IMPACT OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON THE CAREER LIFE CYCLE OF EARLY CAREER ACADEMICS:

LESSONS (UN)LEARNED

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CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	**1**
1. INTRODUCTION	**5**
2. UNDERSTANDING THE CONTEXT	**6**
3. RESEARCH DESIGN	**9**
3.1. Quantitative Methods	9
3.2. Qualitative Methods	11
3.3. Limitations	12
4. RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION	**13**
4.1. Impact of the Pandemic on ECAs	13
4.1.1. Impact on Workload	13
4.1.2. Impact on Productivity	17
4.1.3. Impact on Well-being	21
4.1.4. Career Development and Aspirations	25
4.1.5 Reflections of ECAs on career life cycle	29
4.2. Perceptions of support received during and post pandemic	30
4.2.1. Reflections of business school leaders on the changing environment	34
5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS	**37**
5.1. Recommendations	38
6. REFERENCES	**40**

List of Figures

Figure 1: Impact of pandemic on ECA workload 13

Figure 2: Impact of pandemic on ECA Workload by Gender 14

Figure 3: Impact on ECA workload by Ethnicity 15

Figure 4: Impact of pandemic on ECA workload by institution 15

Figure 5: Impact of pandemic on ECA workload by ethnicity and gender 16

Figure 6: Impact of Covid-19 on ECA productivity 17

Figure 7: Impact of Covid-19 on ECA productivity by gender 18

Figure 8: Impact of Covid-19 on ECA productivity by ethnicity 18

Figure 9: Impact of Covid-19 on ECA productivity by Institution 19

Figure 10: Impact of Covid-19 on ECA productivity by ethnicity and gender 20

Figure 11: Impact of Covid-19 on ECA well-being 21

Figure 12: Impact of Covid-19 on ECA well-being by gender 22

Figure 13: Impact of Covid-19 on ECA well-being by ethnicity 22

Figure 14: Impact of Covid-19 on ECA well-being by Institution 23

Figure 15: Impact of Covid-19 on ECA well-being by ethnicity and gender 23

Figure 16: Impact of Covid-19 on ECA Career development and aspirations 25

Figure 17: Impact of Covid-19 on ECA career development and aspirations by gender 26

Figure 18: Impact of Covid-19 on ECA Career development and aspirations by ethnicity 26

Figure 19: Impact of Covid-19 on ECA Career development and aspirations Institution 27

Figure 20: Impact on Career development by gender and ethnicity 28

Figure 21: ECA perceptions of line manager support 31

Figure 22: ECA perceptions of Departmental support 31

Figure 23: ECA perceptions of pandemic and post-pandemic support by gender 32

Figure 24: ECA perceptions pandemic and post-pandemic support by ethnicity 32

Figure 25: ECA perceptions pandemic and post-pandemic support by Institution 33

List of Tables

Table 1. Profile of survey respondents 10

Table 2. Profile of ECA interview participants 12

ACRONYMS

BAM	British Academy of Management
BSL	Business School Leaders
ECA	Early Career Academic
HESA	Higher Education Statistics Agency
HEI	Higher Education Institutions
EDI	Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Purpose of study

Beyond the emerging consensus about the precarious nature of early career academics (ECAs) work and its effects on job security, career aspirations and development, little is known about their lived experiences. This research project led by a team of researchers at Oxford Brookes University in partnership with the British Academy of Management (BAM), aimed to provide a comprehensive understanding of the impact of Covid-19 pandemic on the career life cycle of early career academics (ECAs), with a particular focus on marginalized groups including women and ethnic minorities. Existing research highlights the persistent gender and racial inequalities in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) across the UK, and the disproportionate adverse impact the Covid-19 pandemic has had on different groups of academics. While ample evidence exists on the potential impact of structural inequalities in HEIs on academic career trajectories, there are knowledge gaps regarding the extent to which external shocks, such as the pandemic, might impact the career life cycle of ECAs. This project, which adopts an intersectional perspective in its analyses, provides an evidence base of the lived experiences of a diverse group of ECAs during and since the pandemic, and the subsequent impact on their career development and 'imagined futures'

Research Questions

Our overall research question asked: *How has the Covid-19 pandemic impacted the experiences and career life cycle of marginalized ECAs?* It explored issues around productivity, workload, work-life balance, wellbeing and management support, and address three main objectives:

- to examine the impact of the pandemic on career pathways and progression of ECAs.
- to understand how institutional leaders and researcher managers supported ECAs
- to develop recommendations on best practices to create an inclusive research and innovation environment that supports all ECAs

Research design

A co-designed approach was utilized in this study, and involved the setting up of an Advisory group to co-create the development of data collection instruments, act as a sounding board, and sense-check project findings. This group included ECAs, mid-career and senior academics in leadership positions, as well as a BAM representative.

A three-stage mixed-method design was adopted to meet the project objectives. In order to address the first objective relating to the impact of the pandemic on career choices and progression, an online survey in the first stage and semi-structured interviews in the second stage were conducted with ECAs. In order to address the second objective regarding the institutional support provided to ECAs, additional semi-structured interviews were conducted with business school leaders in the third stage. Data collection occurred during the period May 2024 to February 2025, with 131 responses being received to the online survey and 42 participants (33 ECAs and 9 business school leaders) being interviewed.

In this study a broad category is used to define ECAs, and includes those who are at the start of their academic career to within 10 years of completing their PhD, regardless of title. Typically, doctoral students, post-doctoral researchers, research fellows, lecturers and senior lecturers fall into this category.

Key findings

Impact on workload

Our survey indicates that approximately 52% of the ECAs felt the pandemic worsened their workload, whilst 17% felt their workload improved. Women appear to perceive a more negative impact of the pandemic than men. In terms of ethnicity, ethnic majority ECAs appear to be more negatively affected than ethnic minority ECAs. In addition, no statistically significant difference is observed between ECAs at Russell and non-Russell group institutions.

"52% of survey respondents felt the pandemic had a negative impact on their workload"

ECAs lived experiences also highlight the negative impact of the increased workload due to the transition to online teaching and associated increased, which sometimes resulted in exhaustion and burnout. The pandemic seems to especially worsen these experiences for ECAs with caring responsibilities. Additionally, some participants felt that greater consideration of individual circumstances would have created a more supportive environment.

Impact on productivity

Majority of survey respondents (53%) indicated a decline in productivity, whilst 16% experienced a rise in productivity levels. Even though no statistically significant differences are observed based on gender, the pandemic seems to have a greater impact on research activities for both ECA men and women. Additionally, ethnic minorities and ECAs in Russell group institutions appear to be statistically more negatively impacted than ethnic majorities and ECAs in non-Russell group institutions respectively.

While interviewed ECAs highlight the opportunities that online platforms created in terms of increasing network reach and identifying potential collaborations, the limited ability of such online exchanges to replace the serendipitous and organic interactions that result from working with colleagues in the same office space are noted. Similarly, the majority felt the disruptions to established workflows and new demands due to transitioning teaching online, such as providing students with pastoral support and dealing with increased lack of engagement, had an adverse effect on both teaching and research activities.

Impact on well-being

Amongst the four areas examined, ECA well-being was the most affected, with most ECA surveyed reporting a decline in their mental and physical well-being. The majority of ECAs (66%) indicate a negative impact of the pandemic on their overall well-being; with only 15% indicating a positive impact. We also observe that the negative impact on mental well-being was greater than on physical well-being, affecting 80% of women ECAs and 71% of men ECAs. In addition, there are statistically significant differences based on both gender and ethnicity. 19% of men ECAs identified positive impacts compared to 12% women ECAs, while 71% of ethnic minority ECAs indicated a negative impact compared to 51% of ethnic majority ECAs.

"Well-being was the most affected, with most ECAs surveyed reporting a decline in their mental and physical well-being"

The lived experiences of ECAs were mixed, with most experiencing a trade-off between the flexibility of remote working, and the health-related challenges, increased isolation, and the blurring of work-life boundaries. These disruptions to the way of working often negatively impacted their well-being, with the experiences being aggravated by one's living situation and caring responsibilities. The long-term impact of the pandemic is also seen in the reshaping of overall attitudes towards work, with an emphasis on prioritizing work-life balance. ECAs express a strong desire to re-establish clear boundaries, and to prioritize what is important for them, so that work does not dominate their lives.

Impact on career aspirations and development

Half of the survey respondents (50%) felt that the pandemic had a negative impact on their careers whilst 20% felt their careers were positively impacted. We observe that while there are no statistically significant differences based on ethnicity, women ECAs were significantly more likely to disagree than men ECAs on the positive impact on their career aspirations. A statistically significant difference is also noted between perceptions of non-Russell group (60%) and Russell group (54%) respondents on the negative impact of the pandemic on their career development.

"ECAs felt that the pandemic only slowed rather than altered their career trajectories"

Our interviews revealed that while some ECAs felt that the pandemic only slowed rather than altered their career trajectories, most agreed on the lack of focus on career development by institutions during the crisis. Existing dominant discourses and practices that valorize research continue to influence ECAs perceptions and aspirations. However, when reflecting on their overall career life cycle, there seems to be shifting perceptions regarding what academic success looks like, with collegiality, human connections, and making an impact, being an important part of that journey. The pandemic drew attention to pre-existing inequalities and privileges, with ECA's experiences and perceptions being influenced by intersecting identities of gender, ethnicity, age and social class. The precarious nature of academic careers in times of uncertainty, is also perceived to play a greater role in adversely impacting ECA's career pathways, especially for those on fixed term contracts and/or depending on one's visa status.

Perceptions of support

Overall, we observe positive perceptions by respondents of the support received from line managers during and post pandemic. However, perceptions of support by departments are less favourable, with only 32% of respondents indicating a positive experience during the pandemic. There was no statistically significant difference in the experiences of ECAs in terms of their gender or ethnicity. On the other hand, significant differences are observed in terms of institutional categories, with Russell group ECAs feeling more supported by their line managers than non-Russell group ECAs. It is also encouraging to note that ECA post pandemic support services have improved in all areas. Perceptions of adequate line manager and department support increased by 6% and 9% respectively compared to the pandemic levels of support.

"ECAs were more positive about the level of support received from line managers than at department/ institutional level"

ECA's experiences of receiving support were varied. Support measures ranged from 'hard' support in the form of stipends, equipment and training, to 'soft support' in the form of moral and emotional support by line managers and Heads of departments. However, while some ECAs' felt adequately supported, in most cases there seems to be a gap between what ECAs expected in terms of support and what was provided. These gaps in expectations combined with structural issues around poor communication, limited resources, and difficulties in navigating institutional structures, often meant that ECAs felt inadequately supported. To fill these gaps in support, ECAs often took the initiative to self-organize and create their own peer support groups and communities.

Reflections by the business school leaders highlight the challenges in supporting ECAs during a disruptive period characterized by increasing uncertainty, limited resources and rising expectations. While a range of support measures and initiatives are provided, these are often individually driven and/or based on existing practices. This emphasizes the need to standardize and mainstream such interventions to ensure equitable access by all ECAs. Additionally, the changing work practices are generally perceived to have a negative impact on ECAs, with the need to build individual and institutional resilience to deal with continuous crises being noted. We also find that existing perceptions and discourses regarding career progression sometimes seem to create tensions between individual

achievement and collegiality, and do not align with changing ECA attitudes to work-life balance. This implies that individual level initiatives, such as mentoring and training, which are crucial for ECAs' career development, are implemented together with broader structural initiatives aimed at changing organizational culture, practice and policies, in order to create a more inclusive and supportive academic environment.

Key Recommendations

- Pay greater attention to the potential long-term impact of the pandemic and its effect on ECAs' career life cycle and progression
- ECAs' changing attitudes to work and career aspirations requires a systemic change in practice, policy and overall organizational culture
- Embed EDI principles in work practices to ensure greater awareness of existing inequalities that could create additional barriers for the career progression of marginalized groups
- Develop career development schemes that take into account the intersectional positionalities of ECAs
- Develop better policies around mental health that acknowledge the impact of career precarity on ECAs mental wellbeing
- Standardize existing good practices around building ECA's research and teaching capabilities to improve their ability to meet ever increasing expectations, while ensuring equitable access to such resources
- Ensure ECA representation at multiple decision-making working groups to improve visibility and voice
- Create or foster a 'safe' environment where individuals feel empowered to request for reasonable adjustments that reflect their personal circumstances
- Protect ECAs' and other academics time allocated for research related activities and pedagogy development by ensuring proper timetabling and workflow planning.
- Provide clear guidance on the purpose and aims of support interventions, such as mentorship schemes (e.g. peer mentoring, reverse mentoring)
- Equip and empower line managers, given their critical role in providing pastoral support and mentorship to ECAs
- Provide clear institutional guidelines of valued outputs and collaborations, with efforts being made to manage ECAs' expectations regarding their career development and progression
- Ensure equitable recognition of contributions; which could involve the celebration and communication of ECA 'wins' at institutional level. Such recognition should take into account academic citizenship activities
- Work to replace systems of 'patronage' for advancement by developing transparent and inclusive opportunities for promotion criteria
- Develop institutional resilience by prioritizing the building of a resilient culture at all levels, ensuring necessary resources are available to support ECAs in dealing with the constant crises facing the academic sector
- Encourage wider adoption and implementation of the Researcher concordat by institutions

1. INTRODUCTION

This research project undertaken in partnership with the British Academy of Management (BAM) aimed to provide a comprehensive understanding of the impact of Covid-19 pandemic (hereafter referred to as 'the pandemic') on the career life cycle of early career academics, with a particular focus on marginalized groups including women and ethnic minorities. Studies show that persistent gender and racial inequalities within higher education institutes (HEIs) across the UK have an adverse impact on academics' careers and lived experiences (Śliwa et al, 2022). These inequalities significantly impact marginalized social groups such as women and ethnic minorities, and are persistent in areas of career aspirations, access to secure employment and career progression (Arday, 2018, 2021; Bhopal & Henderson, 2021). Additionally, the pandemic might have worsened the situation, by disproportionately impacting already disadvantaged groups (Pereira, 2021).

However, while there is growing evidence on the potential impact of structural inequalities in HEIs on academic career trajectories, limited knowledge exists on the extent to which external shocks, such as the pandemic, might impact the career life cycle of ECAs (Ivancheva et al., 2019). This study contributes to our understanding of the lived experiences and career trajectories of early career academics (ECAs) during and since the pandemic. In order to achieve this, the study investigated the question: *How has the Covid-19 pandemic impacted the experiences and career life cycle of marginalized ECAs?* It explored issues around productivity, workload, work-life balance, wellbeing and management support.

The study had three primary objectives:

- **to examine the impact of the pandemic on career pathways and progression of ECAs.**
- **to understand how institutional leaders and researcher managers supported ECAs**
- **to develop recommendations on best practices to create an inclusive research and innovation environment that supports all ECAs**

A co-design approach was adopted in order to ensure the involvement of both those who are directly impacted by the pandemic and can share their lived experiences, as well as those who can directly influence policies regarding supporting ECAs career development. Career development processes are embedded in complex and dynamic systems that result in non-linear and less predictable career trajectories (Pryor & Bright, 2022). It can be argued that such processes manifest themselves in the everyday lived experiences of working in academic institutions (Maxwell et al., 2019). As such, foregrounding ECAs' own stories of their lived experiences during and since the pandemic enables us to gain insights into the 'messiness' of the academic career life cycle. Such knowledge also facilitates the development of recommendations on how best to support ECAs career development.

