

Tipping point: exploring the implications of a precarious early career academic workforce

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There is clear evidence that early career academics are facing an increasingly precarious future. In this presentation we will illustrate the different ways in which precarity is impacting on the academic workforce and its functionality. Drawing on Australian higher education workforce statistics and organisational theory, we explore some key issues that are impacting on the security and capacity of early career academics, and, more generally, the academic workforce as a whole. The institutional practices and systems that are contributing to increasing precarity in higher education are mapped, illustrating the risks to individuals, the academic fraternity and ultimately, the sector as a whole. We offer some points for discussion relating to the organisational practices that need to be reformed to address the personal, institutional and sectoral risks of precarity in higher education. Key issues raised include academic workforce planning, doctoral candidate preparation for university employment, type and level of appointments, the ambiguous messages that are encountered by newcomers and the nature of support within institutions.