



International Consortium
of Research Staff
Associations

Researcher Precarity

What is ICoRSA mission?

- Network researchers from across the globe
- Gather evidence on the structure of research careers globally
- Engage in globally informed advocacy
- Provide best practice researcher mobility, within and outside Europe
- Empower research staff associations and researchers
- Provide best practice on researcher career related topics of:
 - Gender equality, Research integrity, Open Access, Sustainable and environmental research, Incorporation of RRI Dimensions into research, Incorporation of SDGs into research

ICoRSA Association members

- **10 National research staff associations**
 - Europe: Ireland, UK, France, Spain, Portugal, Hungary, Ukraine
 - USA, Canada, South Africa, Australia
- **2 International research associations**
 - [WAYS](#) (World Association of Young Scientists)
 - [WFSW](#) (World Federation of Scientific Workers)
- **2 Research Centres RSA**
 - [EMBL](#) (European Molecular Biology Laboratory Staff Association)
 - [Max Plank](#) (to be confirmed)
- **1 research career development association**
 - [Vitae UK](#)
- **Individual members**



What we do...



Experts in Responsible Research and Innovation
RRI – through [RRING](#) and [GRRIP](#) projects



Experts in the UNESCO Sustainable Development
Goals SDGs



Experts in Quadruple Helix – members platforms
and engagement through [MUSICA](#) project



Experts in the creation of networks – Lead
partner in the creation of RRING network



Experts in workshops organisation and training

Value of Researchers to Knowledge Economies (OECD)

(<http://www.oecd.org/sti/science-technology-innovation-outlook/research-precariat/>)

- **Researchers are the most important resource of research systems**, and, as in other areas of activity, people are a key determinant of performance.
- The quality of the research produced **depends mostly on the expertise and skills of the researchers**, both individually and collectively, and the conditions given to them to perform their work.

What is Research Precariaty

- The Research Precariat can be defined as the population of researchers with a doctoral degree that hold temporary positions without any commitment to renew their positions or transform those positions into long-term or permanent contracts.

(OECD <http://www.oecd.org/sti/science-technology-innovation-outlook/research-precariat/>)

History of the new career of the 'Postdoc'

- The career of the researcher is a relatively new career. In the late 20th century, core research was relatively small, especially outside the United States. The career of the researcher was a transition position, between the doctoral and the guaranteed progression, or tenure track, to academic career. The intake of researchers matched the vacant positions in academia, guaranteeing career progression. Industry demand for researchers was small.

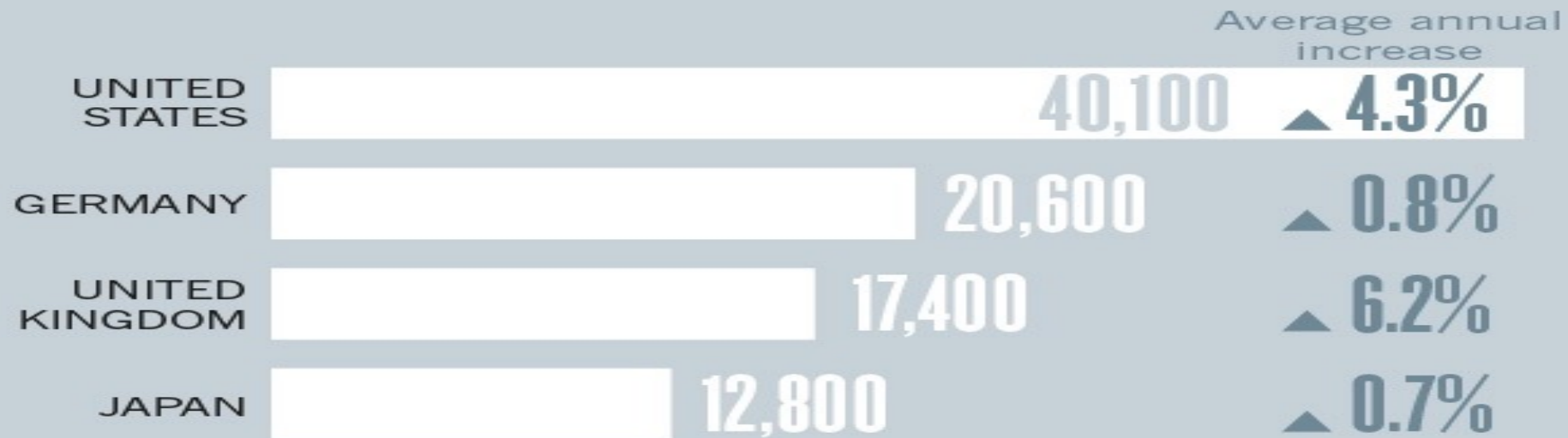
(Taken from COST Action application submission by ICoRSA)