The remainder of the report is organized as follows: Section 2 presents an overview of studies examining existing inequalities in the HE sector, and the varied impact of the pandemic. Section 3 introduces the co-designed mixed methods research design that was developed in exploring the lived experiences of ECAs through online surveys and semi-structured interviews. Section 4 then presents the research findings which focuses on areas of workload, productivity, wellbeing, career development and aspirations, as well as the support provided to ECAs. Finally, Section 5 reflects on the key insights from the study and advances recommendations for next steps.

2. UNDERSTANDING THE CONTEXT

This section provides an overview of the persistent inequalities existing in the UK Higher education sector, as well as the impact of Covid-19 pandemic on the career development of academics. The literature also focuses on the challenges faced by early career academics, with a focus on marginalized groups such as women and ethnic minorities.

"Social inequalities persist within higher education institutions across the UK, significantly impacting marginalized groups"

Inequalities in the UK Higher Education Sector

Within the broader academic context, social inequalities persist within higher education institutions (HEIs) across the UK (Śliwa et al., 2022), despite the progress made through initiatives like Athena Swan and the Race Equality Charter. According to the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) 2023/24 report, there were approximately 246,930 academic staff employed in the higher education sector (HESA, 2025). While females formed 51% of all staff on full-time employment, they formed the majority of those on part-time contracts (65%). Similarly, while males formed the majority of the academic staff (51%), females were overly represented amongst non-academic staff (63%). Of academic staff with known ethnicity, 24% were from ethnic minority backgrounds in 2023/24 (HESA, 2025). These disparities become even more apparent when one considers the level of contracts held. For example, a report published by the British Academy of Management (Śliwa et al., 2022) analysing the HESA data from 2016/17 – 2018/19, found that gender and ethnic diversity decreases with academic progression (26% of professors are women; 2% of professors are ethnic minorities). Additionally, the gender employment gap significantly increases when one considers intersections of gender and ethnicity (32% of academics who self-identified as Black and 35% who self-identified as 'Other' ethnic groups are women).

Even though there has been some gradual increases in staff diversity over the years, the latest HESA statistics indicates that the gaps still persist. As of 2023/24, only 32% of professors were female, and only 14% of professors with known ethnicity were from ethnic minority backgrounds; with the majority identifying as Asian. Only 1% of professors from ethnic minority backgrounds identified as Black (HESA 2025). These trends point to significant structural problems within HEIs that need to be acknowledged and addressed (Showunmi, 2023; Śliwa et al., 2022) in order to create a more inclusive research and innovation environment.

Whilst, existing research provides ample evidence of the potential impact of structural inequalities in HEIs on academic careers, majority of these studies (some exceptions include Enright and Facer, 2017; Hollywood et al., 2020; O'Keefe and Courtois, 2019; Spina et al., 2022) have primarily focused on the progression of those in senior positions. As a result, there is still limited understanding of how these inequalities impact those positioned at the lower hierarchy of academic structures. Additionally, the extent to which such inequalities might exacerbate the impact of external interventions and/or major societal disruptions on ECAs career life cycle and development (Ivancheva et al., 2019) remains underexplored.

ECA career development

In academia, career development focuses on understanding the process through which scholars create their work-related identity by managing various behaviours, tasks and experiences across various positions and organisations over time (Zacher et al., 2018). By nature of their work, academics tend to be highly educated and specialist in their fields; have high intrinsic work motivation; and tend to value working environments that promote independence and flexibility. Thus, the environmental context, which provides the opportunities and constraints, within which academics develop their careers is significant to this process. However, career development processes are neither linear nor predictable (Pryor and Bright,

2022). Instead, they tend to be embedded in complex and dynamic environments that are influenced by multi-level factors resulting in 'messy' career trajectories. For example, an individual's level of agency is not only influenced by one's personality or social in-groups (e.g. family, friends), but also by the broader socio-economic, political and institutional factors. As a result, career paths and life cycles tend to vary from one individual to the next.

Research focused on ECAs highlight the heterogeneity of this group in terms of career aspirations and progression. Hollywood et al. (2020) exploring the experiences of early career researchers found that it was not only situational factors such as the departmental environment or job security that impacted researchers' 'imagined futures', but also intrapersonal dimensions and individual personality. Studies also found that certain discourses around academic 'pipelines' and 'early careers' obscured the experiences of 'older' ECAs entering academia as a second-career, and those on long-term fixed term contracts (Spina et al., 2022). Moreover, the increased casualization of labour within universities continues to perpetuate inequalities by reinforcing 'citizenship' (those on permanent contracts) and 'non-citizenship' (those on contractual basis) status (O'Keefe & Courtois, 2019). Few options exist for those in precarious positions to gain financial security or develop a career outside of the 'regular' PhD to professoriate pipeline (Spina et al., 2022). Instead, an ECA's gender identity, employment status and institutional affiliations have been shown to influence the degree to which they are able to negotiate precarity during periods of uncertainty (Kınıkoğlu and Can, 2021).

Given the diversity of ECAs' experiences and career life cycles and the varied impact based on their career stages and/or social identities (Gabster et al., 2020; Lokhitan et al., 2022), it is important to further explore how societal disruptions, such as the pandemic, might have disproportionately affected this group of scholars.

"The pandemic not only caused massive disruptions to the 'normal' way of working, but also worsened existing social inequalities."

Being an ECA in challenging times

The pandemic not only caused massive disruptions to the 'normal' way of working, but also worsened existing social inequalities. The academic sector was no exception, with studies highlighting the varying impact on academics based on their social identities and/or career stages (Pereira, 2021; Vitae, 2021). Surveys conducted by Vitae found that while some researchers identified opportunities arising from the pandemic, the majority perceived a negative impact on their career prospects, mental health and wellbeing (Vitae, 2021). This negative impact was more acutely felt by certain groups of academics. For instance, despite the flexibility of remote working, the pandemic also led to increased caring and housework burdens, with women experiencing a significantly larger impact than men. Female academics with children reported a disproportionate reduction in research time, compared male counterparts with children as well as both childless male and female academics (Deryugina et al., 2021). The additional burden of juggling household and office work not only impacted research productivity, but also had an influence on academics' career prospects and overall well-being (Vitae, 2021).

Disrupted work-life boundaries posed a serious threat to STEM women's career progression, as was reflected in some of the ways women adapted (e.g. through mental detachment through psychological role withdrawal, or abandoning role duties through behavioral role exit) (Kossek et al., 2021). It should also be noted that contrary to perceptions that childfree women academics were unencumbered during the pandemic, and thus deemed to have less priority in using work-life balance arrangements at work (Filippi et al., 2022), studies suggest that this group of academics faced various challenges that significantly had a negative impact on on their emotional well-being and work availability (França, 2022).

A review of existing literature on the impact of the pandemic on ECAs revealed similar mixed findings. While ECAs identified some positive impacts of the pandemic on their research creativity, the majority felt that this was overshadowed by the overall negative impact in terms of delayed research activities and the inability to network and collaborate. ECAs felt that these limited social interactions had a negative impact on career prospects and morale (Świgoń et al., 2023). Jackman et al. (2022) also found that the main challenges facing ECAs and doctoral researchers were related to poor work environment, limited access to resources, perceptions of pressure, and negative psychological outcomes. Indeed, Owusu-Agyeman. (2022) found that the provision of teaching and learning resources, exposure to professional networks and social interaction were all factors that positively influenced ECAs' subjective career success - defined as an individual's perceptual evaluations of, and affective reactions to, their careers (Ng and Feldman, 2014).

Focus on marginalized groups

It is also argued that HEI's policymaking has been a system of privileging gender over race, as gender and race become conflated in inequality work, resulting in the perpetuation of White privilege (Bhopal and Henderson, 2019). Research indicates that ethnic minority staff are more likely to have their leadership abilities questioned, with traditional characteristics associated with leaders often conflicting with stereotypical expectations of Black women (Showunmi, 2023; Showunmi and Tomlin, 2022). Therefore, while belief in policies on equality is widespread, the implementation of equity initiatives rarely achieves intended outcomes (Showunmi, 2023). For example, a recent report exploring the experiences of Black ECAs' career progression (Franssen et al., 2024) indicated that while most respondents valued the relationships with colleagues (68%), few felt that the workplace was inclusive (34%) or that adequate support was provided with regards to their mental and physical wellbeing (38%). Additionally, the report found that the biggest barriers to career progression identified by respondents were unconscious bias, a lack of community, and a lack of clarity around promotion criteria.

"While belief in policies on equality is widespread, the implementation of equity initiatives rarely achieve intended outcomes"

Furthermore, apart from the pandemic's role in amplifying existing inequalities, scholars indicate that those at the intersections of socio-demographic categories such as gender, age, ethnicity, class, disability etc. experienced even greater detrimental outcomes and glaring inequalities in their careers (Martinez Dy and Jayawarna, 2020). While financial capital, social capital and culture play a role in creating significant differences between employees, racial, gender and social class disparities play exacerbating roles in career trajectories of academics (Autin et al., 2020). The highly gendered forms of invisible academic work - such as providing emotional and psychological support to students - which are neither recognized nor rewarded by HEIs in career advancement decisions, were more likely to be performed by female academics (Górska et al., 2021). More importantly, the extent to which this extra workload impacted women depended on their socio-economic situation, race, class and ethnicity.

The complexity, interconnectedness and changeability of these challenges can be daunting not only for individual academics (Pryor & Bright, 2022), but also those seeking to support their career development. Such support needs to be provided in a post-pandemic environment where the neo-liberalization of higher education has pushed for a "do more with less" mentality that thrives on individual meritocracy (Lawless, 2023); and an increasing phenomenon of "quiet quitting" - a term referring to the limited commitment of employees to carry out assigned tasks and relinquish any other task not specified in their job description (Formica and Sfodera, 2022). This calls for transformative approaches that: consider individual context and shifts the way academics are evaluated (Mickey et al., 2022); seek systematic change by formalizing informal practices and processes (Franssen et al., 2024; Maxwell et al., 2019); address problematic organizational norms and hierarchical cultures that excludes certain social groups (Arday 2018; Kossek et al., 2021).

In exploring the lived experiences of ECAs during and since the pandemic, this study engaged with issues of productivity, workload, work-life balance, wellbeing and management support. It adopts an intersectional perspective (Crenshaw, 2013) that recognizes the multiple and overlapping nature of social identities, such as gender, ethnicity, age, disability, sexuality and class. Such an approach provides a critical framework through which the interconnections and interdependencies within systems, and the resulting privileges and disadvantages can be examined (Atewologun, 2018; Martinez Dy, 2020). The study provides a more comprehensive understanding of the impact of the pandemic on ECAs career life cycle and 'imagine futures', and identifies best practices for promoting a more inclusive research and innovation environment.

3. RESEARCH DESIGN

A co-designed approach was utilized in this study, and involved the setting up of an Advisory group to provide inputs in the development of data collection instruments, act as a sounding board, and to sense-check project findings. This group included ECAs, mid-career and senior academics in leadership positions, as well as a representative from BAM, the partner organization. For this study a broad category was used to define ECAs, and included those who were at the start of their academic career to within 10 years of completing their PhD, regardless of title. Typically, doctoral students, post-doctoral researchers, research fellows, lecturers and senior lecturers fell into this category.

A three-stage mixed-method design was adopted to meet the project objectives. In order to address the first objective relating to the impact of the pandemic on career choices and progression, an online survey in the first stage and semi-structured interviews in the second stage were conducted with ECAs. In order to address the second objective regarding the institutional support provided to ECAs, additional semi-structured interviews were conducted with business school leaders in the third stage. Both the survey and interview guides were co-designed by the research team with inputs from the Advisory group. Ethics approval for the study was granted by Oxford Brookes University on 5th April 2024. The remainder of this section discusses the methodology used.

3.1 Quantitative Methods

The online survey was conducted during the period May 2024 to February 2025 to explore the key themes relating to ECAs career life cycle and the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. The survey was distributed via social media platforms such as LinkedIn, X and Facebook as well as through the BAM website, various targeted newsletters and early career researcher networks at different institutions. The survey questions focused on understanding the impact of the pandemic on career aspirations; career development; workload; productivity in terms of teaching and research; physical well-being, mental health; issues concerning work-life balance as well as the perceptions of support ECAs received. We also explored these themes in relation to participants' gender, ethnicity and institution-type in order to identify any variations in the relative impacts of the pandemic on different groups of ECAs. Given the multiple classifications used to describe UK institutions based on their history, structure and focus, such as 'traditional versus modern', 'red-brick', 'plate-glass', 'post-1992', it was decided to classify institutions into two distinct categories; the 'Russell Group[1]' and the 'non-Russell Group' universities in order to avoid overlaps.

1 The full list of Russell group universities are: University of Birmingham; University of Bristol; University of Cambridge; Cardiff University; Durham University; University of Edinburgh; University of Exeter; University of Glasgow; Imperial College London; King's College London; University of Leeds; University of Liverpool; London School of Economics; University of Manchester; Newcastle University; University of Nottingham; University of Oxford; Queen Mary University of London; Queen's University Belfast; University of Sheffield; University of Southampton; University College London; University of Warwick; University of York.

Table 1 below presents a summary of the 131 responses obtained from the survey of which 28% were from Russell Group institutions. The gender split of respondents in the dataset is 62% women and 36% men. In terms of ethnicity, 53% of respondents self-identified as White, while the remaining 47% self-identified as different ethnicities. Due to the sample size and to allow for meaningful analyses based on ethnicity, we further reclassified respondents into either ethnic majority (White ethnic respondents) or ethnic minority (all other ethnic groups). Respondents also had the option to select 'Prefer not to say' for the gender and ethnicity responses. However, given the low numbers (4 responses in total) these figures are excluded from the quantitative analyses. Respondents were also categorized based on their current career focus. Majority of respondents (58%) had teaching and research contracts, while 14% focused mainly on teaching, and 31% focused on research only.

Table 1: Profile of survey respondents

Focus Area/ Gender	**Teaching & Research**		**Research**		**Teaching**		**Total**	
	Count	**%**	**Count**	**%**	**Count**	**%**	**Count**	**%**
Women	41	54%	30	73%	10	71%	81	62%
Men	33	43%	10	24%	4	29%	47	36%
Undisclosed	2	3%	1	2%		0%	3	2%
TOTAL	**76**	**100%**	**41**	**100%**	**14**	**100%**	**131**	**100%**
Focus Area/ Ethnicity	**Teaching & Research**		**Research**		**Teaching**		**Total**	
	Count	**%**	**Count**	**%**	**Count**	**%**	**Count**	**%**
Asian	20	26%	5	12%	3	21%	28	21%
Black	13	17%	5	12%	1	7%	19	15%
Middle Eastern	5	7%	2	5%		0%	7	5%
Mixed	1	1%	1	2%	1	7%	3	2%
White	35	46%	26	63%	9	64%	70	53%
Prefer not to say	2	3%	2	5%		0%	4	3%
TOTAL	**76**	**100%**	**41**	**100%**	**14**	**100%**	**131**	**100%**
Gender/ Ethnicity	**Women**		**Men**		**Undisclosed**		**Total**	
	Count	**%**	**Count**	**%**	**Count**	**%**	**Count**	**%**
Asian	18	22%	10	21%		0%	28	21%
Black	5	6%	14	30%		0%	19	15%
Middle Eastern	6	7%	1	2%		0%	7	5%
Mixed		0%	3	6%		0%	3	2%
White	52	64%	18	38%		0%	70	53%
Prefer not to say		0%	1	2%	3	100%	4	3%
TOTAL	**81**	**100%**	**47**	**100%**	**3**	**100%**	**131**	**100%**

The data was analyzed based on the distribution of survey participants responses (agree, neutral and disagree) to questions related to: (a) the positive and negative impacts of the pandemic on career aspirations; career development; workload; productivity, well-being and work life balance; and (b) the adequacy of support available to ECAs during and post-pandemic from line managers and department; (c) the distribution of these responses based on ECA's gender, ethnicity and institutional categories.

