

Routes to precariousness: the expansion of fixed-term contracts in the Irish Higher Education and Early Childcare Education

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Post-recession Ireland: overall **flexibilization of employment** relationship BUT flexibility for the employer
Implications across the **occupational structure** (not only the bottom)

'Social Implications of Precarious Work' project

- **Contractual (objective) precarity**, e.g. irregular part-time work, fixed-term contracts, self-employment
- **Qualitative study (2016-2017)** – interviews with stakeholders and **40 precarious workers AND the analysis of the existing statistical data** (Quarterly National Household Survey; Census data)
- **Sample:** over-representation of precarious workers with professional jobs => shift in focus towards 'middle-class' precarity

Findings: importance of social implications and impact of precarious work – career, housing, family formation, health...

Definitions of precarious work: usually in opposition to full-time open-ended employment

Characteristics

- Relative ease of dismissal, insecurity and limited employment rights (Benach, 2014; Rubery et al, 2018; Vosko, 2010)
- Often low levels of job satisfaction, low levels of autonomy, limited control over working time (Kalleberg, 2011; McGann et al., 2016)

Growing importance

- Macrostructural changes, the rise of neoliberal ideology, deregulation of employment relationship, competition... (Kalleberg, 2011; 2012; Cappelli, 1999)
- Often associated with work done by women and/or migrants
- BUT: 'spreading' to the advantaged male population (Kalleberg, 2018)

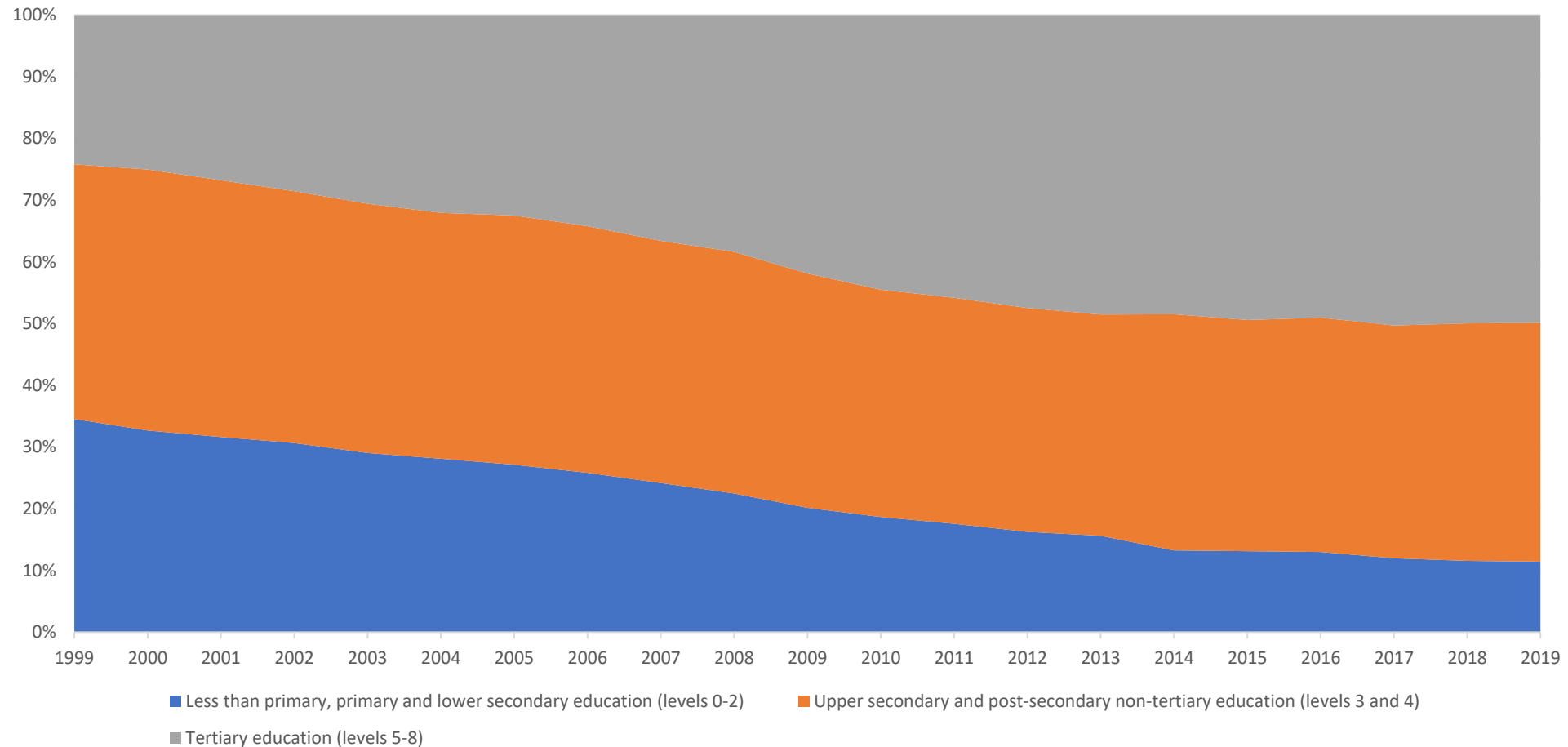
Discussion still focused on **low-paid and low-skilled work**

