2025).

2. Funder-by-Funder Analysis

2.1 UK Research and Innovation (UKRI)

Summary of Practice

UKRI, including its councils (AHRC, BBSRC, ESRC, EPSRC, MRC, NERC and STFC), has taken positive steps towards inclusivity. Several schemes now avoid rigid definitions of 'early career' and allow applicants to self-define their career stage, opening the door to more diverse applicant backgrounds. The Future Leaders Fellowship is particularly notable in leading the sector by permitting joint applications on a job-share basis.

However, these reforms sit alongside conditions that continue to exclude many researchers. Most grants still require lead applicants to hold contracts extending beyond the project's duration, effectively excluding those on fixed-term contracts unless their institution guarantees an extension –

a support rarely available. Moreover, the persistent language of 'upward trajectory', 'transition to independence', 'research leadership', and 'future leaders' assumes linear and accelerated progression, disadvantaging those with complex or disrupted careers.

The result is a paradox: UKRI appears more open than many other funders, but the combination of institutional gatekeeping and narrow expectations of what a successful career should look like results in LTCAs remaining largely excluded from leading proposals.

Key Problems

- Demand-managed schemes rely on HEI endorsement, which often privileges permanent staff.
- 'Independence' and 'trajectory' are narrowly defined, disadvantaging LTCAs who contribute to team science and teaching-intensive roles.
- Prestige-based expectations disqualify LTCAs whose career has been damaged by bullying, harassment or discrimination.

Recommendations

- Remove requirements that contracts must extend beyond the project end date.
- Require institutions to demonstrate equitable support in demand-managed schemes across contract types.
- Develop a dedicated fellowship or grant stream for experienced researchers in precarious employment.
- Introduce mechanisms for collective applications that allow multiple LTCAs to collaborate as co-leads.
- Publish disaggregated equalities data on application and success rates by employment status, gender, race, disability, and age.

UKRI: Summary Table

Scheme	Advertised career stage	Years since PhD	Specifics
Future Leaders Fellow	ECR	NA	'This scheme is for early career researchers'; 'There are no eligibility rules based on whether you currently hold a permanent or open-ended academic position or job role'; 'there are no eligibility rules based on the number of years since your PhD'; 'Joint applications on a job-share basis are permitted'
UKRI policy fellowships 2025		NA	'There are no eligibility rules based on years since PhD or whether you currently hold a permanent or open-ended job role'; 'Applicants should determine their suitability to the scheme as either an early or mid-career researcher (unless applying for a What Works innovation fellowship which is open to all career stages'; 'An early career researcher is somebody who has yet to establish or transition to

			independence (where an independent researcher has submitted their own proposal and taken on the role of project lead)'; 'A mid-career researcher is somebody who has established independence, having, for example, taken on the role of project lead, published works of intellectual distinction, or established a significant track record as a 'champion' within their field. This would not ordinarily include professors but may include assistant or associate professors'
Mathematical sciences postdoctoral fellowship	Postdoctoral / ECR	NA	'There are no eligibility rules about how many years of postdoctoral experience you need. You do not need to hold a permanent academic position to be eligible for postdoctoral fellowships'; 'This is an early career fellowship for those that (..) have not previously held a significant grant (usually defined as those that included postdoctoral research associate (PDRA) time, capital equipment, or were over £100,000 full economic cost (FEC))'
BBSRC Fellowships scheme	ECR	NA	'There is no limit on the number of years postdoctoral or work experience'
STFC leadership fellowships in public engagement (Last closing date April 2024)	All	NA	'Demonstrate a strong track record of leadership in their field and public engagement, appropriate and proportionate to their career stage'; 'Can support individuals at different stages of their careers (early careers and established)'; 'At the time of application, you must have a contract of employment at the UK research organisation that wholly covers the duration of the fellowship. You must be in the employment of your host research organisation when the fellowship commences'
ADR UK fellowship (ESRC; Last closing date April 2024)	All	NA	'This funding opportunity is open to all researchers irrespective of career stage'
EPSRC quantum technologies career acceleration fellowships (Last	ECR		'The definition of ECRs is broad and can span from current postdoctoral researchers to those recently appointed to their first permanent academic position'; 'There is no requirement to demonstrate equivalent research or training