In order to identify potential trends and understand variations in the impact of the pandemic between the various groups of ECAs, logistic regression models were further used to examine the statistical significance of variations in survey responses between different social groups. Regression models make it possible to identify characteristics that can explain the largest proportion of variance in outcomes (Codiroli Mcmaster, 2017). The survey responses were coded into three categories of 'agree', 'disagree' and 'neutral', which were used as the response variable in the multinomial regression analyses. Our three independent variables were 'gender' (Men and Women); 'ethnicity' (Majority and Minority); and 'institution' (Russell group and non-Russell group). For each of the main survey questions, we use

the multinomial regression to examine the statistical significance of any given category in one of the independent variables to indicate a response of “agree” or “disagree” given a starting position of neutrality. Whilst it would have been useful to undertake regression analyses for the intersecting categorical variables of gender, ethnicity and institution; the relatively low sample sizes of the intersecting categories meant we could not have achieved any meaningful results from the analyses.

3.2 Qualitative Methods

In the second and third stages of the study, we conducted semi-structured interviews with ECAs and business school leaders (BSL) respectively. Potential participants were identified through the online survey (optional response included for ECA participants), compiled lists and/or personal networks, as well as snowball sampling techniques. A total of 42 semi-structured interviews were conducted, and these included interviews with 33 ECAs during the period May 2024 to February 2025, and interviews with 9 business school leaders during the period December 2024 to February 2025.

The topic guide we used for the ECA interviews covered three main areas: (a) the lived experiences of ECAs during and since the pandemic, (b) perceptions on the nature and extent of support received, and (c) reflections of their career life cycle. A descriptive summary of ECA interviewees is presented in Table 2 below. The main themes covered by the topic guide for the BSL interviews included: (a) supporting ECAs during and since the pandemic and related challenges; (b) changes in practice and/or support measures post-pandemic; and (c) reflections on lessons learnt from the pandemic. This group comprised 5 women and 4 men who were either Deans (4), Associate Deans (3), Head of Department (1), or Associate Professor (1), with responsibility for leading and supporting ECAs.

The interviews were conducted online via Zoom and lasted between 30 and 90 mins. All interviews were audio recorded and then transcribed verbatim before being analysed and thematically coded. All participants were assured of anonymity and thus all findings are reported in aggregate or with descriptors consistent with their gender, ethnicity and institutional category. The manual coding process was carried out by the research team, with discussions at different stages to refine the coding framework and discuss any discrepancies in coding. In the initial stages of the coding process, codes were inductively identified from the data. We coded each transcript separately, before comparing codes across the different transcripts to identify common themes and categories. In line with the intersectional approach adopted, the coding also focused on highlighting any differences based on participants’ intersecting identities. The main themes identified are discussed in the next section.

Table 2: Profile of ECA interview participants

Ethnicity/Gender	Female	%	Male	%	Total	%
Black	1	5%	1	9%	2	6%
East Asian	3	14%	1	9%	4	12%
Middle Eastern	1	5%	1	9%	2	6%
Mixed		0%	2	18%	2	6%
South Asian	6	27%	1	9%	7	21%
White	10	45%	5	45%	15	45%
Prefer not to say	1	5%		0%	1	3%
TOTAL	**22**	**100%**	**11**	**100%**	**33**	**100%**

Career Stage	Count	%
Early Career	26	79%
Mid-Career	7	21%
TOTAL	**33**	**100%**
Focus Area	**Count**	**%**
Both Teaching and Research	18	55%
Research focused	11	33%
Teaching focused	4	12%
TOTAL	**33**	**100%**
Institution	**Count**	**%**
Non-Russell Group	27	82%
Russell Group	6	18%
TOTAL	**33**	**100%**
Location	**Count**	**%**
International	4	12%
UK	29	88%
TOTAL	**33**	**100%**

3.3 Limitations

In terms of the qualitative approach of the study there are a few limitations. First, given the reflective nature of the interviews that focused on participants' experiences prior to, during and since the pandemic, there is a possibility of hindsight bias, where participants recall past experiences and reconstruct their stories in ways that makes sense to them (García and Welter, 2013). Second, the comparatively small sample size limits the generalizability of our findings. Larger scale qualitative studies targeting a diverse group of ECAs nationally and internationally would build on the insights gained from this report. Third, the personal and professional identities of the two lead researchers who self-identify as ethnic minorities and early career academics, might not only have influenced how participants responded during the interviews, but also the analysis of the data, and interpretation of findings; i.e. what is viewed as salient and what is not. Lastly, in terms of the quantitative analyses, the relatively lower response rate to the survey questionnaires, and the subsequent smaller sample size rendered it impractical to fully examine the potential impacts of the pandemic on intersecting social identities.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In this section, we present insights on the varied impact of the pandemic based on ECAs' gender, ethnicity and institutional classification. Our findings are based on the analyses of the survey responses, as well as semi-structured interviews with ECAs and BSLs. In order to address the first objective regarding career choice and progression of ECAs, the results of ECAs experiences and perspectives of aspects related to workload, productivity, well-being and career development and aspirations are presented. In order to address the second objective regarding the institutional support provided, the analyses of ECAs experiences and perspectives regarding the nature and adequacy of support received during and since the pandemic are presented. Key insights from the BSL interviews regarding their experiences in supporting ECAs, as well as reflections on lessons learnt are also discussed. Statistically significant differences across the categories are highlighted in the charts[2]. Results denoted with an asterisk (*) or double asterisk (**) on the chart are statistically significant at 10% and 5% respectively **and** shows observations about categories perceptions on the impact of the pandemic given a starting position of neutral are unlikely to be random**.**

4.1 Impact of the Pandemic on ECAs

Overall, and as expected, we find that ECAs had a more negative than positive perception of the impact of the pandemic, with 57% more likely to agree on its negative impact on their experiences. Similarly, the majority (59%) disagree that the pandemic had a positive impact. These findings are mirrored in the qualitative interviews. While participants highlight some positive aspects such as the flexibility of remote working and opportunities for greater collaboration, they also note that these perceived advantages often came with trade-offs. As one participant indicated "*And then there was an opportunity of, I mean, using the long hours to work on the research paper…but then it's kind of like a trade off with your personal life" (ECA47, East Asian Female, Non-Russell).* Moreover, the disruptions in routines and practices, as well as the increased uncertainty due to the pandemic was perceived to have an overall negative impact on ECAs career experiences and development. We explore the different aspects in the following subsections.

4.1.1 Impact on Workload

Regarding the pandemic's impact on ECAs workload, our analyses of the survey data indicate that approximately half of the ECAs felt the pandemic worsened their workload, whilst 31% felt the pandemic did not affect their workload negatively (see Figure 1a below). On the other hand, for 17% of the survey respondents, the pandemic had a positive impact on their workload (see Figure 1b).

Figure 1: Impact of pandemic on ECA workload

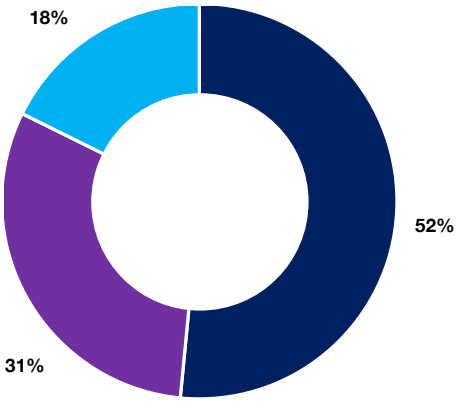

Fig 1a: Negative Impact of the pandemic

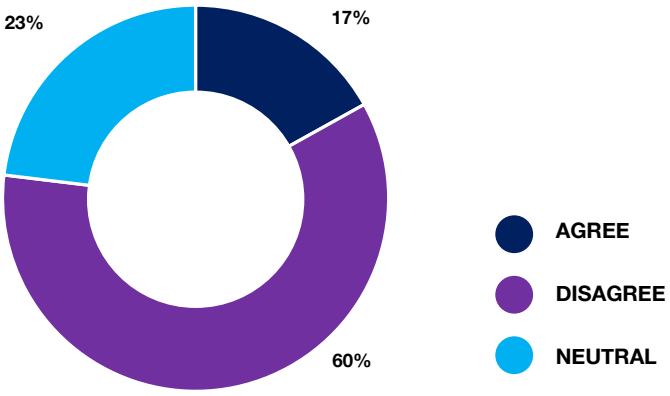

Fig 1b: Positive Impact of the pandemic

2. Please contact the project team, if you would like additional information on the regression analyses

The analyses of the survey results on ECA workload by gender presented in Figures 2a and 2b show that even though a relatively higher percentage of both men and women reported negative impact of the pandemic on their workload, the proportion of women (58%) with negative experience was higher than men (46%) (Figure 2a). We performed a multinomial logistic regression to model the relationship between ECA gender (men and women) and survey responses (agree, disagree and neutral) and found that the model containing only data and the intercept did not improve with the addition of ECA gender (Model: *p<0.417, chi-square = 1.747)*.

When asked about whether the pandemic had a positive impact on their workload, 23% of men experienced a positive impact, whilst the corresponding value was only 13% for women (Figure 2b). However, the result of our regression analyses show that women ECAs were more likely to disagree that the pandemic had any positive impacts on their workload than the likelihood of men to disagree (Model: *p<0.059, chi-square = 5.652).* The survey results also show that the percentage of men who experienced neither negative nor positive impacts on workload was higher than women.

The results of both the positive and negative impact of the pandemic on ECAs' workload by ethnicity are shown in Figures 3a and 3b respectively. The 56% of ethnic majority ECAs that experienced negative impacts on their workload was 10% more than the ethnic minority ECAs that highlighted negative experiences (Figure 2a). This result was statistically significant as our regression model to examine the relationship between ECA ethnicity and the survey responses shows that ethnic majority ECAs were more likely to agree that the pandemic negatively affected their workload than ethnic minority ECAs. Interestingly, ethnic majorities were also more likely to disagree that the pandemic had a negative impact on their workload than ethnic minorities given a default position of neutral (Model: *p<0.016, chi-square = 4.141).*

Figure 2: Impact of pandemic on ECA Workload by Gender

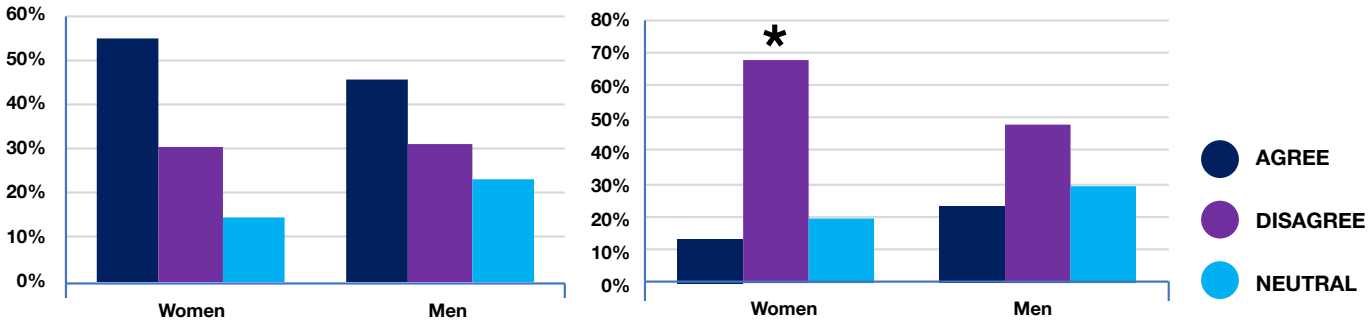

Fig 2a: Negative Impact of the pandemic

Fig 2b: Positive Impact of the pandemic

Note: where there is a ¨ (p-<0.05) or ˚ (p<0.1) on the chart, it shows the statistical significance of a category to indicate stronger perception on the impact of the pandemic given a starting position of neutral.

The proportionate difference between ethnic majorities and minorities with positive experiences on their workload was only 6% (Figure 3b). About 19% of ethnic minority ECAs agreed the pandemic had a positive impact on their workload. However, the result of our regression analyses shows that ECA ethnicity did not have any statistical significance on survey responses regarding the potential positive impacts of the pandemic on ECA workload (Model: *p<0.356, chi-square = 2.067).* The proportion of ECAs that were indifferent to both the positive and negative impact of the pandemic on their workload was higher for ethnic minorities than ethnic majorities.

Figure 3: Impact on ECA workload by Ethnicity

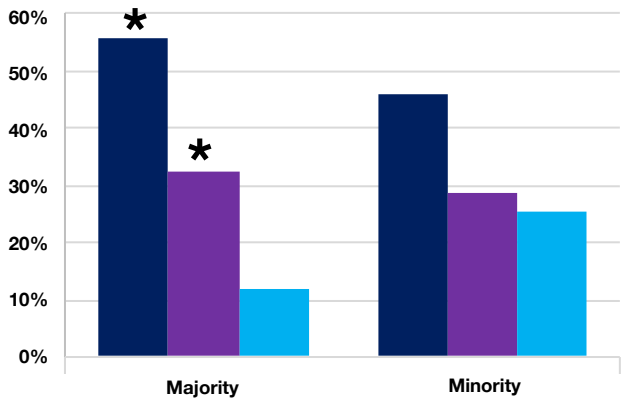

Fig 3a: Negative Impact of the pandemic

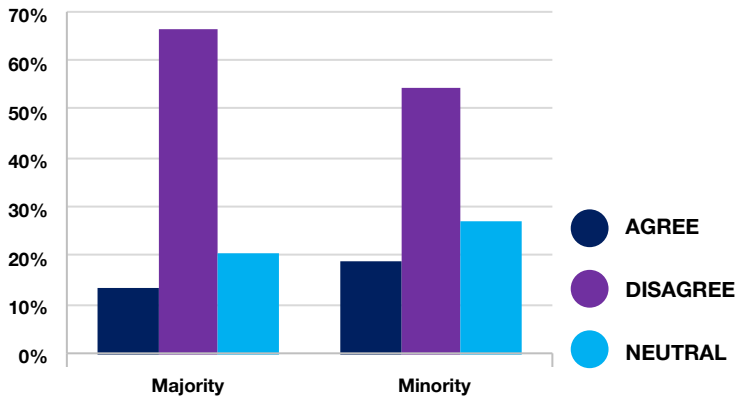

Fig 3b: Positive Impact of the pandemic

Note: where there is a ¨ (p-<0.05) or ˙ (p<0.1) on the chart, it shows the statistical significance of a category to indicate stronger perception on the impact of the pandemic given a starting position of neutral.