High-skilled employment and 'boundaryless' careers?

The **role of state** in **shaping precarious employment** (O'Sullivan et al. 2020)

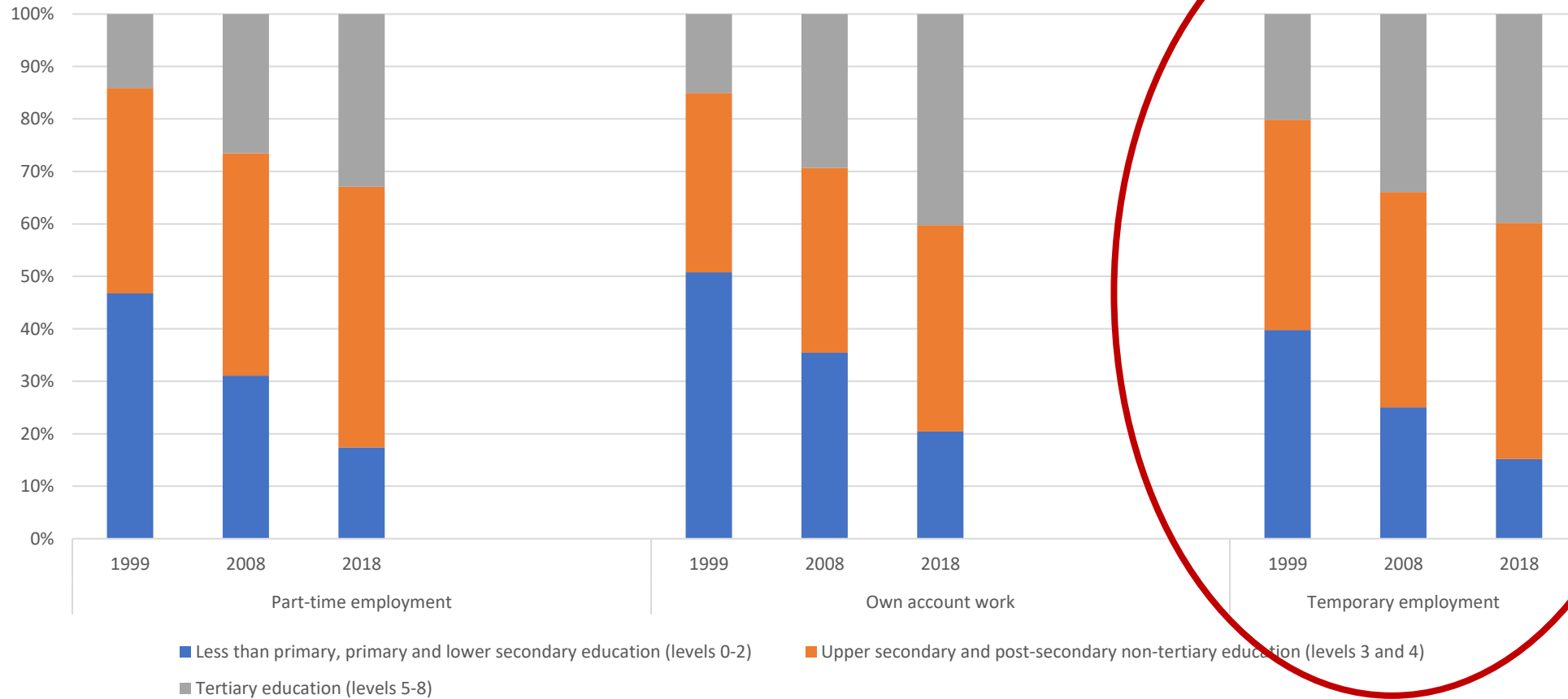
Employment in Ireland: levels of education (1999-2019)