History of the new career of the 'Postdoc'

- Since 2000's, two changes have emerged:
 - The demand for core research has increased tremendously, all across the globe, and is used as a measure of economic progress. Research has increased in both academic institutions and industry. (Nature [1])
 - The intake of PhDs has increased exponentially, whereas the number of academic positions remained constant, (and in some cases decreased). (Nature 2016 [2])

PHDS RISING, JOBS FLAT

The number of graduates with advanced science and engineering degrees has been rising around the world. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) has recorded an increase in the number of science-related doctorates that would typically funnel into academic positions. The leading OECD nations in 2014 were:



1.6%

The proportion of young people completing a doctorate of any kind in OECD member countries has doubled from **0.8%** less than two decades ago.

3,000

In most countries, however, the growth in academic jobs has not kept pace. US universities, for example, create only about **3,000** new full-time positions annually.

The new American way of a 'career'

(Taken from COST Action
application submission by
ICoRSA)

The 'postdoc' research position emerged as a new position, but not a career.

all posts were offered on short-term contract basis.

The research career was probably the first new career of the post industrial age to be completely following the new "American" employment style of short-term contract positions.

Almost no positions offered to early stage researchers were permanent, as would be offered to similar positions in industry.

The advantages to 'University Inc' of Precarity

(Taken from COST Action application submission by ICoRSA)

A work force that is only hired for the duration of a project, departing once project is ended.
added huge efficiencies for employers

Staff had little employment rights as a result, often with no holiday, pension or maternity rights

The employment force was in general non-unionised, due to their short term stay, and often acquiescent, if not fearful of their employers, further increasing employer control.

The new reality for researchers

(Taken from COST Action application submission by ICoRSA)



Employees might be offered a series of rolling contracts, often over 15 years or more. The number of contracts gave no extra entitlement to security and were let go, in favour of younger candidates.



Same pay, with each new contract.



No career advancement: No career stability: No prospect of permanent position.