closing date April 2024)			regarding the length of postdoctoral experience or length of relevant work experience to be considered an "early-career researcher"'; 'Who is not eligible to apply applicants who have already achieved research or innovation independence (for example, by having already secured funding aimed at this career stage, or by already managing their own significant programme of work within a business)'
EPSRC open fellowship		From 4+ years to before permanent appointment	Before 12/12/2024 [NOW DEFUNCT]: 'Open fellowships are for all career stages beyond postdoctoral level and include researchers who are close to their first academic appointment, leading in an area of technical development, or are a highly experienced researcher'
NERC fellowship	ECR	NA	'There is no limit on the number of years postdoctoral or work experience'
AHRC responsive mode: Curiosity Award			'Applications are welcomed from researchers across all career stages, from early career to established researchers'; 'It is also not a requirement to have a permanent employment contract to apply for funding'
ESRC responsive mode: new investigator grants	ECR	NA	'you must articulate why you should be considered an early career researcher'
Experimental medicine (MRC) Transdisciplinary research to tackle antimicrobial resistance (Multiple RC) Interdisciplinary research to tackle epidemic threats (multiple RC) AHRC responsive mode: Curiosity Award	Various	NA	'For applicants who do not have a contract of employment for the duration of the proposed project, by submitting an application the research organisation is confirming that, if it is successful contracts will be extended beyond the end date of the project'; Can apply as 'new investigator' or as ECR: 'We welcome applications from early career researchers'; 'employed as a postdoctoral research assistant, although this grant cannot start until your current work finishes'; 'have any number of years of experience'

P2R: increasing UK policymaker engagement with research	Not specified	Not specified	

2.2 The Royal Society

Summary of Practice

The Royal Society offers a range of fellowships primarily targeted at 'early-career' and 'mid-career' researchers. Its schemes are rigidly structured around years since PhD. Although some career breaks and part-time working patterns can extend the eligibility window, the assumption of linearity remains. Definitions of ECR are inconsistent and vary between schemes (ranging from 2 to 8 years post-PhD) and mid-career awards are targeted towards permanent academics or those who have already secured a long-term research fellowship. As such, no scheme is accessible to LTCAs.

Key Problems

- Rigid time-based eligibility with inconsistent definitions of ECR.
- Requirement for permanent posts or long-term fellowships for most mid-career fellowships.
- Years since PhD are assumed full-time and cannot be adjusted to extend the eligibility as a function of part-time working hours.
- Prestige-based expectations disqualify LTCAs whose career has been damaged by bullying, harassment or discrimination.

Recommendations

- Adopt a consistent, inclusive definitions of ECR and MCR that allow for contextualised self-definition.
- Remove the requirement for a permanent or long-term post and instead require host institutions to support solid applications, regardless of contract type.
- Develop a dedicated fellowship or grant stream for experienced researchers in precarious employment.
- Introduce mechanisms for collective applications that allow multiple LTCAs to collaborate as co-leads.
- Publish disaggregated equalities data on application and success rates by employment status, gender, race, disability, and age.

Royal Society: Summary Table

Scheme	Advertised career stage	Years since PhD	Specifics
Dorothy Hodgkin	ECR	6 years	'for outstanding early career scientists who require a flexible working pattern due to personal circumstances, such as caring responsibilities and/or health-related conditions'

Career development fellowship	ECR	2 years	
University Research Fellowship	'Early stages of their research career'	Between 3 and 8 years post PhD	
Faraday Discovery Fellowships	Mid-career	10-20 years	'permanent academic post or be in the latter stages of a recognised long-term research fellowship'
Industry Fellowship	NA		'permanent post or open-ended contract'

2.3 The British Academy

Summary of Practice

The British Academy (BA) uses inclusive language and offers flexible eligibility structures. Applicants are invited to self-define their career stage, with clear acknowledgment that academic trajectories can differ due to a range of circumstances, e.g. caring responsibilities, career breaks and non-linear paths.