Levels of education and employment (15-64); %



Flexibilisation of professional work: contractual shifts

Non-standard employment and education levels



International literature: evidence of ongoing flexiblisation and precarisation of employment in this sector

- On one hand, growing importance of so-called 'knowledge economy' (Allmer, 2018)
- On the other hand, massification and marketization of HE (Clark, 1987) and the emergence of the 'neoliberal university' (Archer, 2008; Gill, 2013)

Ongoing segmentation of the sector

- Division between 'tenured core' and 'tenuous periphery' (Kimber, 2003)
- Peripheral 'teaching only' and 'research only' positions (Loveday, 2018)

Emphasis on mobility and hyper-productivity (Bozzon et al., 2017)

- International mobility often a pre-condition to stable employment
- Emergence of 'immobile' 'casual academics'

Expansion of 'teaching only' and 'research only' contracts in the Irish Higher Education (HE)

Traditional division: academic staff (teaching and research) and support (administration) personnel

Policies and shifts pre-dating recession:

- Expansion of third level education: emphasis on third level degrees for Irish students
- Increased emphasis on research and international competition

More recently...

- Post-recession public sector recruitment freeze
 - Overall cuts in funding
 - Ongoing emphasis on externally funded research projects
 - Growing importance of the enrollment of international students
- ⇒ Increasing numbers of **'adjunct' lecturers** – Universities employed 40% of lectures on fixed-term basis (2016 Cush Report)
- ⇒ Increasing numbers in **'specific purpose'** contracts for **externally funded researchers** – 30% increase in academic research posts between 2013-2018 only! (HEA, 2019)

When I completed my PhD I got a research job in another department. It was initially as a research assistant, and then made the transition to Postdoctoral research fellow, and **that was for about a year.** And then after that, there was a job that came up in the research centre where I currently work [...]. That kind of gave me an entry point into the research centre [...] initially it was like a research scientist role that came up [...] **So [then] I was a research scientist for 3 months, then I got a position as a research lead here for maternity cover, and that was for about 6 months.** That was quite well paying, but then **after that finished up, I went back to the research scientist role for a few months, and then a new job as a post doc came up here, so I've been a post doc since January 2017.**
[Researcher, fixed-term contract, interviewed in April 2017]

More generally, the sense I get is that **permanent positions aren't being created. Although it seems to be very uneven;** I have friends in other departments like political science, history, botany and there are positions being created. [...] I think it is something interesting within the university; **even though there is a general tendency towards short term, fixed term, precarious work, there is also quite uneven, between departments and Schools [...]** The only way that I can get a permanent position is if I manage to win a large research award, (I have 3 years left in my contract) in that time, which is basically a European research award.
[Lecturer, fixed-term contract]

International literature: limited discussion on precarious work

- Focus: low pay, ongoing professionalization, increased involvement of the state (particularly in the UK)

Childcare in Ireland: prolonged reliance on informal arrangements

- Underdevelopment of the formal care and influence of the 'housewife model'
- From the early 2000s: expansion of private for-profit centres
- Involvement of the state: 2006 pre-school and childcare regulations
- 2006: more than 80 percent of pre-school children cared for parent/guardian

Early Child Care and Education (ECCE) Scheme

- Introduced in 2010 , expanded in 2016 for children 3 years – 5 years 6 months
- Increase in employment in the sector and increased emphasis on staff qualifications
- Overall successful uptake of the scheme, but...