In order to evaluate whether the extent of the pandemic's impact on ECAs workload differ between institutions, we split the survey responses between Russell group institutions and non-Russell group. We found that the percentage of respondents with negative experience was higher among the respondents from Russell Group institutions than the non-Russell Group (54% and 50% respectively). However, the percentage of respondents with positive experience of the impact of the pandemic on their workload was 16% for both the Russell Group and non-Russell group institutions. The potential impact of ECA institution category on responses to both the negative and positive impact of the pandemic on their workload was not statistically significant as our regression models for negative impact (Model: *p<0.858, chi-square = 2.067) and positive impact (Model: p<0.940, chi-square = 0.123)* did not improve with the addition of ethnicity.

Figure 4: Impact of pandemic on ECA workload by institution

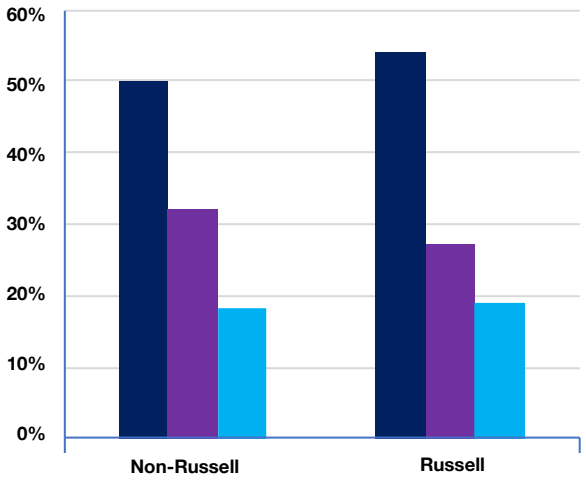

Fig 4a: Negative Impact of the pandemic

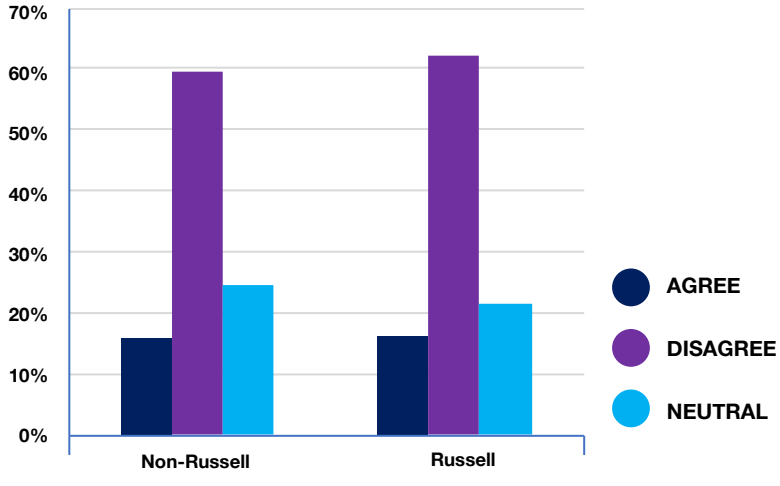

Fig 4b: Positive Impact of the pandemic

Our analysis of the pandemic's workload impact on intersectional categories of gender and ethnicity are shown in Figures 5a and 5b. Whilst 34% of ethnic minority men ECAs agreed the pandemic had a negative impact on their workload the respective percentage of all of the other intersecting categories was over 50%. In fact, for ethnic majority men, the percentage of respondents that experienced a negative impact on their workload was 61%. These perceptions and sentiments are echoed in Figure 5b which focuses on

the potential positive impacts of the pandemic on workload. Again, a significantly higher percentage of majority-men (61%), majority-women (68%) and minority-women (68) did not identify any positive impacts of the pandemic on their workload. The category with the most positive experience on workload is ethnic minority-men (24%) and ethnic majority-men (22%).

Figure 5: Impact of pandemic on ECA workload by ethnicity and gender

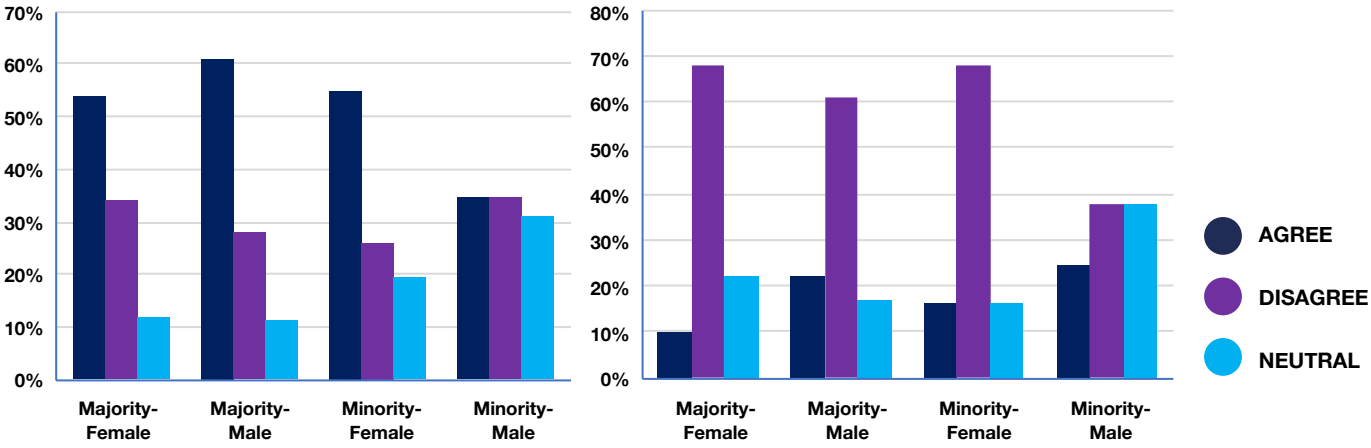

Fig 5a: Negative Impact of the pandemic

Fig 5b: Positive Impact of the pandemic

Exploring the pandemic's impact on workload during the interviews, we find that many ECAs experienced a negative impact on their workload due to the online transition, and increased demand on teaching and administrative tasks. This increased workload, when not properly managed, led not only to experiences of increased exhaustion and burnout, but also could have a serious impact on one's health.

"The workload was relentless, and I ended up exhausted. I didn't take any time off for about 18 months, and eventually, my health suffered. I ended up in the hospital with chest pains, and the doctor insisted I take time off." **(ECA, White Male, Non-Russell)**

"The workload was relentless, and I ended up exhausted... I didn't take any time off for about 18 months, and eventually, my health suffered"

Some of the gendered aspects of the impact of the pandemic, are highlighted in the lived experiences of women ECAs. Some participants, especially those with caring responsibilities, spoke about the struggles in trying to balance academic duties with family responsibilities. Participants also felt that, even though they might receive support from their partners, a large part of the 'burden' still fell on their shoulders.

"My family was in [country], and my parents got COVID. My dad was hospitalized, and I was the only one to care for him. I had to juggle teaching, research, and caring for my parents. I pushed myself until I burned out in 2023." **(ECA, South Asian Female, Non-Russell)**

"I had to juggle between being a parent and being an academic. During the day, I had to look after him and teach him because my husband wasn't great at teaching. He didn't have the patience for it, so I had to take over. Then, at night, I had to do pre-recorded sessions. I remember sleeping at one or two o'clock every night, almost" **(ECA, White Female, Russell)**

"Sure, my husband is very good. He's very supportive. But I need to do the thinking right. So if we're talking about mental load, I still need to think, what we're having for dinner. I need to do the shopping list, you know. I make sure they have the uniform ironed in the morning, so that is still on me, even though he's very good." **(ECA, White Female, Non-Russell)**

Additionally, while some participants felt that institutions did not take into consideration individual's personal circumstances when setting expectations:

*"There was even less consideration whether there's a pandemic, whether you had small children at home, you know you needed to balance having the girls at home because … there was no consideration of that (***ECA33, White Female, Non-Russell)***, others indicate a more supportive environment:*

"I think my workload is reasonable. We all have constant support from our line managers. They always ask if we're okay with the workload. It's not like, "This is your work, do it." They always offer feedback and ask if we're okay with the workload" **(ECA, South Asian Female, Russell)**

"There was even less consideration whether there's a pandemic, whether you had small children at home, you know you needed to balance"

While the impact of the pandemic seems to have worsened the lived experiences of women ECAs with caring responsibilities in terms of workload, no reference was made by participants in regards to the impact based on one's ethnicity or type of institution on workload.

4.1.2 Impact on Productivity

The pandemic's disruptions to normal day-to-day activities had a significant impact on ECA productivity. The survey responses to questions about the positive and negative impact of the pandemic on ECA teaching and research productivity are shown in Figures 6a and 6b respectively. Over half of the survey respondent's productivity declined whilst 16% experienced improved productivity. About 25% and 30% of the respondents felt the pandemic did not impact their productivity negatively or positively respectively.

Figure 6: Impact of Covid-19 on ECA productivity

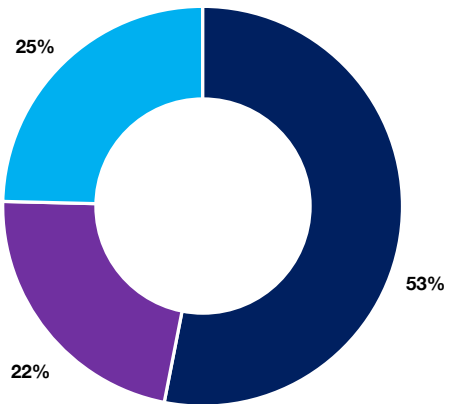

Fig 6a: Negative Impact of the pandemic

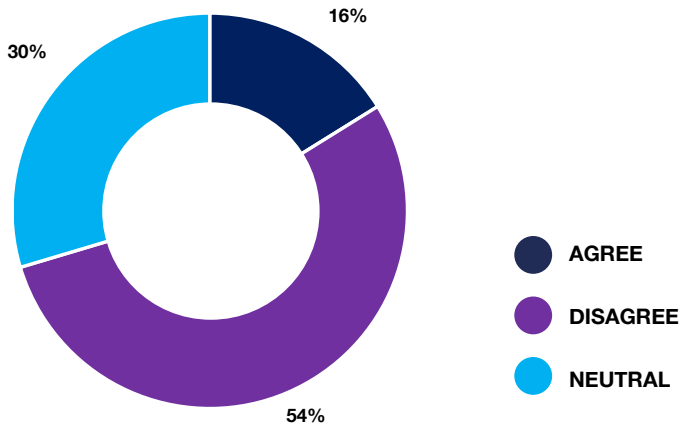

Fig 6b: Positive Impact of the pandemic

When we examine the impact of the pandemic on ECA productivity between Men and Women (presented in Figures 7a and 7b), the survey responses indicate that the percentage of men and women that experienced negative effects on their overall productivity were similar (54% and 52% respectively). Our regression models to estimate the impact of gender on ECA productivity showed gender

did not have any statistically significant effect. Compared with only 11% of men, 19% of women indicated the pandemic had a positive impact on their overall productivity. Whilst our regression result suggest gender had no statistically significant effect on the positive experiences related to ECA overall productivity, when we consider the effect of gender on teaching alone, the regression model shows that (Model: *p<0.053, chi-square = 5.868)* women were more likely to agree that their teaching productivity improved during the pandemic.

The pandemic's impact on research activities was greater than on teaching for both ECA men and women. Whilst 65% and 67% of women and men respectively experience negative impact on their research activities, 40% and 42% of women and men (respectively) felt their teaching productivity was negatively affected. Although only a relatively small percentage of ECAs identified a positive impact on their productivity, for both teaching and research, the percentage of women with positive experience was higher than men.

Figure 7: Impact of Covid-19 on ECA productivity by gender

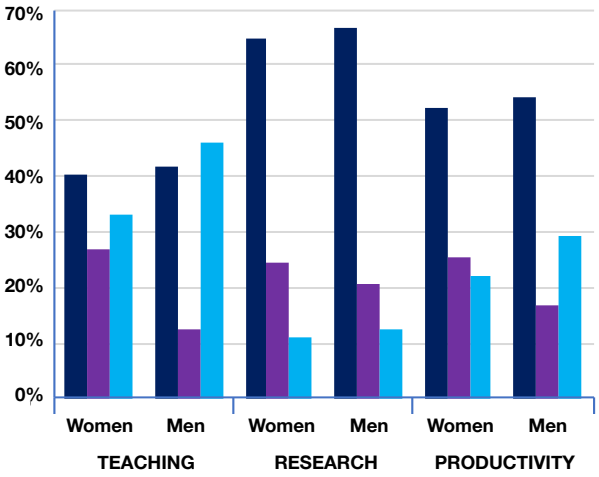

Fig 7a: Negative Impact of the pandemic

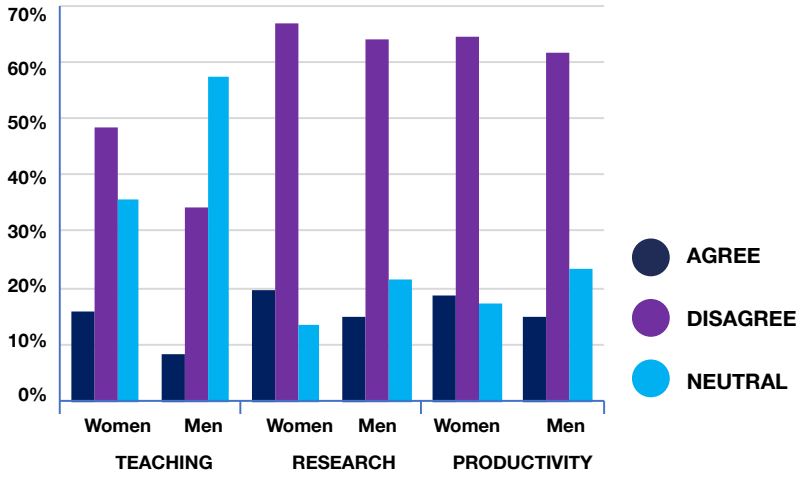

Fig 7b: Positive Impact of the pandemic

The result of the impact of the pandemic on the ECA productivity by ethnicity is shown in Figures 8a and 8b. Comparatively, a relatively higher percentage of ethnic minorities (59%) ECAs reported negative impacts on their productivity than ethnic majority ECAs (46%). On the other hand, 16% of ethnic majority ECAs realized some positive impacts on their productivity. The corresponding percentage for ethnic minorities was 15%. When considering the pandemics impact on teaching and research between the two ethnic categories, the negative impact on research for both ethnic minorities and ethnic majorities was greater than it was for teaching (see Figure 8a). However, the percentage of ethnic minority ECAs that reported negative experiences was relatively greater than ethnic majority ECAS for both teaching and research activities. The result of our logistic regression models to examine the role of ECA ethnicity on the differential impact of the pandemic shows ethnicity was only statistically significant on teaching productivity alone, where ethnic minority ECAs were more likely to experience negative impacts than ethnic majority ECAs (Model: *p<0.0.20, chi-square = 7.849).*

Figure 8: Impact of Covid-19 on ECA productivity by ethnicity

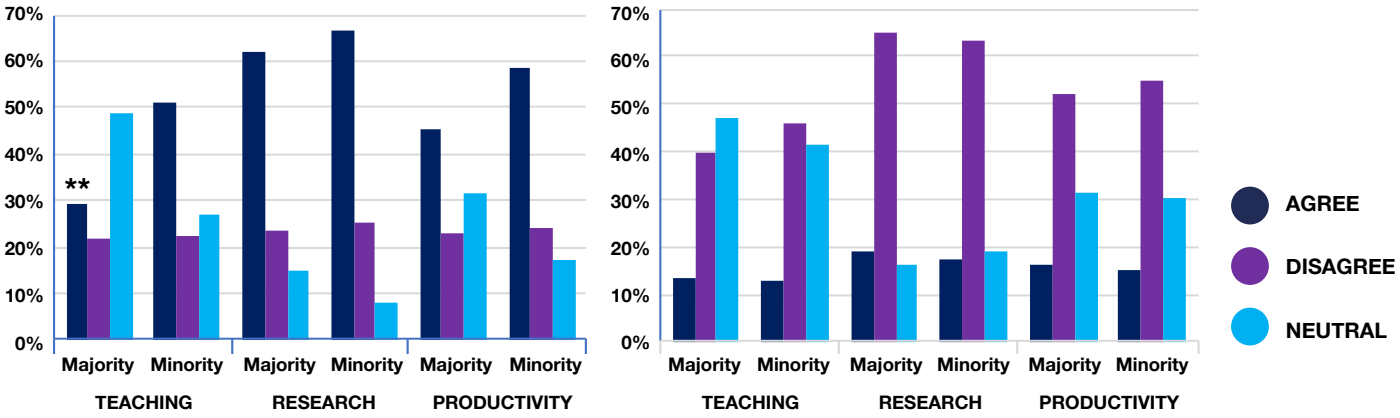

Fig 8a: Negative Impact of the pandemic

Fig 8b: Positive Impact of the pandemic

Note: where there is a ** (p-<0.05) or * (p<0.1) on the chart, it shows the statistical significance of a category to indicate stronger perception on the impact of the pandemic given a starting position of neutral.