However, limitations remain: some BA grants (such as the Small Research Grants and Talent Development Awards) do not cover staff costs, effectively excluding casualised staff who need their own salary covered to participate in research. These grants can only appeal to privileged casualised staff who can afford to conduct their research without salary.

Key Problems

- Lack of salary coverage in some schemes favour permanent academic staff.
- Mid-career fellowships pay off 'normal academic' commitment, therefore implicitly targeting permanent academic staff with teaching and research contracts rather than LTCAs on teaching-only or research-only contracts.

Recommendations

- Ensure all fellowship and grant schemes allow for salary support for casualised applicants.
- Acknowledge that 'normal academic commitments' vary and open mid-career fellowships to experienced researchers in precarious employment.
- Introduce mechanisms for collective applications that allow multiple LTCAs to collaborate as co-leads.
- Publish disaggregated equalities data on application and success rates by employment status, gender, race, disability, and age.

British Academy: Summary Table

Funder	Scheme	Advertised career stage	Years since PhD	Specifics
British Academy	Small research grants	All	NA	Does not cover staff cost.
British Academy	Mid-career fellowships	Mid-career	<15 years since PhD	'The primary rationale of the scheme is, therefore, to free successful applicants from their normal academic and administrative commitments for a period of six to 12 months, to devote to the completion of a major piece of research'; 'Allowance for applicants who have had career breaks, and for established scholars who do not have doctorates.'
British Academy	Talent Development Awards	Any	NA	Does not cover staff costs. 'Current long-term appointment at a UK-based Higher Education Institution (HEI) or Independent Research Organisation (IRO), which will continue for the full duration of the proposed award'.
British Academy	Innovation Fellowships Scheme – Route A: Researcher-led	ECR or mid-career	'Applicants do not have to fit within a certain time-frame since their PhD in order to prove their career-stage. However, applicants must self-define their career stage and demonstrate this accordingly in their applications.'	'Applications are welcome from early-career researchers and mid-career researchers. Applicants must self-define their career stage in the application, providing further details about career breaks or other circumstances, if relevant'.

2.4 Wellcome Trust

Summary of Practice

Wellcome offers a wide range of funding opportunities and, on paper, many schemes are framed with flexible eligibility criteria. Notably, its early- and mid-career awards avoid normative, linear

definitions of time since PhD and allow for part-time work, career breaks and changes of discipline. Some schemes also permit applications from teams, albeit still led by an 'experienced researcher', which marks a step towards recognising collaborative approaches to research.

However, these inclusive criteria sit alongside conditions that continue to exclude LTCAs from leadership roles. To act as a principal investigator, applicants must already hold employment that is not conditional on receiving the award – an expectation that effectively rules out most casualised staff. The definition of mid-career does not rely on 'years since PhD', but instead uses an equally arbitrary measure, requiring 'one or two substantial periods of research after training'. While this definition may cover a small number of 'early' LTCAs who happened to have worked on long-term grants, the majority remain excluded from access to leadership opportunities.

Key Problems

- Requirement for long-term, permanent contract to apply for awards.
- Implied relationship between employment status and experience.
- Individual awards are time-limited and leadership on grant proposal conditional upon employment status leaving LTCAs stuck between the two.

Recommendations

- Separate capacity to be a leader on a project from contract type.
- Require host institutions to support solid applications, regardless of contract type.
- Develop a dedicated fellowship or grant stream for experienced researchers in precarious employment.
- Introduce mechanisms for collective applications that allow multiple LTCAs to collaborate as equal co-leads.
- Publish disaggregated equalities data on application and success rates by employment status, gender, race, disability, and age.