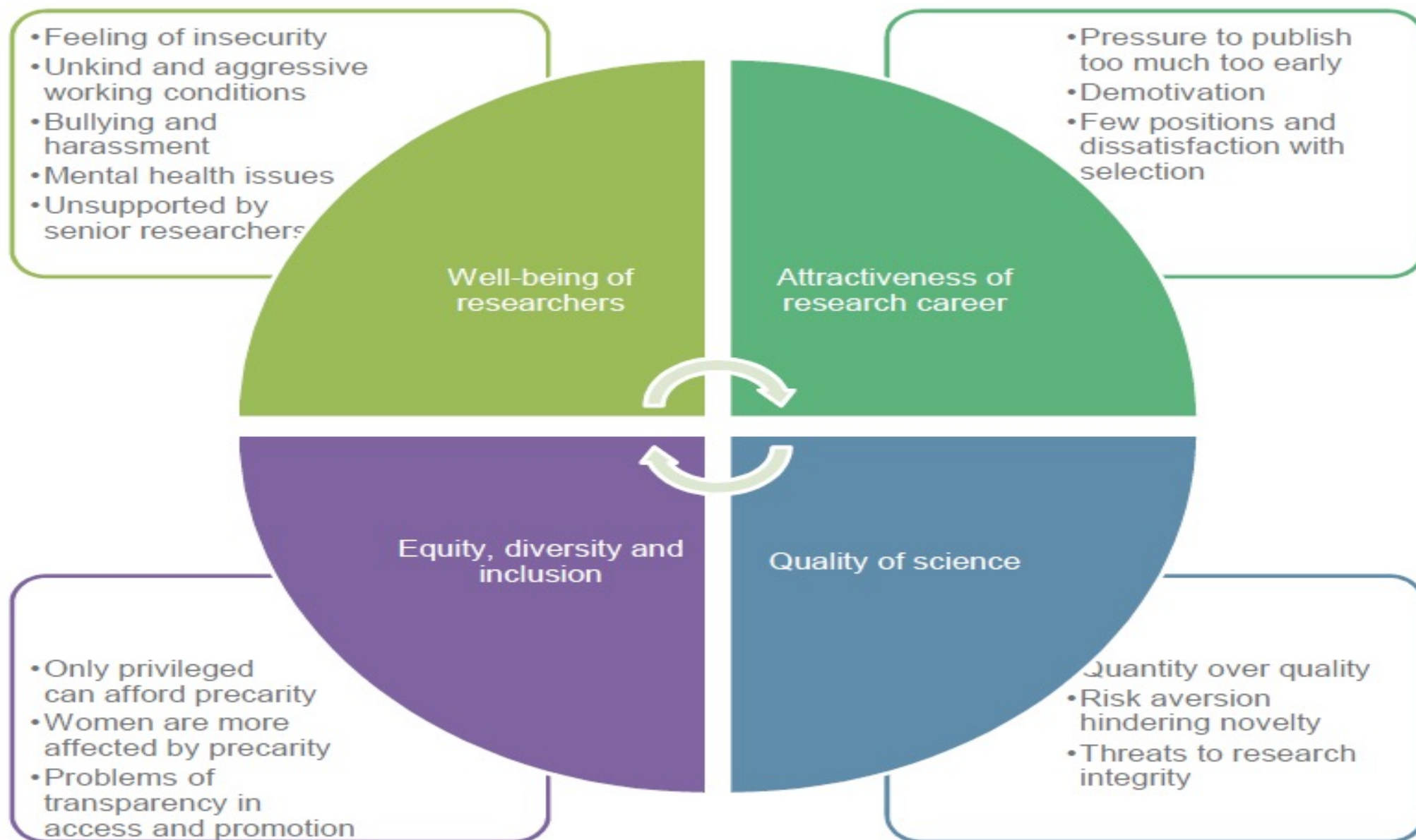
Situation for researchers seems to be getting worse

(Taken from COST Action application submission by ICoRSA)

- European recession in 2007, states drastically reduce research budgets, ending stability for careers.
- Less permanent posts were offered, Short-term contracts were increased, salaries reduced, as were terms and conditions. Despite European recession ending, the legacy continues.
- The emergence of “zero contract hours”, “precarious” or “casual” contracts is increasingly being used in contract negotiations. Project based work is not vulnerable to it yet, but it is only a matter of time.
- Some states re-designated postdoc researchers as trainees, in order to remove their eligibility to claim for CID e.g. Ireland.

Effects of Precarity

<https://community.oecd.org/events/4551>



The facts – Italian example (ADI)