...ECCE scheme only runs for 3 hours a day, 38 weeks is per calendar year (matching schools' schedule)

- Expansion of employment in the sector but many on **temporary contracts**
- Jobs are low paid and insecure but require third level qualifications

I never had a contract with her. [...] Literally it was like, **you're working on Wednesday, Thursday and Friday this week, next week I'd be working Monday Tuesday and Wednesday – oh can you come in tomorrow? It was like that every week, it was like - I cannot do this anymore, and it's ridiculous! **And it was just like that every week; you didn't know whether you were coming or going.** And I was like; - I can't, so I left it.**

[Early Years Education professional]

We are the same as the primary school with the same holidays, so whenever they close, we close too but we don't get paid. We have to go on the dole, and you often don't get the dole because the school just closes for a day [...] and you just don't get paid. Now, we get paid for bank holidays, but that's it. **And then your contract ends in June basically and you might get re-employed come September.**

[Early Years Education professional]

ECE and HE jobs: 'Vocation', responsibility and unpaid work

They mentioned, oh you've done 69 extra hours; it's ok next year you don't need to do that much. But I still had to do it.[...]. And at the same time **I felt a sense of responsibility;** if I said I don't want to teach it, who's going to do it? And I know it's wrong of me because I should have said, well if I get paid I'll do it. **But you know when you have such a close relationship with people you work with, you feel that you're putting them on the spot** and you feel like you're being unfair. **But they don't think about that when you don't have a job, and you don't have enough money to survive on, that they are putting us in an unfair position.**
[Teaching Fellow, fixed-term contract]

Yea they call it **non-contract hours.** [...] **I was forever bringing stuff home with me, trying to finish them off.** [...] **But you just don't get the time** [...] Kids start coming in at eight o'clock. The last kid doesn't leave 'til six. You've still got to clean the room. You've still got to prep it for the next day. You know, by the time you get to leave you're about half six, a quarter to seven. **You don't get paid for that extra work. But you do it for the love of the job.** You do it because the little kids faces. **It's what mum and dad expect, what your manager expects of you.**[...]. **And you have to do it for the children, otherwise you shouldn't be in childcare.**
[Early Years Education professional]

Precarious contracts in HE and ECE: stress and worry about the future

Yea, it's **permanently thinking about the next job**. You're always thinking about it, you're always trying to watch and see where to apply. **So I'm thinking I'm finished in April**, so maybe it's a possibility of a couple of months of funding at the end [...]. **So I have to be looking out for jobs**, so there's a 4 year job advertised in another university, so I'm applying for that at the moment. **So that takes a lot of time to put your CV together again, and I'm constantly applying for, I don't know how many jobs I've applied for in the last 4 or 5 years, a lot!**
[Researcher, fixed-term contract]

Definitely stress – coming up to summer as well when there's like, what am I going to do? And last year was a real panic, and getting that work... **That whole summer was stressful because of that**. But generally that is it, it's the summer time, it's when you don't have any work. **And it is money as well, when it comes to summer it is money; you know you're only going to be earning 120 a week from this dole** so you're really going to have to get some more money. **But it's more than that – it's that sitting around and doing nothing**. I just go crazy, I can't do that, I have to be doing something. **So, that's not a nice part of it, definitely not**.
[Early Years Education professional]

Policies and their (in)direct effects on employment relationship

- ECE: ECCE scheme and fixed-term jobs but increased emphasis on quality of service and staff qualifications
- HE: Reliance on research and external funding, lack of proper lectureships
- ⇒ Professionalization of former casual jobs and casualization of regular 'good' employment
- ⇒ Precarious jobs which require higher levels of education

Consequences for the workers

- Fragmented careers, horizontal mobility, lack of career prospects
- Inability to plan for the future (work and outside work)
- Social consequences: housing, health, family formation

Consequences for employers, students, children...

- Staff turnover and loss of experience: workers on the move but usually starting from the lowest positions
- Quality of teaching, research and childcare: long-term in the profession but short-term with one employer

THANK YOU!

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