Wellcome Trust: Summary Table

Scheme	Advertised career stage	Years since PhD	Specifics
Wellcome Career Development Awards	Mid-career	NA	'Must have completed one or two substantial periods of research after initial training'; 'Open-ended or fixed-term'
Various grants e.g. Climate impacts awards; Mental health award	NA	NA	'Have a permanent, open-ended or long-term rolling contract for the duration of the award, or guarantee of a salaried post, which is not conditional on receiving this award.'
Early-Career Awards	No more than 3 years of postdoctoral experience		'We will allow for part-time work, the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, career breaks (for example, parental leave or long-term sick leave) and other significant amounts of time spent outside research (for example, clinical training). We will also consider whether you have changed research discipline.'

Discovery Awards	NA	NA	'At the point of application, you should have a permanent, open-ended or long-term rolling contract, or the guarantee of one. The contract should not be conditional on receiving this award.'; 'An award can be held by an established researcher or a team of researchers led by an established researcher.'
Springboard Awards	Lecturer / Holding 'independent' post		'Within three years of being appointed to your first independent post (such as a lecturer position)'

2.5 Leverhulme Trust

Summary of Practice

Leverhulme Trust schemes consistently conflate experience with employment status. Early career fellowships are eligible to academics with a maximum of four years since PhD, which does not reflect the reality of an academic landscape with increasingly expanding periods of casualised employment.

All other awards are reserved for permanently employed academics or for those holding long-term contracts that extend far beyond the end of the award. As such, casualised academics are systematically excluded.

Key Problems

- Permanent contracts or contracts that extend beyond the award required for most schemes for all schemes but Early Career Fellowship.
- Time outside academia is devalued, with the only recognised career breaks being for 'illness' or caring responsibilities.
- No allowance for part-time when years since PhD is a criteria.
- Implied definition of success assumes quick and linear career trajectory.
- Prestige-based expectations disqualify LTCAs whose career has been damaged by bullying, harassment or discrimination.

Recommendations

- Adopt an inclusive definition of 'early career' that allow for contextualised self-definition.
- Separate capacity to be a leader on a project from contract type.
- Require host institutions to support solid applications, regardless of contract type.
- Develop a dedicated fellowship or grant stream for experienced researchers in precarious employment.
- Introduce mechanisms for collective applications that allow multiple LTCAs to collaborate as co-leads.
- Publish disaggregated equalities data on application and success rates by employment status, gender, race, disability, and age.

Leverhulme Trust: Summary Table

Scheme	Advertised career stage	Years since PhD	Specifics
Early Career Fellowships	ECR	4	'Those wishing to make a case for a career break should present the case for interruption by a period of maternity leave, family commitments, illness, or other exceptional circumstances. Please note that time spent working outside academia does not qualify as a career break'.
Research Fellowships	'Experienced researchers'	NA	'Be a permanent member of the UK scholarly community'; 'Priority will be given to applicants whose teaching and administrative duties have significantly impacted their ability to undertake research in the three years prior to their application'.
Philip Leverhulme Prizes	'Researchers at an early stage of their careers'	10 years	'Nominees must hold either a permanent post or a long-term fellowship'; 'the only eligible career breaks for this funding scheme are for caring responsibilities or due to illness'.
Research Project Grants	NA	NA	'Applications can be submitted by those holding contract research posts, provided that their appointment continues for a period at least equal to the span of the requested award'; 'Eligible applicants will already be employed by the eligible institution'.
Research Leadership Awards	'Early career scholars'; 'early career-stage academics'		'Have had at least two years full-time or equivalent experience in a research or teaching post in a university after the date of your PhD award'; 'Already hold a permanent academic appointment at a UK university at lecturer level or equivalent, or be nominated for the award by a UK university that undertakes to offer a contract for the duration of the award, with the expectation that a permanent role would be offered by the end of the award'.