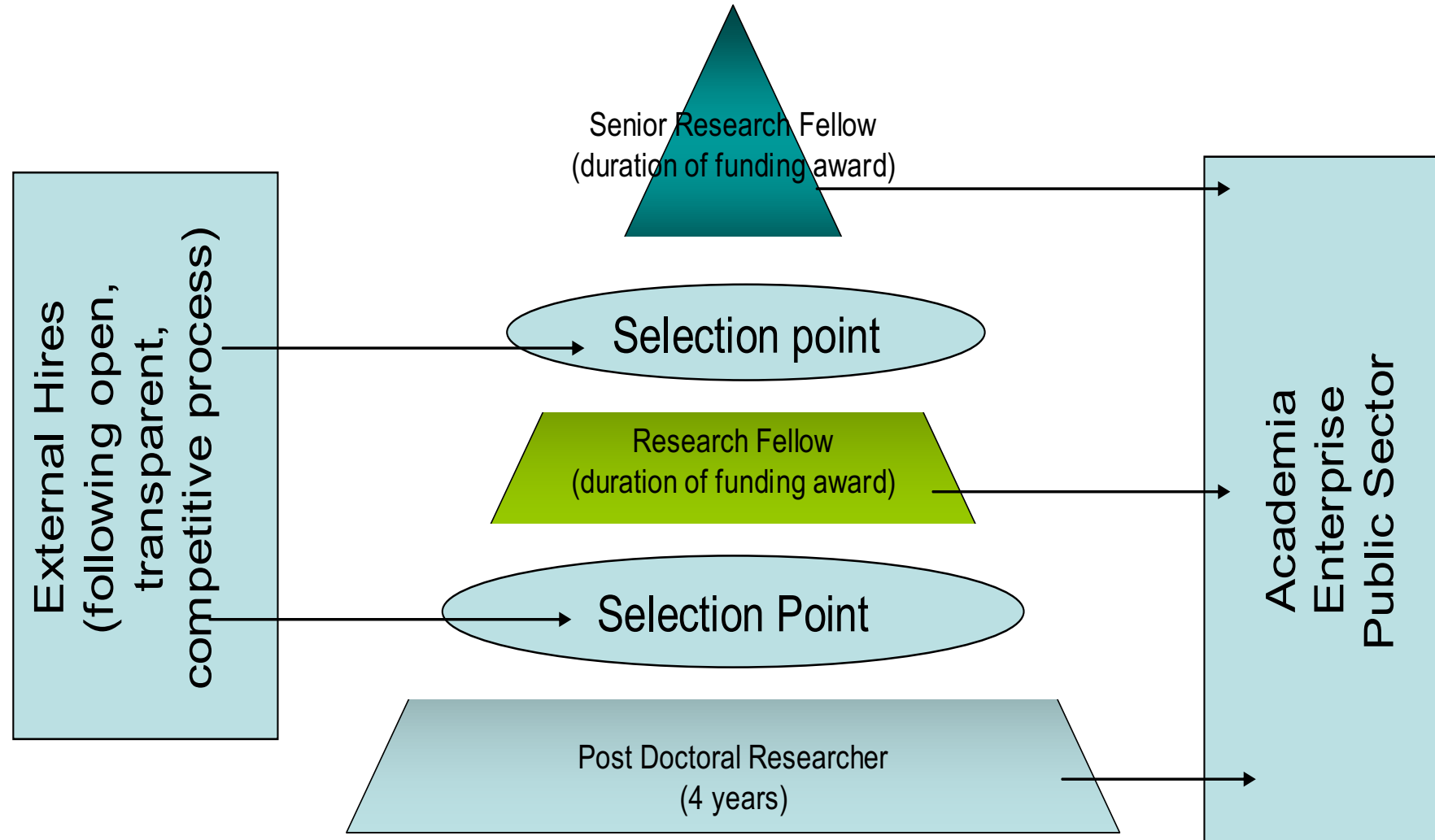
<https://www.nature.com/articles/d43978-020-00037-8>

- 56.2% of the more than 13,000 annual postdoctoral fellows leave the university system after the fellowship, 29% after an RTD-A, 5.3% after an RTD-B. Only 9.5% of the initial fellows have the chance of obtaining a permanent position.
- 36% of the post-doc researchers declare to have access to mortgages. Also, while 92% of them would like to have children, 67% are putting starting a family on hold.

What is the Research Career – ideal pyramid

taken from Irish HERG report:

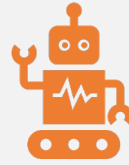
HERG\WG1 Researcher Careers\Draft Report\Researcher Careers discussion document 24 JULY 09.doc)



OECD finding ([Link](#))

- **The move away from core basic funding to project-based funding is making research systems increasingly dependent on a cohort of junior staff employed on casual contracts.**
- Furthermore, the context for funding and the development of research assessment regimes puts emphasis on the short-term output of research, which places immense pressure on early career researchers to publish.
- **The traditional academic career path can no longer absorb the increasing number of doctorate holders in many systems, which is [heightening career competitiveness to extreme levels](#) and contributing to greater precarity.**

Issues facing University for research in current economic climate



Research can be a loss making endeavour, due to insufficient overheads.



