



Background

The Re-Well HE project was established in response to growing evidence that poor wellbeing and occupational stress are widespread among researchers and research professional staff in UK Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), and a lack of consolidated evidence regarding how universities are responding to these challenges in practice.

Scan the QR code to visit our project webpage and find out more!



Aims

- 1. To establish an up-to-date understanding of wellbeing and occupational stress among researchers and research professional staff.
- 2. To identify, consolidate, and map organisational initiatives being implemented across the sector in response to these challenges.
- 3. To examine the extent to which existing initiatives align with established principles of work-related stress prevention by mapping findings to the Health & Safety Executive Management Standards Framework (2004).

Method

The project adopted a **multi-stage participatory approach** that combined evidence synthesis, stakeholder engagement, participatory workshops with researchers and research professional staff, and national survey activities.

Findings

Participatory Workshops

12 Key Drivers of Poor Wellbeing & Occupational Stress were identified through a participatory desk review and four insight-gathering workshops with the wider research community (N = 100; Figure 1).

- The 12 stressors were experienced as interconnected challenges, each aligning with multiple HSE workplace stress domains – Demands, Control, Support, Relationships, Role, Change (Table 1).
- A growing landscape of organisational activity was identified across the sector in response to these challenges (see Figure 2); however, organisational initiatives currently remain limited, fragmented, unevenly implemented, and largely unevaluated.

Table 1: Example mapping "Employment Precarity and System Instability" to HSE MSF

| Key Driver                                  | Mapping to HSE Domains                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
|---------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Employment Precarity and System Instability | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• High uncertainty increases <b>demands</b> (performance pressure under insecurity).</li><li>• <b>Control</b> is reduced because individuals cannot influence funding continuity.</li><li>• System instability leads to constant restructuring and organisational <b>change</b>.</li><li>• Blurred expectations around future employment extend <b>role</b> ambiguity.</li></ul> |



Figure 1: 12 Key Drivers of Poor Wellbeing and Occupational Stress.

National Wellbeing Survey

A survey of 536 researchers and research professional staff (15%) (N = 536; 72.0% researchers; 15.1% research professionals) extended these findings:

- HSE Support, Role, Demands, and Employment precarity were the strongest predictors of wellbeing and occupational outcomes.
- Researchers and research professionals reported a broadly comparable psychological profile, with no significant differences in wellbeing outcomes.
- Mental wellbeing and life satisfaction were lower than UK general-population benchmarks, while stress, anxiety/depression, and loneliness were higher.
- Disabled, female, ethnically minoritised, and non-parent/caregiver colleagues reported more physical symptoms, higher loneliness and/or anxiety/depression than their peers.

Summary

The persistence of poor wellbeing among researchers and research professionals in UK HEIs reflects the reality that occupational stressors are embedded within the wider organisation of research itself.

The Re-Well HE project highlights substantial progress across the sector, with universities, funders, and sector bodies increasingly investing in research culture, leadership, workforce development, and organisational improvement.

However, it also demonstrates that preventative organisational responses remain uneven and have not kept pace with the structural pressures affecting the research workforce.

Ultimately, improving wellbeing is not a case of expanding individual-level wellbeing support provision. Instead, it requires sustained action to reshape the organisational conditions under which research is undertaken. This means addressing workload, employment security, leadership, governance, incentive systems, and the wider organisation of research across UK HE.

Project Team

**PI:** Prof Elena Riva. **Co-PIs:** Prof Nicole Tang, Dr Carla Toro, Dr Jagjeet Jutley-Neilson. **PDRAs:** Dr Amber Tout, Dr Hatice Mastacan.

Funding

This project was supported by the Enhancing Research Culture Fund (ERCF) at the University of Warwick (2025-26), UKRI, Research England.