When we consider the pandemics impact on ECA productivity by institution, Figure 9a indicates that 53% and 49% of ECAs from non-Russell group and Russell group universities respectively experience negative impacts. Yet, from Figure 9b, the percentage of non-Rusell group ECAs (20%) that identified positive impacts on their overall productivity was higher than Russell group ECAs (15%). Institutional based responses to the negative impact of the pandemic on teaching and research, shows that the proportion of non-Russell group ECAs (45%) that was negatively affected in term teaching activities was higher than Russell group ECAs (27%). Conversely, the percentage of respondents indicating negative impact on research was higher among Rusell group ECAs (70%) than non- Russell group ECAs (62%). It is notable from both Figures 9a and 9b that the percentage of Russell group respondents that did not experience either negative nor positive impacts were higher than non-Russell group ECAs for both teaching and research related activities.

The results of our regression analysis of the role institutional categories on ECA teaching and research productivity shows statistically significant differences between the responses of non-Russell group ad Russell group institutions relating to teaching productivity. Whilst the majority of Russell group respondents felt the pandemic had neither positive nor negative impacts on their teaching, most of the Rusell group respondents either agreed to the negative impacts of the pandemic on teaching and disagreed with the positive impacts.

Figure 9: Impact of Covid-19 on ECA productivity by Institution

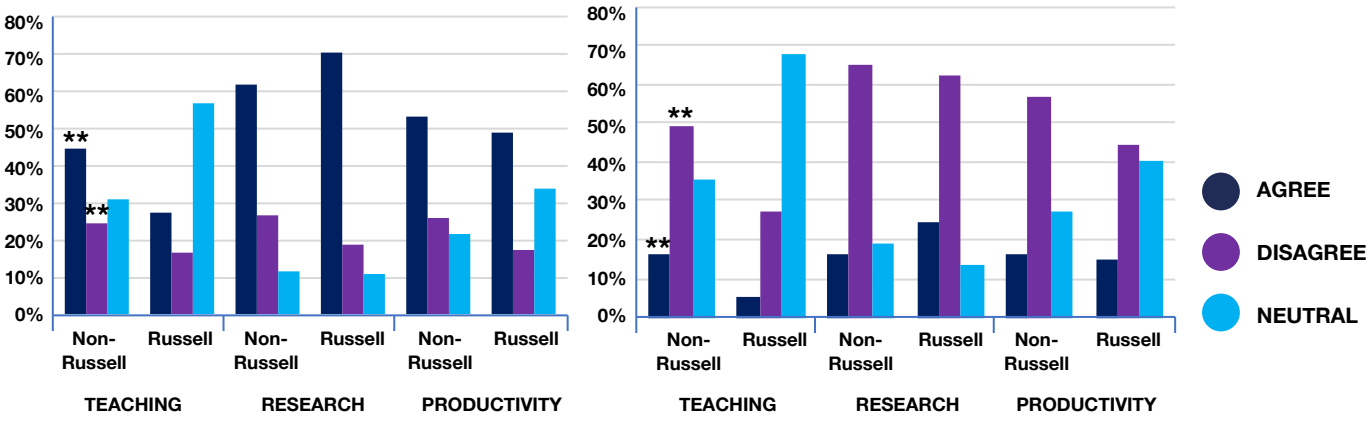

Fig 9a: Negative Impact of the pandemic

Fig 9b: Positive Impact of the pandemic

Note: where there is a ** (p-<0.05) or * (p<0.1) on the chart, it shows the statistical significance of a category to indicate stronger perception on the impact of the pandemic given a starting position of neutral.

The results of the survey analyses of the impact of the pandemic on the overall productivity based on the intersecting categories of gender and ethnicity are shown in Figures 10a and 10b. The category with the greatest percentage of experience on productivity is ethnic minority-men (76%). However, at least 50% of respondents from each of the other intersecting categories experienced negative impacts on their productivity (see Figure 10a). Only 11% of ethnic majority-men ECAs identified positive impacts on their productivity compared to an average of 18% for the other intersecting categories (see Figure 10b).

Figure 10: Impact of Covid-19 on ECA productivity by ethnicity and gender

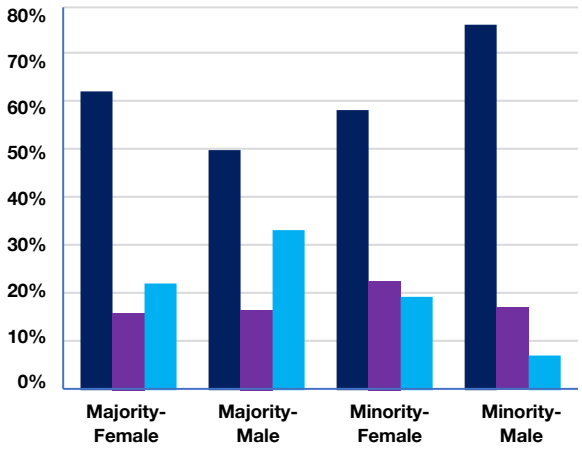

Fig 10a: Negative Impact of the pandemic

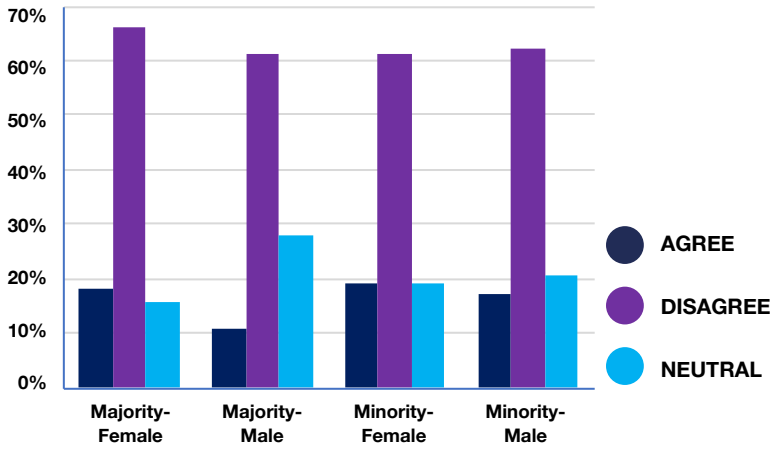

Fig 10b: Positive Impact of the pandemic

During the interviews, participants indicate varied experiences of the impact of the pandemic on their overall productivity. While some ECAs indicate a positive impact on their research productivity, the majority felt that the disruptions to established workflows and new demands due to transitioning teaching online, had an adverse effect on both teaching and research activities.

"I was more productive after leaving campus and moving back home. Infinitely more productive. My best three-year span was between December 2020 and June 2022." **(ECA, White Male, Non-Russell)**

" I think I wasted a lot of time on recording things. Now, I've learned how to do it more efficiently, but at the time, I spent three hours recording a one-hour session. So, yes, I was producing something, but it took much longer than it should have." **(ECA, White Female, Russell)**

In terms of teaching activities, the rapid transition not only created challenges in learning and adapting to digital technologies, but also had an effect on the classroom dynamics. ECAs highlight the need to both provide more pastoral support due to increasing anxiety among students and deal with low attendance and/or lack of student engagement.

" I was busier than ever before. We had to redesign traditional classroom material for online use, breaking it into smaller chunks to keep students engaged. We also recorded short videos for tasks like using Excel and SPSS, which required additional time for captions and transcripts" **(ECA, White Male, Non-Russell)**

"I think students now are a little bit more needy and anxious, and require a bit more kind of hand-holding and reassuring... which I find as a young female lecturer has an impact on me..."

"…I think students now are a little bit more needy and anxious, and require a bit more kind of handholding and reassuring, and they previously were, which I find as a young female lecturer has an impact on me, because quite a lot of time they kind of see you as a bit more of an accessible figure." **(ECA, White Female, Russell)**

These reflections underline the steep learning curve of shifting to an online environment, as well as the additional drain on one's time and mental wellbeing. On the other hand, findings were mixed in terms of the impact on conferences, networking and collaboration. While some ECAs felt that online events expanded networking possibilities by allowing access to otherwise 'unreachable' networks, most recognized the challenges faced in forging new relationships online.

"And with the use of Teams, we can invite someone from outside the country to join us. I think that benefits a lot of us, not just the presenter but the attendees who might not make it in person. So I think this online meeting option expands the networking possibilities." **(ECA, East Asian Female, Non-Russell)**

"Networking works better in person, and virtual conferences don't replicate the organic conversations that happen at in-person events." **(ECA, White Male, Non-Russell)**

"Networking works better in person, and virtual conferences don't replicate the organic conversations that happen at in-person events."

Furthermore, ECAs also point out the reduced interactions that resulted from working from home during the pandemic, and continues due to hybrid working post pandemic. The serendipitous and organic interactions that resulted from working with colleagues in the same office are now limited; *"you know, previously working in the same building together, you get those more kind of organic sort of interactions. I'd find the community quite supportive" (ECA, White Female, Russell).* This was echoed by another ECA who also pointed out that such collegial interactions allowed both parties to benefit without it being a burden for either.

"That part of working super micro, super collaboratively without it being a burden on you and beneficial to me. And then you go away from the coffee break, thinking, Oh, yeah, I've really helped [name] with that. That's great, you know I can be this kind of sounding board. I can really help my colleagues. So, you feel good about the process. Yeah, I feel great, because I've suddenly solved my issue. You don't get that if you're working at home." **(ECA, White Female, Non-Russell)**

Therefore, while the pandemic might have provided academics additional research time and networking possibilities, the increased challenges brought about by the rapidly changing work environment affected most ECAs' productivity.

4.1.3 Impact on Well-being

Amongst the four aspects of the pandemic's impact on ECAs examined in this study, ECA well-being appear to have been the most impacted. Our survey questions related to well-being centered around physical well-being, mental health and work-life balance. Overall, 66% of ECAs felt the pandemic had a negative impact on their well-being (see Figure 11). Only 15% agreed the pandemic had a positive impact on their well-being.

Figure 11: Impact of Covid-19 on ECA well-being

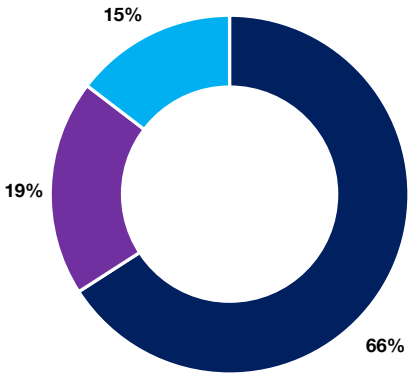

Fig 11a: Negative Impact of the pandemic

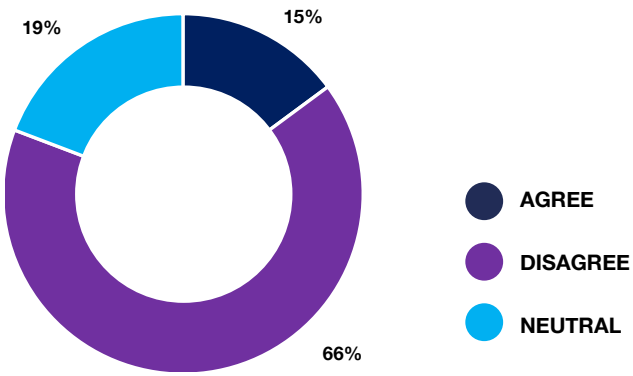

Fig 11b: Positive Impact of the pandemic

A review of ECA wellbeing by gender presented in Figures 12a and 12b shows that about 61% of ECA men identified negative impacts on their overall well-being although this was relatively lower than women (69%). The percentage of men (19%) that identified positive impacts was also higher than women (12%) and this finding was statistically significant as the result of our regression analysis indicates women were less likely to identify positive impacts of the pandemic on their overall well-being than men (Model: *p<0.067, chi-square = 5.417).* Mental well-being was the most affected with about 80% of women and 71% of men experiencing negative effects during the pandemic. However, a relatively higher percentage of both men and women experienced negative effects on all aspects of their well-being. The least percentage of ECAs that reported negative impacts was for men and related to physical well-being (50%).