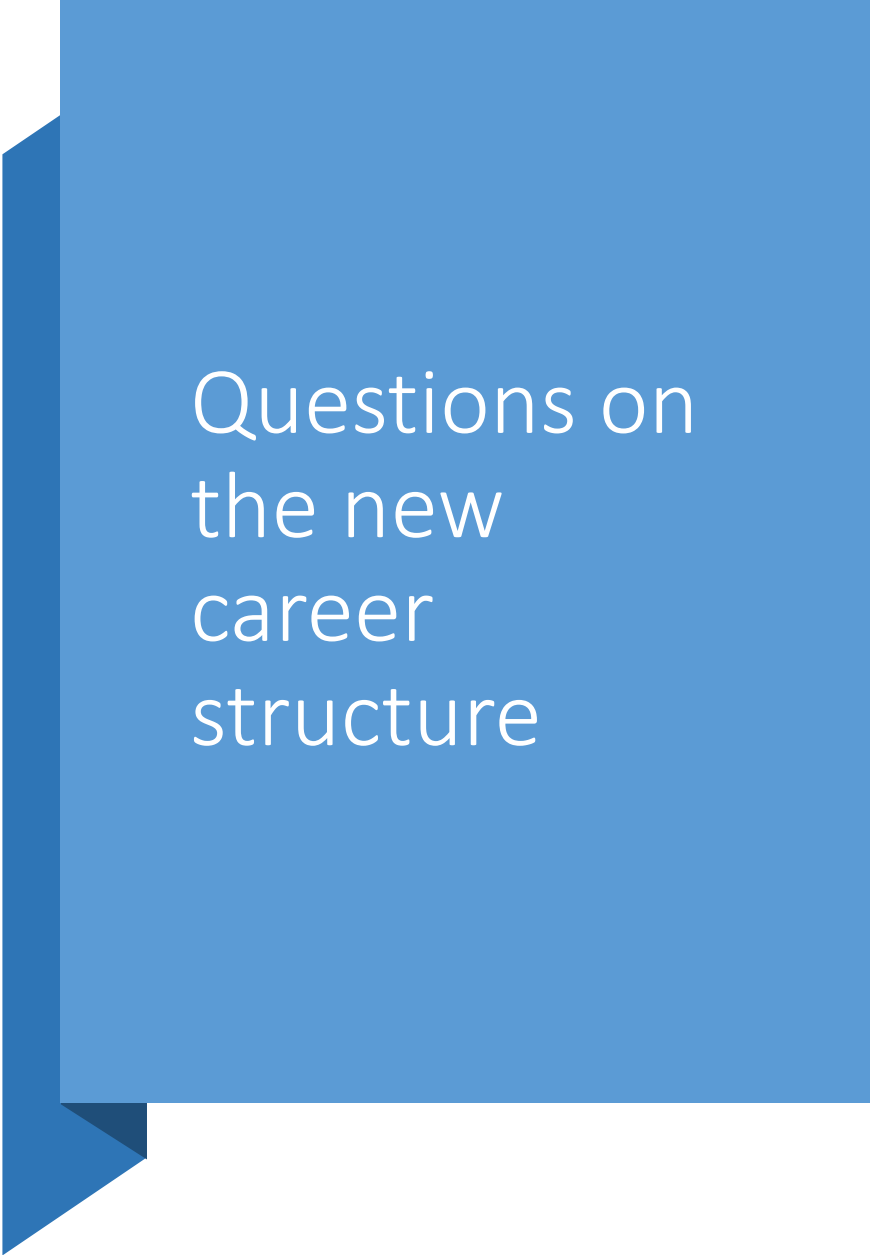
Imbalance of researchers in sciences, with some departments heavily funding research.