2.6 Other Funders

Summary of Practice

Several other major funders—both UK-based and international—also limit access to funding through restrictive eligibility conditions.

The European Commission and **the European Research Council (ERC) Starting and Advanced Grants** retain years since PhD as a limiting criterion, but allow for a wider range of reasons than most funders to extend eligibility based on time since PhD. The **Royal Society of Edinburgh** effectively exclude LTCAs unless institutions are willing to extend contracts beyond the project they would fund. It is also the only funder that reserves the right to act as the sole employer, thus adding

additional barriers to part-time staff. The **Nuffield Foundation** has fewer eligibility restrictions other than the PI needed to be already employed by the host institution.

Key Problems

- Conditional employment still required for most schemes.
- Prestige-based expectations disqualify LTCAs whose career has been damaged by bullying, harassment or discrimination.

Other Funders: Summary Table

Funder	Scheme	Advertised career stage	Maximum years since PhD	Specifics
Royal Society of Edinburgh	Personal Research fellowship	ECR and MCR	ECR = 7 MCR = 15	'Applicants must be existing members of academic staff on open-ended or continuing contracts'; 'Applicants on short or fixed-term contracts should ensure their contracts extend for at least three months after the end of the proposed project'; 'Awardees must not hold other paid appointments without the express permission of the RSE'.
Nuffield foundation	Research, Development and Analysis Fund	NA		'We will not fund: Individuals without formal employment or other relationship with the institution hosting the grant'; 'Projects led by individuals unaffiliated to any particular organisation'
European Commission	Marie Skłodowska-Curie Postdoctoral fellowships	Postdocs	8	'Years of experience outside research and career breaks will not count towards the above maximum, nor will years of experience in research in third countries, for nationals or long-term residents of EU

				Member States or Horizon Europe Associated Countries who wish to reintegrate to Europe'
European Research Council	Starting Grant	Early Career Scientist (but 'any field of research')	2 to 7	'The PI does not need to be employed by the host institution at the time of proposal submission, but a mutual agreement and commitment are necessary if the proposal is successful'; 'Eligibility can be extended for reasons such as maternity, paternity, or parental leave, illness, national service, clinical training, natural disasters, asylum, or for victims of gender-based violence or any other form of violence'.
European Research Council	Advanced Grant	Established, leading principal investigator	N/A	'Active researchers who have a track-record of significant research achievements'; 'The PI does not need to be employed by the host institution at the time of proposal submission, but a mutual agreement and commitment are necessary if the proposal is successful'.

3. Summary and recommendations

In recent years, many funders have signalled a welcome commitment to inclusion, using language that recognises 'non-linear career paths' and varied academic trajectories. However, the impact on the careers of marginalised academics will depend on how this rhetoric translates into practice: without concrete reforms to eligibility rules, assessment criteria and institutional endorsement requirements, such commitments remain symbolic rather than transformative.

This report finds that, despite progress in funder discourse, eligibility criteria across research funding schemes continue to reproduce structural inequalities. Two key mechanisms stand out: reliance on years since PhD as a metric of career stage, and employment status as a condition of eligibility.

3.1 Years Since PhD as an Exclusionary/Discriminatory Metric

Many fellowship schemes use 'years since PhD' as a central eligibility criterion. This report argues that it is an exclusionary and at times discriminatory metric on the following accounts:

- **Time worked at reduced capacity is penalised** While career breaks are accounted for by some funders with justification, time worked at less than 1.0 FTE is usually treated the same as full-time employment. This disproportionately disadvantages part-time staff, who are often individuals with caring responsibilities, chronic illness or disability, or those who must take on additional jobs to supplement inadequate academic pay.
- **Disciplinary disadvantage** In practice, this metric also reproduces disciplinary inequities. While precarious staff in STEM are often employed on research-only contracts, precariously employed academics in SHAPE are more likely to hold teaching-only roles – often on zero, hourly or fractional contracts – leaving them to conduct research and publish in their own unpaid time.
- **Normative expectations of time** These dynamics are compounded by structural assumptions embedded in the 'years since PhD' metric. It presumes that all time is equally productive and that all academics have had equal access to research opportunities and institutional support. In doing so, it flattens difference and conceals the structural forces shaping academic trajectories. As scholars such as Kafer (2013) have noted in discussions of 'crip time', such assumptions exclude and possibly discriminate against those whose working lives do not follow normative patterns.
- **Career stage labels are arbitrary and exclusionary** This metric often defines terms such as 'early career' and 'mid-career' as if the appropriate number of years is self-evident, even when different schemes within the same funder set different limits. These terms rest on hidden assumptions about continuous employment and publication output. In addition, the term 'ECR' gained prominence in funder discourse shortly after the UK introduced age discrimination legislation in 2006, shifting expectations of achievement from age to time since PhD while often maintaining the same ageist exclusionary and at times discriminatory effects.

3.2 Employment Status as a Gatekeeping Tool

Beyond fellowship schemes, many grant opportunities exclude applicants who do not hold a permanent contract or cannot guarantee one that extends beyond the end of the award – from three months in UKRI schemes to at least equal to the span of the requested award for Leverhulme. While funders assert that they have no role in shaping institutional hiring, their own award conditions make them active gatekeepers. By demanding long-term or permanent contracts at the point of application, funders hand decision-making power to university leadership, entrenching a hierarchy where only the already-secure can compete and where narrowing eligibility is used to manage demand, regardless of the equity cost. This narrows eligibility and normalises precarity as an acceptable filter.

The effects go beyond eligibility: many LTCAs report having written grant proposals, but being unable to lead the grant, despite being the intellectual lead (Menard and Shinton, 2022; Menard, 2025). This raises serious concerns around research integrity and ethics, as colleagues in secure

positions are often named as principal investigators on work to which they have not made the primary contribution. Even in cases where the working relationship is respectful and not exploitative, those in permanent roles still benefit professionally from someone else's work being presented as their own. This practice is widespread, and it is unlikely to have escaped the attention of funders and reviewers, raising important questions about the extent to which current systems enable unethical and exploitative practices.

3.3 Recommendations

While this report sets out recommendations for individual funders in their respective sections, the points below highlight cross-cutting reforms that apply to all funders. These are complemented by recommendations for HEIs and for future research, recognising that systemic change requires coordinated action across the research landscape.

For funders – to ensure eligibility criteria and funding practices are genuinely inclusive:

- Redefine eligibility to centre expertise and potential – not employment status.
- Allow self-definition of career stage with contextual justifications.
- Support salary costs for applicants on casualised contracts.
- Remove contract-length conditions.
- Create fellowship schemes specifically for long-term precariously employed academics.
- Fund team-based applications that allow multiple casualised researchers to lead.
- Require institutions to justify who is nominated under demand-managed schemes.
- Publish disaggregated data on award outcomes by employment status, age, race, gender, and disability.

For HEIs – to support equitable access to funding opportunities:

- Support LTCAs in applying for funding, including offering contract extensions where possible.
- Recognise casualised academics as legitimate research leaders.
- Stop using precarity as a filtering mechanism for opportunity.

This project was only possible because EDICa had flexible eligibility criteria. However, having secured funding and led this project, we, the two project leads, are no longer considered 'early career innovator' and therefore are ineligible to apply for the majority of the awards listed in this document because we do not hold a permanent position or explicit university endorsement to extend our contract should we secure funding. As a result, we are unable to apply for the future research recommended below, despite a proven track record of securing funding and delivering and completing research projects.

For future research – to improve evidence and accountability:

- Investigate how apparently inclusive eligibility criteria actually shape funding outcomes.
- Examine how collaborative models of leadership can be structurally supported by grants.
- Continue documenting the lived experiences of long-term casualised academics.

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