



Senate Select Committee on Job Security

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To the Select Committee on Job Security,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on the work of this Select Committee.

Science & Technology Australia (STA) is the peak body representing more than 88,000 scientists and technologists in Australia. Our member organisations include specialist scientific societies, research institutes, and research strategy bodies such as councils of deans.

Insecure work in the research sector is a longstanding challenge. The COVID-19 pandemic has amplified these challenges for the workforce in the research sector.

Science & Technology Australia, along with other peak bodies, has produced several reports on the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the research workforce. They highlight the following:

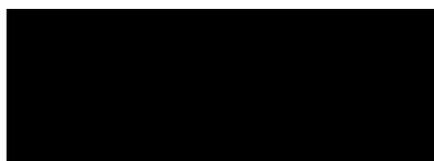
- Women and early-career researchers are more heavily concentrated in insecure jobs, and are at greater risk of job losses;
- The COVID-19 pandemic has led to significant job losses in Australia's universities – particularly for staff in insecure work;
- The ongoing challenge of insecure work is damaging the morale and wellbeing of the research workforce.

In this submission, STA outlines the key findings of the work behind these conclusions. We encourage the committee to refer to the following reports for further information:

- [The initial employment impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on Australia's science workforce;](#)
- [The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on women in the STEM workforce;](#)
- [Impact of the pandemic on Australia's research workforce;](#)
- [Impacts of Covid-19 for EMCRS;](#)
- [20/21 Professional scientists' employment and remuneration report;](#)
- [2020 Australia's STEM Workforce Report](#)

We thank the committee for the opportunity to provide evidence on the issue of insecure work. STA would be happy to assist the committee further.

Kind regards,



Associate Professor Jeremy Brownlie
President
Science & Technology Australia



Misha Schubert
CEO
Science & Technology Australia

Women and early-career researchers more reliant on insecure work

According to the latest STEM workforce report by the [Office of the Chief Scientist](#), only 48% of the university-qualified science workforce was employed full-time in 2016. For young people in the science workforce (those aged under 29), the proportion working full-time has fallen to 62% to 54% between 2012 to 2016. Taken together, these two statistics highlight the particular challenge of insecure work for Australia's talented early-career STEM professionals.

Statistically, women are also more likely than men to be in insecure work in the science and research sector. Based on the data available, women held more of the casual contracts in universities, and only 12% of academics at the professorial level in universities are women. Referring back to the work of the Office of the Chief Scientist, only 34% of women in the STEM workforce with a child were working full-time.

These figures highlight that women and early-career researchers were more likely to be in insecure work in the science and research workforce prior to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The COVID-19 pandemic has led to significant job losses in the university sector - particularly for staff in insecure work

Early in the COVID-19 pandemic, it became clear there would be a significant hit to revenue for universities and research institutions. It was anticipated this would result in job losses in the science and research sector - with one estimate of 21,000 full-time equivalent jobs at risk.

Unfortunately, this estimate has proven to be accurate - the peak body Universities Australia reported at least [17,300 jobs were lost from Australian universities in 2020](#). This number could potentially be higher, with casual contracts not being renewed in an effort to reduce costs.

These job losses, however, are not necessarily uniform across the entire STEM research workforce. Because early career researchers and women are more likely to be in part-time or casual work in the sector, these jobs are at greatest risk.

Organisations like the Early- and Mid-Career Researcher (EMCR) Forum, the Australian Mathematical Society, and the Statistical Society of Australia have all monitored the impact of the pandemic closely. Their research shows this risk is real for the sector. The EMCR forum, for example, found 57% had an increased uncertainty of their employment (this figure was 61% for part-time staff and 42% for full-time staff).

The ongoing challenge of insecure work is damaging morale in the research workforce.

The downside of insecure work is more than just the insecurity of work. It affects the morale of the research workforce. STA, along with Professionals Australia, survey the scientific workforce on workplace pay and conditions and morale each year.

In the most recent survey, 18.3% of Australia's professional scientists said they were considering leaving the profession permanently. Almost ten percent of scientists had also changed jobs in the previous 12 months, 22% of whom cite greater job security as a

reason. These challenges to workplace morale were, of course, exacerbated during the COVID-19 pandemic particularly in the insecure workforce as was the case throughout the economy.

Conclusion

The COVID-19 pandemic, and the associated economic challenges, has highlighted some of the major challenges associated with an increasingly insecure workforce. The pandemic amplified and exacerbated the growing challenge of insecure work in Australia's research sector.

Insecure work disproportionately affects the early-career workforce and women in the STEM workforce (who are often doubly affected by being early-career researchers).

STA draws the committee's attention to our submission to the [2021/21 federal budget process](#) and our proposals to tackle this growing challenge of insecure work. In it, we make recommendations to track the researcher workforce lost during the pandemic - and develop a bridging strategy to ensure crucial STEM talent is not lost to Australia.