Liability of University for researchers in:

CID

Redundancy and pensions



Questions on the new career structure

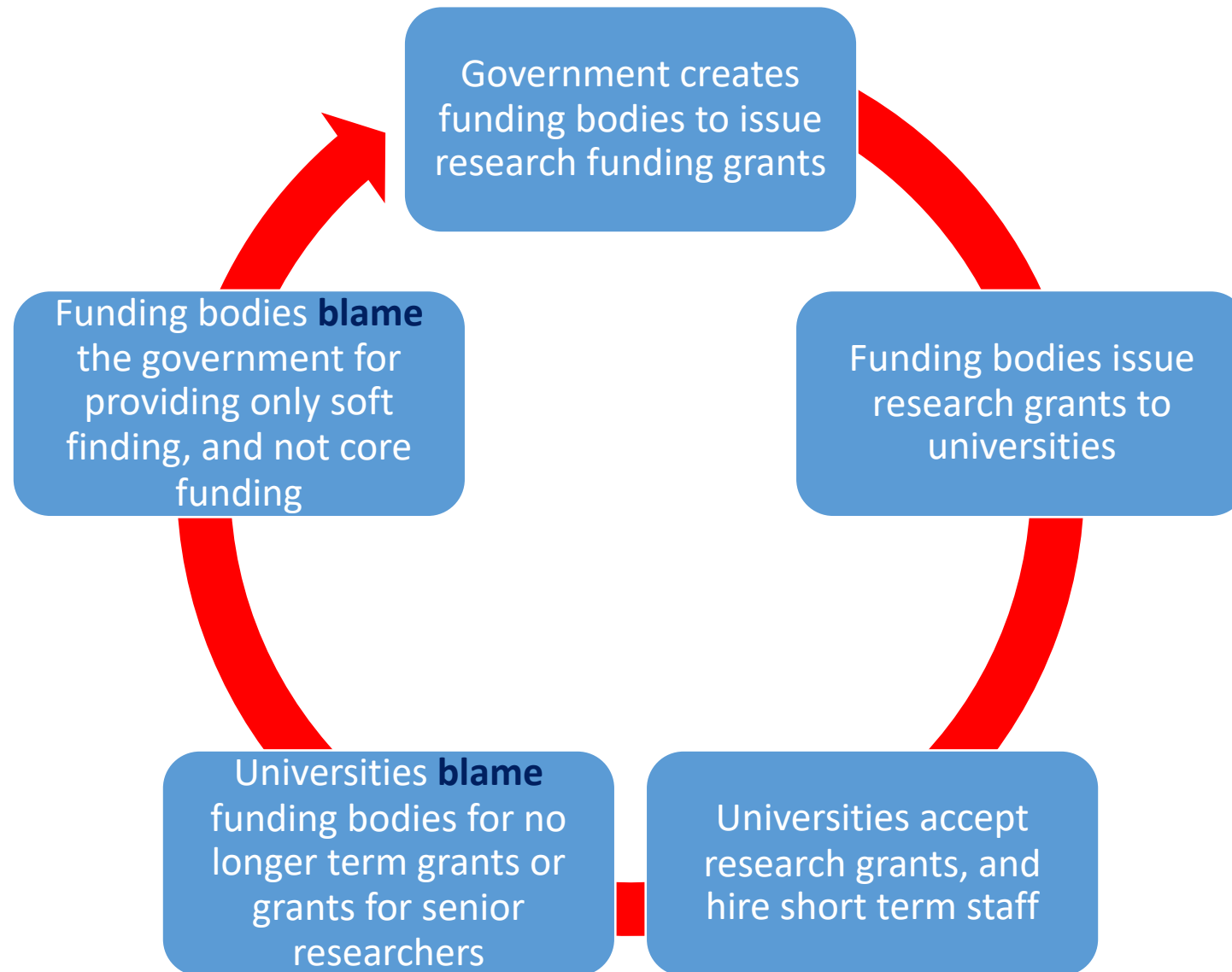
Confusion over intention and outcome of career structure, in particular the economic benefit to University.

Is there a cost-benefit analysis of more permanent sustainable careers?

Non yet

Are there avenues to make research cost neutral/revenue generating? What is the true cost of research required.

Perfect circular blaming game



Ramifications for University of researcher drain

Reduced capacity to

- expand research centres
- Retain valued staff

Loss of reputation due to loss of senior staff

Loss of contracts awarded.