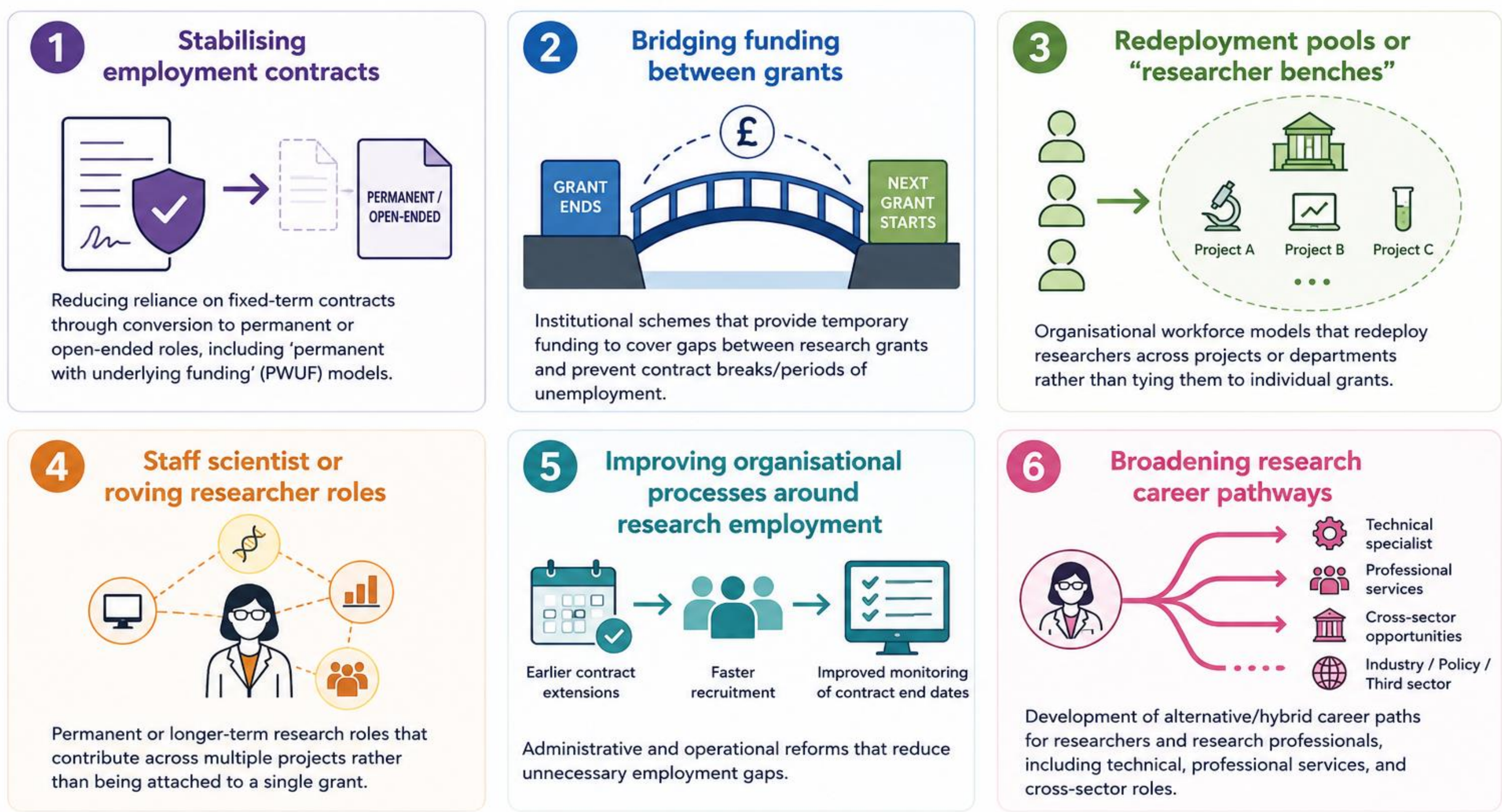


Figure 2: Organisational Responses to Employment Precarity and System Instability