Figure 12: Impact of Covid-19 on ECA well-being by gender

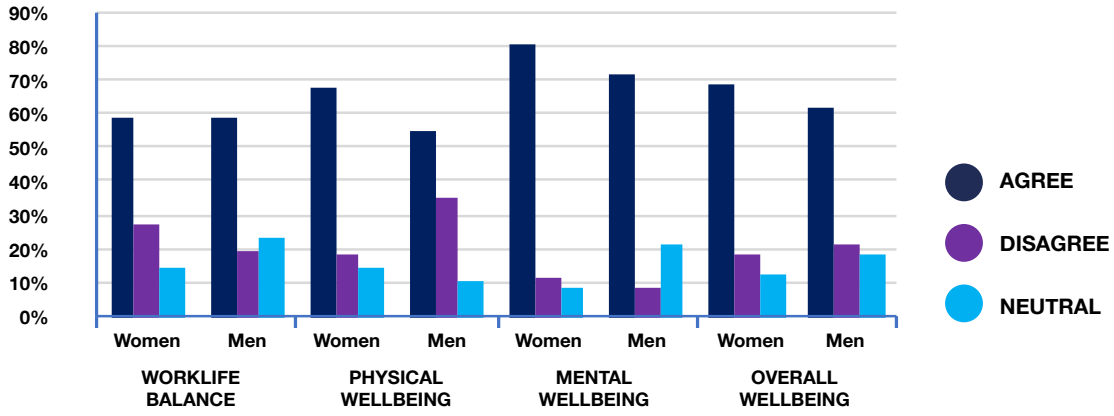

Fig 12a: Negative Impact of the pandemic

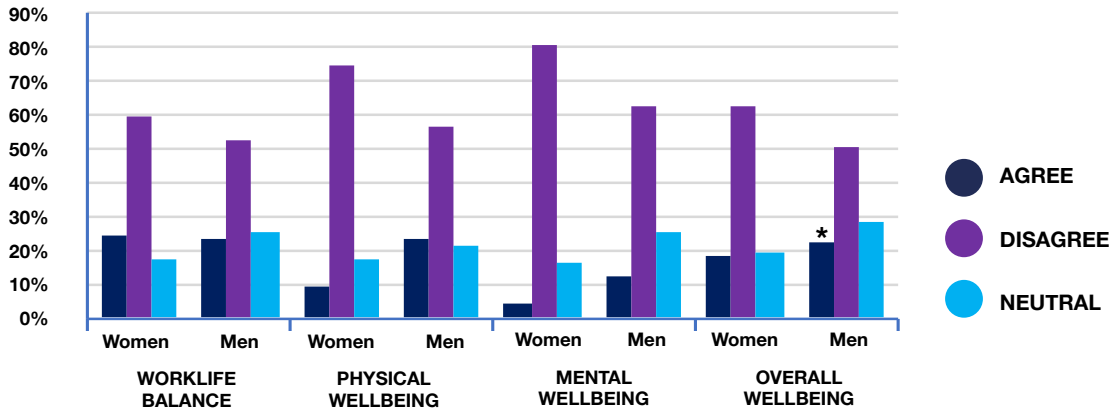

Fig 12b: Positive Impact of the pandemic

Note: where there is a ** (p-<0.05) or * (p<0.1) on the chart, it shows the statistical significance of a category to indicate stronger perception on the impact of the pandemic given a starting position of neutral.

In terms of ethnicity, the negative impact of the pandemic on ECA overall well-being was higher among ethnic minorities than majorities (70% and 62% respectively). However, 17% of ethnic minority ECAs identified positive impacts on well-being. This was 4% higher than the positive outcomes of ethnic majority ECAs. Amongst the three aspects of wellbeing investigated, only physical well-being was statistically impacted with ethnic majority ECAs being less likely to highlight negative impacts of the pandemic. Although 51% of ethnic majorities did acknowledge the negative impacts of the pandemic on their physical well-being, our regression model (Model: *p<0.058, chi-square = 5.697)* on the effects of ethnicity shows negative impact on ethnic minorities ECAs' well-being was statistically significantly higher (71%).

Figure 13: Impact of Covid-19 on ECA well-being by ethnicity

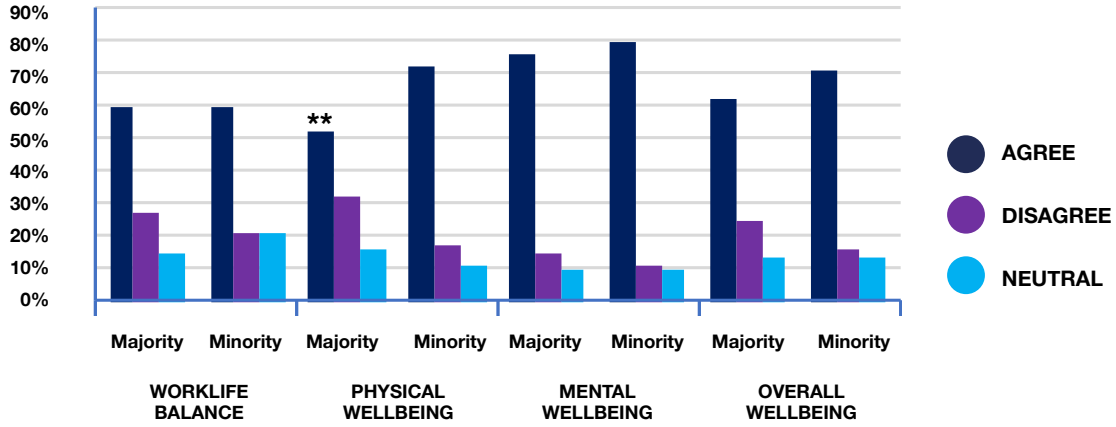

Fig 13a: Negative Impact of the pandemic

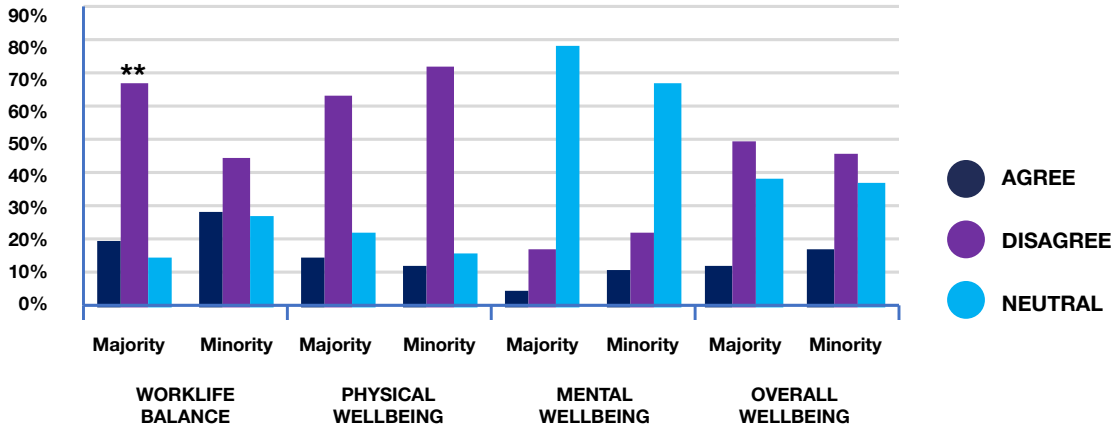

Fig 13b: Positive Impact of the pandemic

Note: where there is a ** (p-<0.05) or * (p<0.1) on the chart, it shows the statistical significance of a category to indicate stronger perception on the impact of the pandemic given a starting position of neutral.

The impact of the pandemic on the ECA well-being by institution indicates that overall, 59% of respondents from Russell group institutions experienced negative effects compared to 68% from non-Russell group. The percentage of ECAs that experienced negative impact was highest for mental health with 73% and 79% for Russel group and non-Russell group respectively. Interestingly, the percentage of Russell group and non-Russell group ECAs that experienced positive impacts on their well-being were closely matched for all three aspects of well-being. The highest percentage of positive impact was related to work-life balance (24% and 23% for Russell group and non-Russell Group respectively), and the lowest was related to mental health (5% and 9% respectively). Our regression analyses on both the negative positive impact of the pandemic on wellbeing were found to be not statistically significant.

Figure 14: Impact of Covid-19 on ECA well-being by Institution

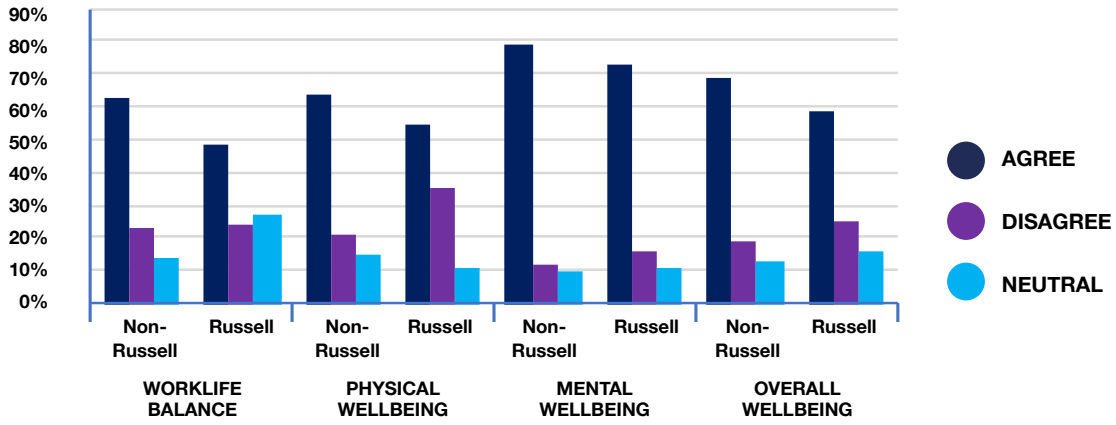

Fig 14a: Negative Impact of the pandemic

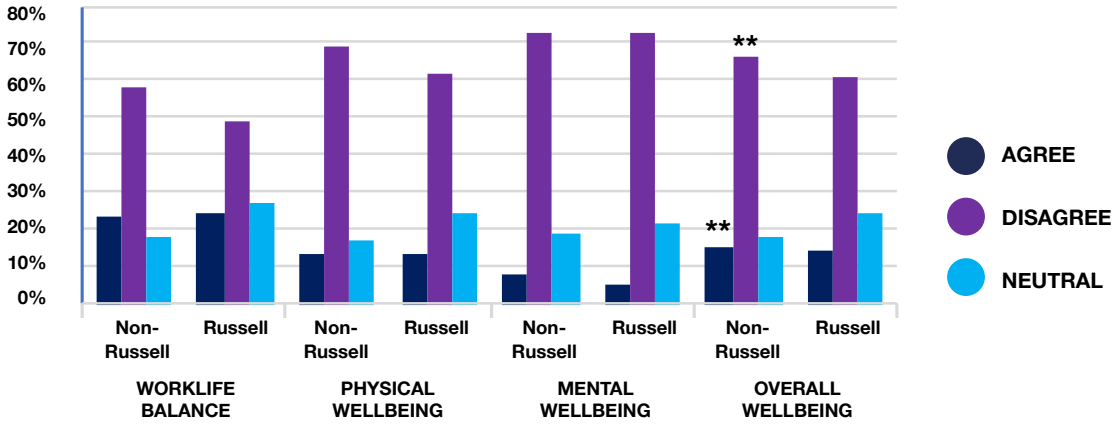

Fig 14b: Positive Impact of the pandemic

Note: where there is a ** (p-<0.05) or * (p<0.1) on the chart, it shows the statistical significance of a category to indicate stronger perception on the impact of the pandemic given a starting position of neutral.

Analysis of the pandemic's impact on the wellbeing of intersecting social identities of gender and ethnicity is presented in Figures 15a and 15b below. Over 60% of respondents from all intersecting categories experienced some negative impacts on their overall wellbeing. Ethnic minority-women were the most negatively impacted group (84%). On the other hand, ethnic minority-men had the highest percentage of positive experiences on wellbeing (45%) whilst the category with the least percentage of positive experience was ethnic majority-women (20%).

Figure 15: Impact of Covid-19 on ECA well-being by ethnicity and gender

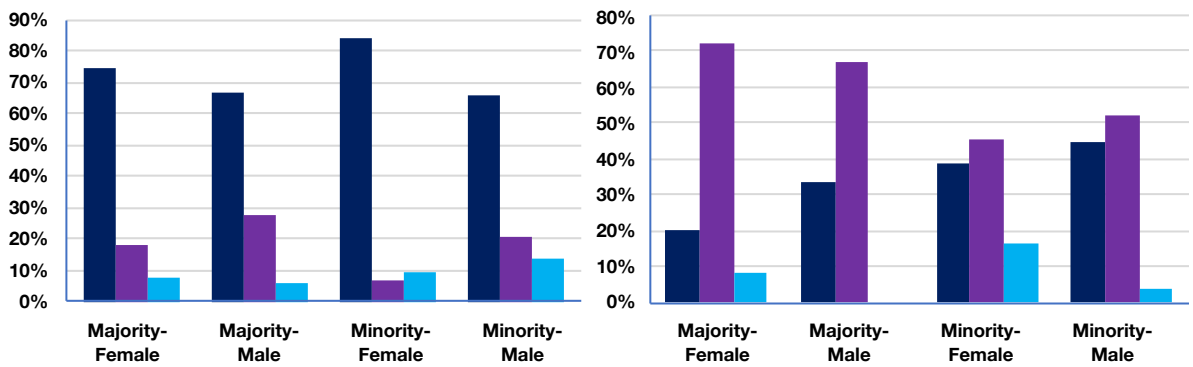

Fig 15a: Negative Impact of the pandemic

Fig 15b: Positive Impact of the pandemic

During the interviews, most discussions about well-being were interlinked with those on work-life balance. ECAs shared mixed experiences, expressing an initial relief from being able to work remotely, to the ongoing challenges of increased isolation and anxiety from the health crisis, dealing with blurred boundaries, and balancing family and work in the same space.

"Initially, working from home was a relief because it eliminated the commute. However, over time, it became repetitive and isolating." **(ECA, White Male, Non-Russell)**

"Working hours became very fluid, and that wasn't necessarily healthy. I would feel unproductive in the morning and then try to compensate in the evening, which led to a cycle of feeling unmotivated. It took me a long time after the pandemic to establish a routine and set boundaries between work and personal life" **(ECA, White Female, Non-Russell)**

The isolation and intrusion of work into all aspects of one's life often led to physical and mental strain thus negatively impacting ECAs' wellbeing. These experiences could be aggravated by one's living situation, caring responsibilities and nationality.

"...the house that we live in wasn't obviously big enough as well to have an office space. So, I didn't have a space that I could shut the door and say, well, I'm done for the day..."

"…the house that we live in wasn't obviously big enough as well to have an office space. So, I didn't have a space that I could shut the door and say, well, I'm done for the day..." **(ECA, White Female, Non-Russell)**

"My wife and I were both doing PhDs, and we had to take care of our children, who were homeschooling. We had to share laptops and other equipment, and it was hard to find a balance. I often sacrificed my PhD work to take care of the kids…" **(ECA, South Asian Male, Non-Russell)**

"… If I was a single person that wouldn't have been a big issue, but yes, since I have a family, and they all had to transition to another country. So, for them it was really difficult" **(ECA East Asian Male, Non-Russell)**

Similar sentiments are reflected in interviews with business school leaders who felt that apart from the potential negative impact of one's living situation, the prolonged isolation and lack of variety might also have a negative impact on ECA's mental wellbeing.

"The fact that there was no variety in our days at all. The days were all in front of the computer, and did have an effect on my concentration. So if it had an effect on my concentration, it's likely to have had effects on other people's as well." **(BSL, Male, Non-Russell)**

"The pandemic made me realize how resilient I am, but it also made me rethink my priorities"

The pandemic not only had an immediate impact on ECAs during the crisis, but also had a longer-term effect; reshaping overall attitudes towards work, with an emphasis on prioritizing work-life balance. As one ECA points out: *"I think academia is so good at, like glamorizing its problems, right. Overworking and like having no work life balance" (ECA, White Female, Non-Russell).* The pandemic created a time for ECAs to reflect on what is important and acted as a catalyst for change.