Loss of research funding

Reduced ability to attract

- Students
- Top researchers

What needs to be done – from OECD [Link](#)



Policy changes desired

01

Government core funding extended to cover research as well as traditional teaching

02

Funds can be from multiple source

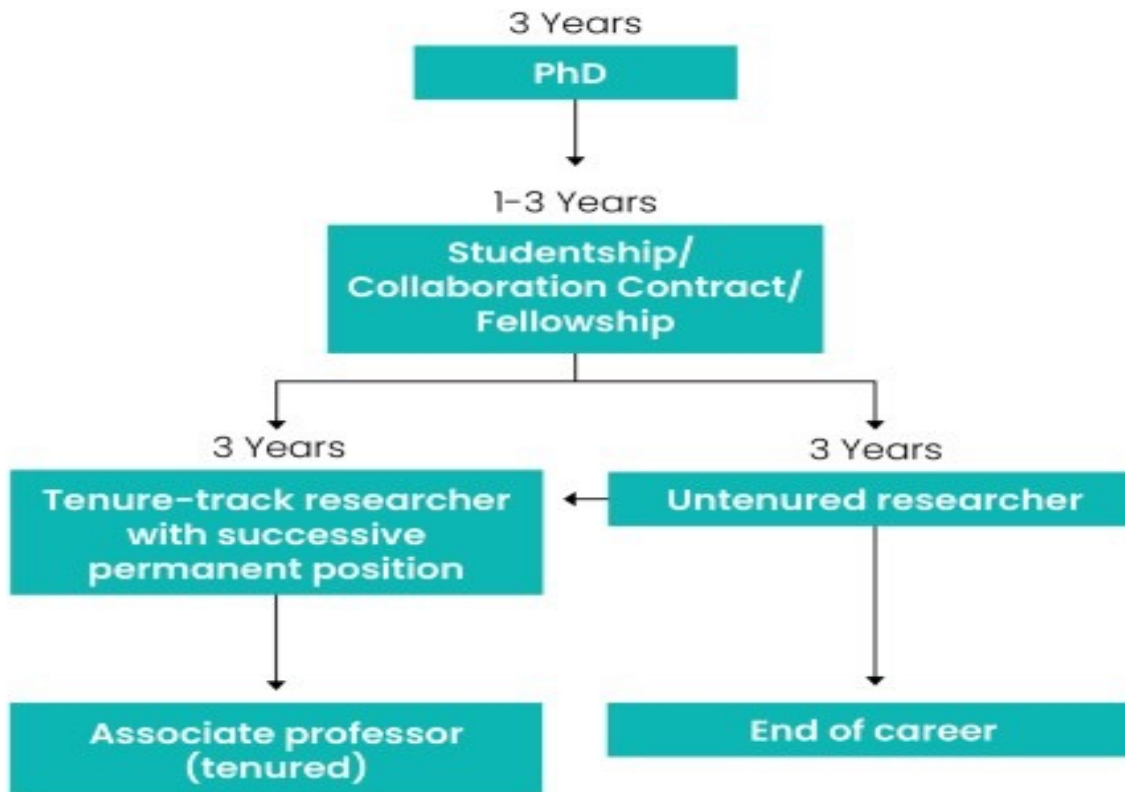
03

Allow researchers to remain in same grade if funds allow, and researcher is in agreement.

The Italian story – reality & possibility

<https://www.nature.com/articles/d43978-020-00037-8>

How it works now



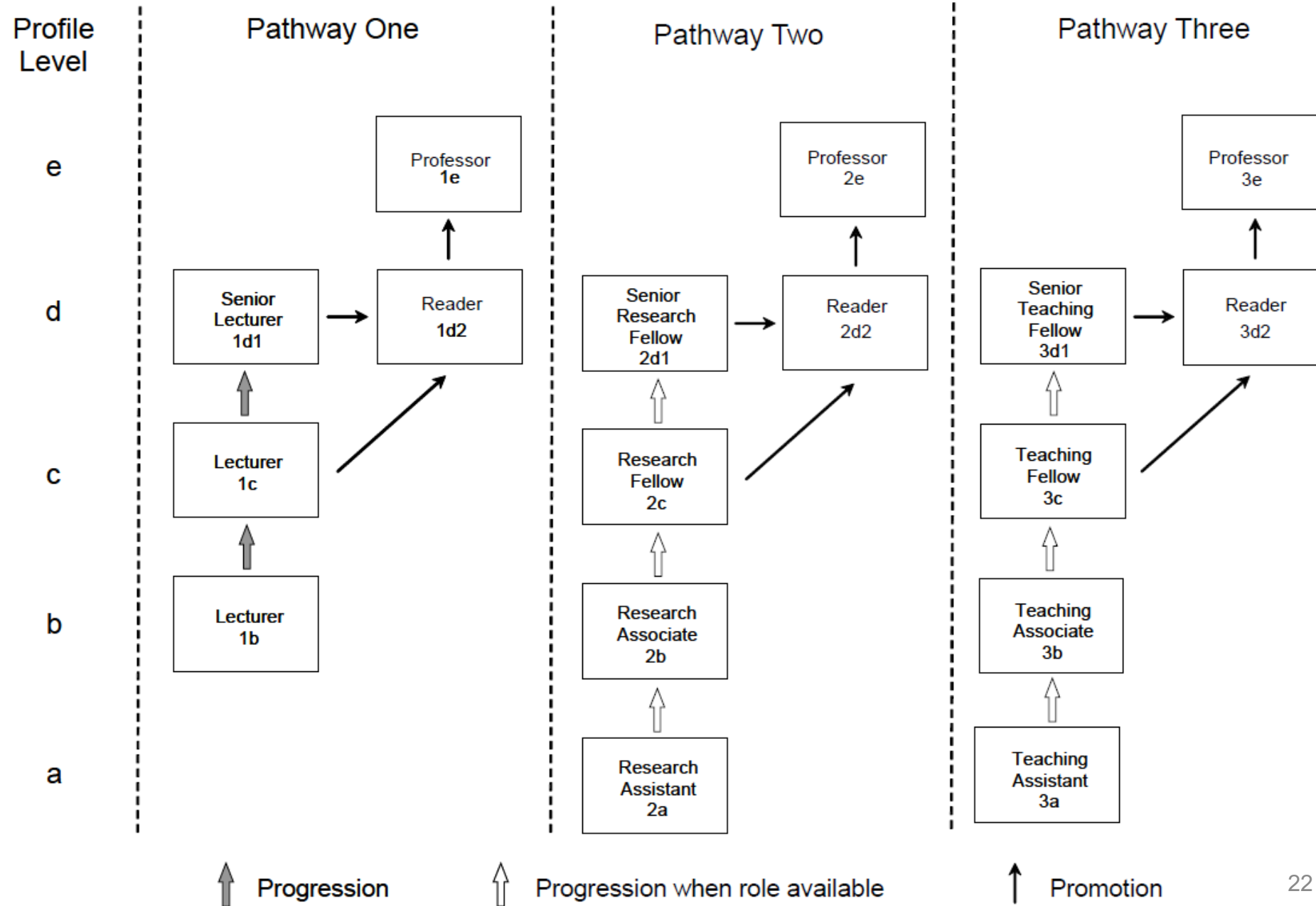
How it could work



What are countries doing? (from OECD [Link](#))

- The Canada Research Chairs Program invests up to CAD 295 million per year to attract and retain some of the most accomplished and promising minds.
- Japan funds the Leading Initiative for Excellent Young Researchers (LEADER) whose objective is to provide stable and independent positions for young researchers in new areas of research.
- The federal government in **Germany** funds a “[tenure track programme](#)” for a thousand professorships (providing EUR 1 billion for the period 2017–2032). The “[women professors program](#)” finances several full professorships for higher education institutions with convincing strategies for ensuring gender equality.
- In **China**, the government has issued [guidelines to address the “publish or perish”](#) mentality in the assessment of academics and universities, with consequences for funding decisions.

Academic Staff Career Pathways



Bristol University
(taken from presentation by BU to UCCRSA 2005)

Career framework for researchers examples

- European Career Framework ([Link](#))
- UK Concordat ([Link](#))
- Irish Research Career Framework ([Link](#))

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INTERNATIONAL CONSORTIUM OF RESEARCH STAFF ASSOCIATIONS