"The pandemic made me realize how resilient I am, but it also made me rethink my priorities. I lost colleagues to COVID, and that had a huge impact on me. It made me question what I wanted out of my career and my lif" **(ECA, White Female, Non-Russell)**

ECAs express a strong desire to re-establish clear boundaries, and to prioritize what is important for them. so that work does not dominate their lives.

"I know that the workload is quite high in academia and that there's lots of pressure, but I refuse to allow it [work] become my world. I absolutely love my job. Don't get me wrong, I love what I do. But that balance is crucial." **(ECA, White Female, Non-Russell)**

"I just got to the point that I was feeling that to continue doing research that way was not sustainable for myself or my own mental health, and because I felt that writing papers for the sake of writing papers and doing it that way just wasn't enough for me anymore" **(ECA Mixed Male, Russell)**

"..I just got to the point that I was feeling that to continue doing research that way was not sustainable for myself or my own mental health..."

However, participants also recognize the challenges involved in trying to rebuild blurred boundaries and renegotiate priorities. Such a transformation, calls not only for a change in mindset but also for a broader cultural shift.

4.1.4 Career Development and Aspirations

Our analyses of the impact of the pandemic on ECA career development and aspirations show that 50% of the respondents felt the pandemic had a negative impact on their careers whilst 20% felt their careers were positively impacted. However, in terms of gender, the percentage of women who felt their careers were negatively impacted by the pandemic was slightly higher than men (51% and 49% respectively). These are shown in Figures 16a and 16b. Similarly, the 36% men that indicated the pandemic had a positive impact on their career development was 7% higher than women.

Figure 16: Impact of Covid-19 on ECA Career development and aspirations

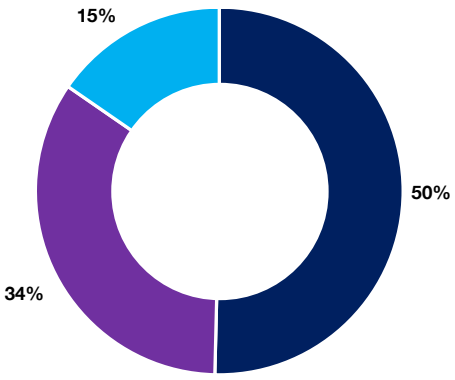

Fig 16a: Negative Impact of the pandemic

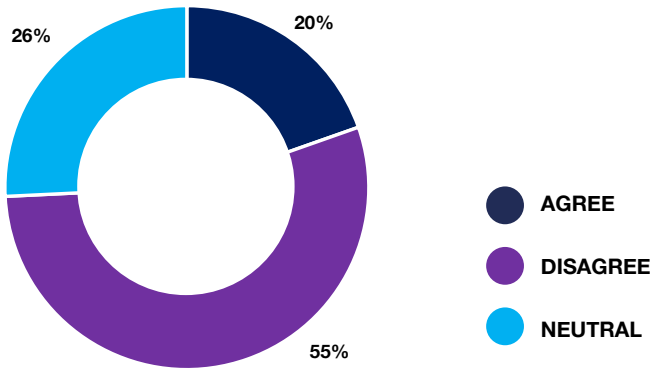

Fig 16b: Positive Impact of the pandemic

When we focus on the impact based on gender, our analyses of the survey responses (presented in Figures 17a and 17b) show greater negative impact on career development than career aspirations for both men and women. Whilst 61% of women and 54% of men felt their career developments were negatively affected by the pandemic, only 41% of women and 44% of men had perceptions of negative impacts on their career aspirations. This suggests that for some ECAs, even though they felt their career developments were negatively impacted by the pandemic, it did not alter their career aspirations.

In terms of whether the pandemic had any positive impacts, the percentage of both men and women with positive perceptions of the impact on career aspirations were much higher than for career development. The regression results indicated that gender was only statistically significant when you consider the pandemic's

effect on only career aspirations. Women were more likely to disagree that the pandemic had some positive impact in career aspirations than men (Model: *p<0.086, chi-square = 4.908).*

Figure 17: Impact of Covid-19 on ECA career development and aspirations by gender

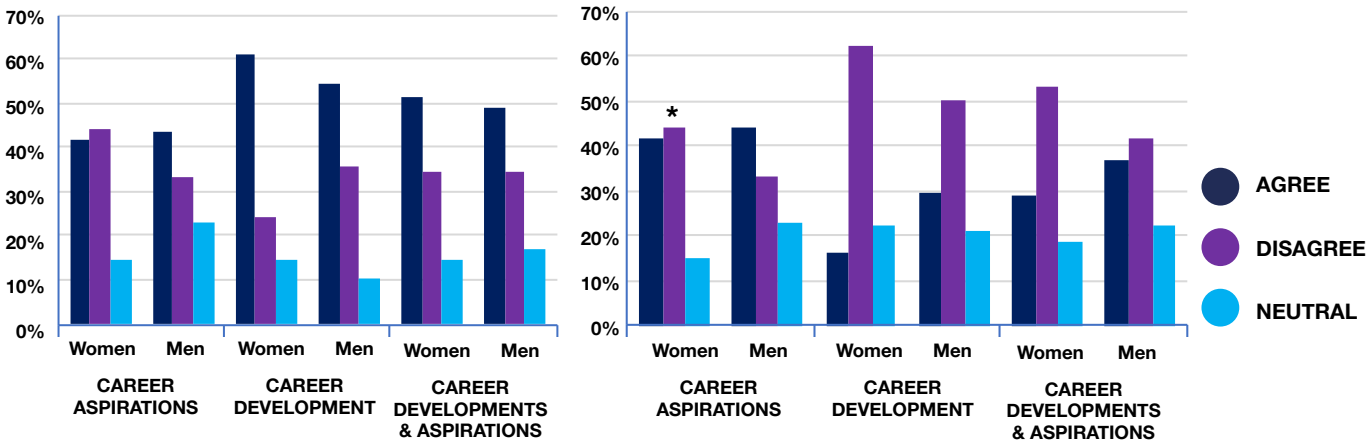

Fig 17a: Negative Impact of the pandemic

Fig 17b: Positive Impact of the pandemic

Note: Where there is a ** (p-<0.05) or * (p<0.1) on the chart, it shows the statistical significance of a category to indicate stronger perception on the impact of the pandemic given a starting position of neutral.

With regards to the pandemic's impact by ethnicity, the overall results show that 51% of ethnic minority ECAs indicated negative impacts and 21% indicated positive impact (see Figures 18a and 18b). On the other hand, negative and positive experiences among ethnic majority ECAs was 49% and 19% respectively. When we focus on career development and career aspirations separately, we find that about 29% more ethnic majority ECAs felt their career development were negatively affected than their career aspirations. The gap for ethnic minority ECAs was much smaller (3%) with 49% and 52% indicating negative impacts on their career aspirations and career development respectively. Experience of positive impacts on both career development and career aspirations were much closely aligned for both ethnic majorities and ethnic minority ECAs with a range of about 3% (see figure 18b). Our statistical analyses show no significant differences.

Figure 18: Impact of Covid-19 on ECA Career development and aspirations by ethnicity

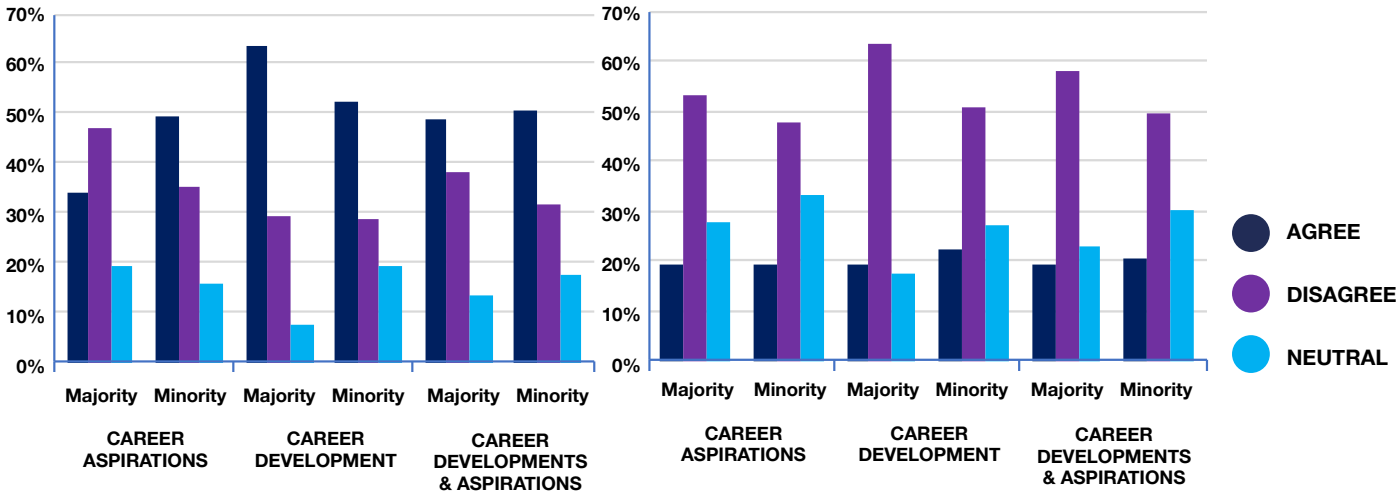

Fig 18a: Negative Impact of the pandemic

Fig 18b: Positive Impact of the pandemic

Figures 19a and19b show the impact on ECA career development and aspirations by institutions. About 4% more respondents from non-Russell group institutions experience negative impacts on their overall career development and aspirations when compared to the 47% from Russell group respondents. The percentages of ECAs that experience positive impacts on their overall career development and aspirations were 16% and 21% for Russell group and non-Russell group respondents respectively (see Figure 19b). Interestingly, the pandemic's impact on ECA career aspirations alone (Figure 19a) shows similar percentages (41%) of respondents from both types of institutions experiencing negative impacts. The variation in the impacts on career development was relatively higher with 54% and 60% of Russell and non-Russell group respondents respectively indicating negative impacts. This was also found to be statistically significant (Model: *p<0.098, chi square = 3.240)* with non-Russell group respondents more likely to agree on the negative impact. Interestingly, non-Russell group respondents were also more likely to disagree that the pandemic had a negative impact on their career development. This percentage of ECAs that felt the pandemic did not affect their career development was higher for Russell group respondents.

Figure 19: Impact of Covid-19 on ECA Career development and aspirations Institution

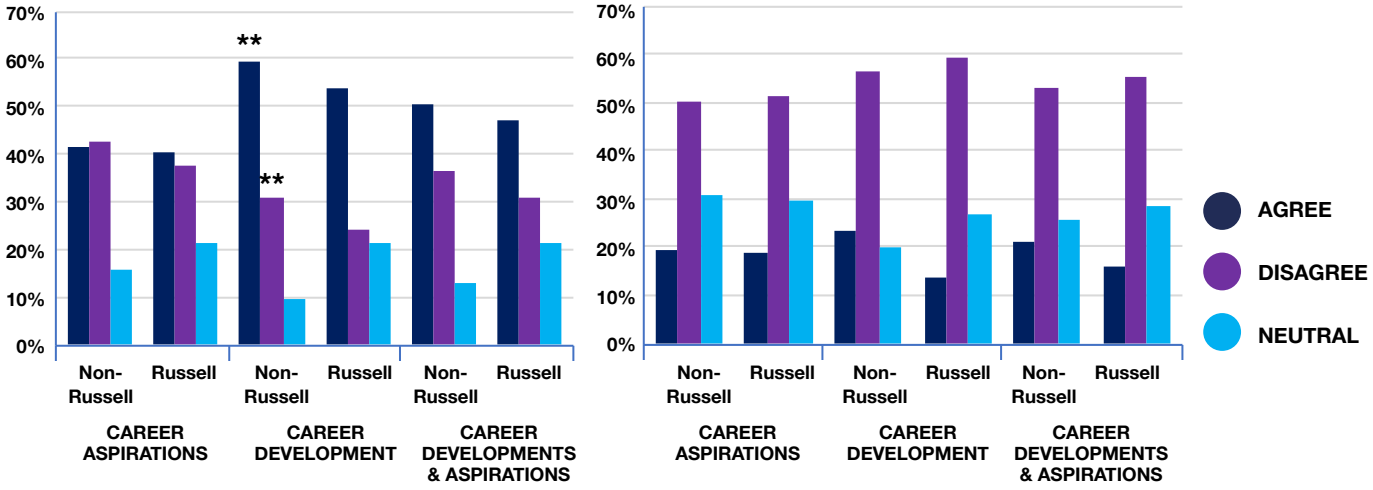

Fig 19a: Negative Impact of the pandemic

Fig 19b: Positive Impact of the pandemic

Note: where there is a ¨ (p-<0.05) or ˙ (p<0.1) on the chart, it shows the statistical significance of a category to indicate stronger perception on the impact of the pandemic given a starting position of neutral.

When we consider intersecting social identities of gender and ethnicity, we find that ethnic majority-women ECAs had the highest percentage of negative impact (68%) and ethnic majority-men had the lowest percentage (50%) (see Figure 20a). The percentage of respondents with negative experiences was higher among ethnic minority- men (62%) than ethnic majority-men (50%). The survey responses related to the positive impacts of the pandemic presented in Figure 20(b) shows men had more positive experiences than women. Approximately 31% and 28% of ethnic minority men and ethnic majority men felt their career development and aspirations were positively impacted by the pandemic compared to ethnic majority-women (18%) and ethnic minority-women (13%).

Figure 20: Impact on Career development by gender and ethnicity

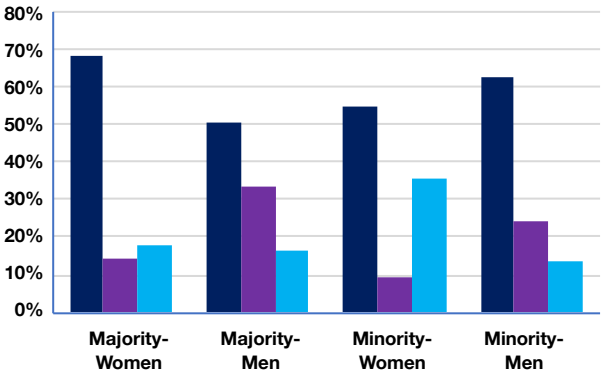

Fig 20a: Negative Impact of the pandemic

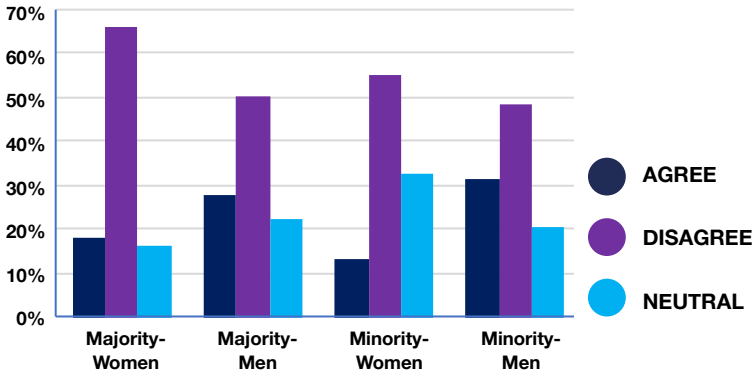

Fig 20b: Positive Impact of the pandemic

Discussions during the interviews around career trajectories and development highlighted the fact that while ECAs felt that the pandemic only slowed, rather than altered, their career trajectories, most agreed on the lack of focus on career development by institutions.

> *"It slowed me down, but it didn't change my trajectory. I still want to stay in academia. The pandemic made me realize that academia can be more flexible than I thought, especially with the increase in online teaching and meetings." (ECA, White Female, Non-Russell)*
>
> *"So it is like, well, during the pandemic there's no discussion at all. Everything's paused in relation to career development…. It's like playing catching up from the time that we lost." (ECA, East Asian Female, Non-Russell)*

Additionally, ECAs felt that little consideration was given to the potential long-term impact of the pandemic on career development, with institutions expecting them to revert back to 'normal' practice.

> *"Then they [department] talk about the promotion. Everything becomes, we forget about what happened in Covid already... Oh let's look at the research… (ECA18, South Asian Female, Russell)*

ECAs' career development is therefore more influenced by persistent dominant discourses of 'publish or perish' and existing promotional practices. Most ECAs felt that research productivity was more important for progression, with teaching activities creating a possible 'barrier': "*I believe that once you start teaching, you are engulfed by the time-consuming process of teaching.…" (ECA, White Female, Non-Russell)*. As a result, ECAs' career choices prioritize research roles.

> *"During the pandemic, I was on a teaching contract, but a year later, I switched to teaching and research. I had good support from the department at that time. They suggested I change my contract to teaching and research, and I felt that was a good move. My mentor, who was also my PhD supervisor, guided me and suggested I switch to teaching and research." (ECA, White Female, Russell)*

Some ECAs also highlight the importance of being strategic, while recognizing that not being part of certain insider networks could impact progression.

"I think there are some things that cannot be measured in metrics and numbers. Where you know I should show collegiality and support to each other … I mean, that became really important to me"

"I don't even look at my workload anymore. I used to try to make sense of it, but now I just get on with it. I want to get promoted, so I'm trying to be more strategic about the roles I take. I also feel a bit distant from senior management, and there are always some favourites who seem to have better connections with seniors. But my head of department is supportive…" (ECA, Female, Non-Russell)

However, the interviews also highlight the fact that for international ECAs, their visa status could also play a role in determining their career trajectories; with the restricted opportunities due to the pandemic creating less choice and more anxiety.

"… I don't know how other institutions do in terms of the teaching fellow position, because I've heard people warn me about not taking those positions. But there were not many options when I applied, and also to apply for a skilled worker visa. I would just have to go for whichever job that can sponsor" (ECA, East Asian Female, Non-Russell)

The interviews also reveal that changing attitudes to work are similarly reflected in ECAs' definitions and perceptions of career aspirations and success. There seems to be a slow shift from viewing academic milestones as pinnacle of success, to considering the 'humane' side of academia, i.e. meaningful impact, human connections, as an important part of that journey.

"I think it's affected my aspirations for the future in terms of me not wanting to sacrifice everything, for, like an academic career. I think it's really toxic how some people make academic work really, the pinnacle of their entire lives. And I want to be a human and then an academic and I think maybe without the pandemic I wouldn't have…." (ECA, White Female, Non-Russell)

"...I think there are some things that cannot be measured in metrics and numbers. Where you know I should show collegiality and support to each other … I mean, that became… really important to me. Then really, I don't know… striving for just moving up the ladder." (ECA East Asian Male, Non-Russell)

"I want to look back and say that I contributed to meaningful debates… I also want to have been a good colleague and worked well with others. I don't feel the need to become a professor or achieve specific milestones. For me, success is about making a difference and having good relationships with colleagues." (ECA, White Male, Non-Russell)

"I think it's affected my aspirations for the future in terms of me not wanting to sacrifice everything for, like an academic career"

4.1.5 Reflections of ECAs on career life cycle

During the interviews ECAs also reflected on their overall career life cycle, and whether this was impacted by either their social identity or type of contract. The precarity of academic careers is reflected in the experiences of those on fixed term contracts, impacting their sense of security, and their possibility to engage meaningfully with other colleagues on a long-time basis.

"open ended contract makes a big difference, because when I was on a fixed term contract, I'd internalized this idea that I was constantly under review, and I had to be at a hundred percent, at my best all the time, because I wanted to convince them that they should renew my contract…" (ECA, White Male, Russell)

"Fixed-term contracts are challenging. You don't feel attached to the institution because you don't know how long you'll be there. There's always a fear of job insecurity, which makes it hard to dedicate yourself fully to your role. Now, being on a permanent contract, I feel more secure, but not 100% secure with all the changes happening…" (ECA, White Female, Russell)

With regard to social identities, while some women ECAs felt that social class and age rather than gender impacted their career life cycle, others felt that parental responsibilities and ethnicity could have an adverse effect on career progression.

"My gender, I've never, ever experienced any challenge because I'm a female. If I'm being completely honest, I think socio-economic issues were more the issue for me. ... I'm sure if you kind of look back there probably were slight nuances, but I don't think that I would say it was a challenge for me… but finance absolutely 100% was always in the back of my mind."(ECA, White Female, Non-Russell)

"Obviously, I'm white woman of a certain age, and I would say I'm middle class. So, I got a lot of resources...But that also meant that I was kind of expected to just battle on" (ECA, White Female, Non-Russell)

"So when we, I feel that black and minority ethnic women, when they have to apply for something, we have to give our best. We have to go through all the things we have to apply…but then, when it [position] is taken off us, you are just told…. so that really affects morale" (ECA, South Asian Female, Non-Russell)

One ECA also mentions the fact that some EDI issues might be prioritized over others: "*And to be honest it is like, there are some like hierarchies about EDI issues." (ECA, South Asian Female, Russell),* which is also reflected in the experiences of single ECAs who are perceived as having no responsibilities outside work.

"Just because I was on my own, that means well, the implication is, I had more time. And so it's just a kind of conversation. Oh, can you do this for me? Or my kids are around here? I can't do that, or my Wi-fi isn't working…. So I wish that I had learned how to say no during my Phd, I still don't know how." (ECA East Asian Female, Non-Russell)

"I have a lot of family duties, and then, you know, females who care about our students' feelings…Our [male] colleague, if they are single, they can work like a machine… whereas I have to do the thinking about dinner, shopping, and so on." (ECA, South Asian Female, Russell)

The pandemic therefore drew attention to pre-existing inequalities and privileges related to caring responsibilities, social class, age and ethnicity. These intersecting identities play a role in shaping ECAs' career progression and opportunities.

4.2 Perceptions of support received during and post pandemic

Regarding experiences of support received by ECAs shown in Figures 21a and 21b, we find that overall, ECAs were positive about the level of support received from line managers both during (41%) and post-pandemic (47%). Positive experiences of support at the departmental level were relatively lower; 32% during the pandemic and 43% post pandemic (see Figures 22a and 22b). Most of the ECAs did not feel well-supported by their departments during the pandemic with 45% of the survey respondents indicating negative experience, whilst 23% were neutral. Our results also suggest there has been improvements in post pandemic experience of support at the department level with only 27% of ECAs reporting negative experiences.

Figure 21: ECA perceptions of line manager support

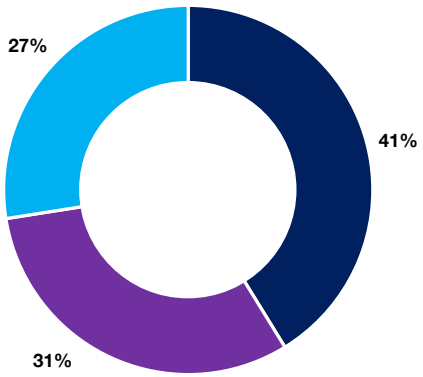

Fig 21a: Support during the pandemic

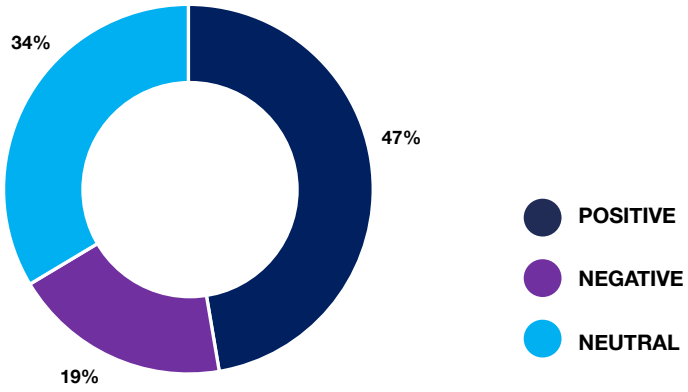

Fig 21b: Post pandemic support

Figure 22: ECA perceptions of Departmental support

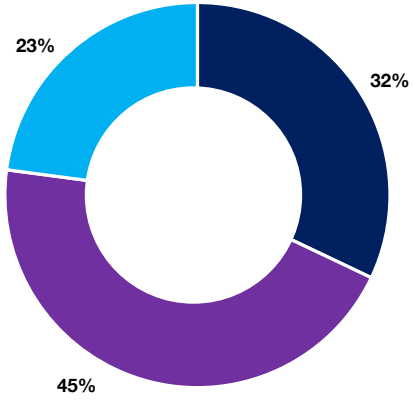

Fig 22a: Support during the pandemic

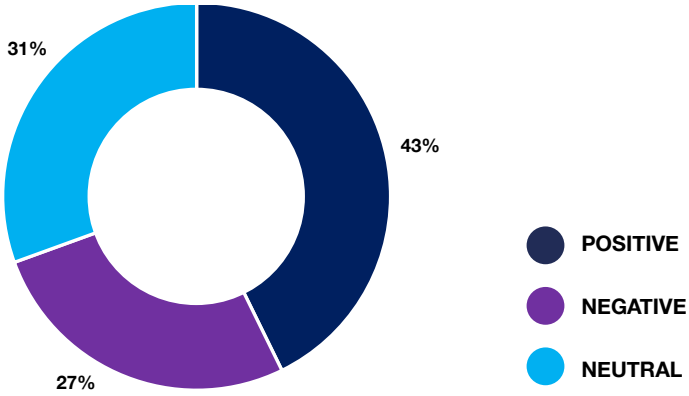

Fig 22b: Post pandemic support

Looking at the overall ECAs experiences of support by gender, Figure 23a and 23b indicates that men felt more supported than women during the pandemic. Although the percentage difference in women and men ECAs with positive experiences was only 2%, more women (44%) had a negative overall experience than men (28%). The percentage of men (34%) with no strong sentiments about the level of support received during the pandemic was higher than women (20%). Post pandemic support services (Figure 23b) appear to be better with an increased percentage of both men (45%) and women (46%) reporting positive experiences. Consequently, the percentage of women and men with negative post pandemic support experiences reduced to 27% and 15% respectively.

When considering experience of support from the two main sources (line managers and departments), Women ECAs felt better supported by their line managers than their departments during the pandemic. 43% of ECA women had positive experiences with their line managers whilst the respect percentage for department support was 29%. Interestingly, the percentage of men with positive ECA support experiences from line managers from line managers during the pandemic was similar to the percentage of ECA's with positive experiences from their respective departments (38%). The percentage of women with negative experiences was higher than men for both line manager and departmental support during the pandemic. Comparing post pandemic experiences of ECA support from line manager and departments to the levels of support during the pandemic, we find a significant reduction in negative experience at all levels between pandemic and post pandemic support. However, whilst some of these changes in perceptions are reflected in the percentage of ECAs with positive post pandemic experience, there were also increases in the percentage of ECAs without neutral perceptions about ECA support. Our regression analysis found no statistically significant outcome for both line manager and departmental support.

Figure 23: ECA perceptions of pandemic and post-pandemic support by gender

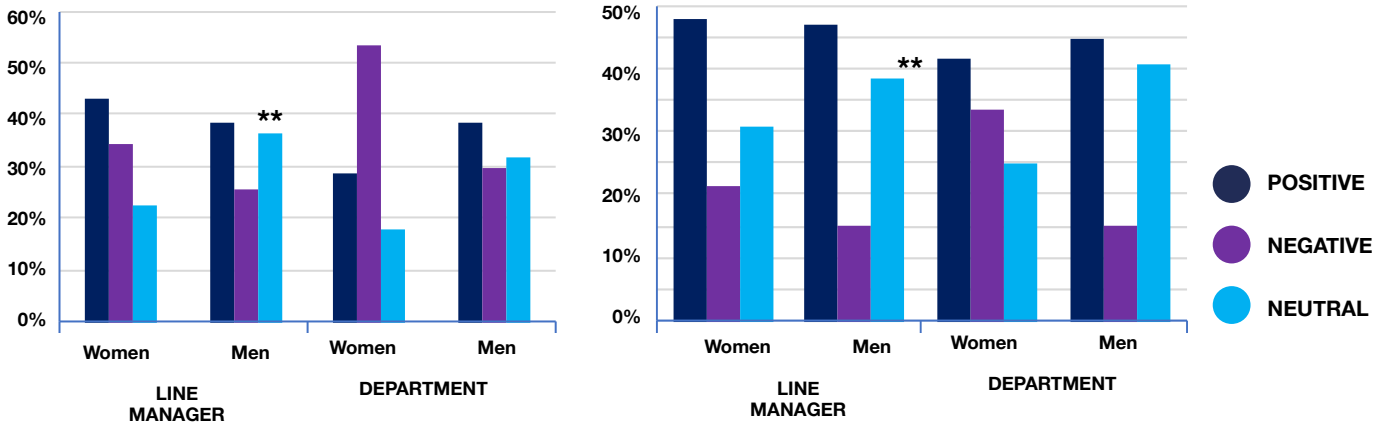

Fig 23a: Support during the pandemic

Fig 23b: Post pandemic support

Note: where there is a ** (p-<0.05) or * (p<0.1) on the chart, it shows the statistical significance of a category to indicate stronger perception on the impact of the pandemic given a starting position of neutral.

In terms of ethnicity, the overall survey results indicate experience of ECA support among ethnic minorities and majorities was very similar during the pandemic with almost identical distribution of responses between those who had positive and negative experiences (see Figures 6a). When we consider the sources of support during the pandemic, we observe that ethnic majority ECAs felt well-supported by their line managers than the level of support received from their department or institution in general. About 48% of the respondents were happy with the level of support they received from their line manager. Only 26% of ethnic majority ECAs felt there was adequate departmental/institutional support during the pandemic.

The perceptions of ethnic minority ECA regarding line manager support during the pandemic was similar to their perceptions about departmental support (37% and 38% respectively). These results indicate that whilst perceptions of line manager support during the pandemic was better among ethnic majority ECAs, the perceptions of departmental support among ethnic minority ECAs were better. The post pandemic experiences of ECA support presented in Figures 24a and 24b shows improvement in support across all levels for both ethnic minorities and majorities. Notably, there was a 10% increase in the proportion of ethnic majorities with positive line manager experience compared to experience during the pandemic. The proportion of ethnic majority ECAs with negative departmental support experience also reduced from 50% during the pandemic to 31% post pandemic. The overall sentiments around ECA post pandemic support are better than it was during the pandemic for both categories.

Figure 24: ECA perceptions pandemic and post-pandemic support by ethnicity

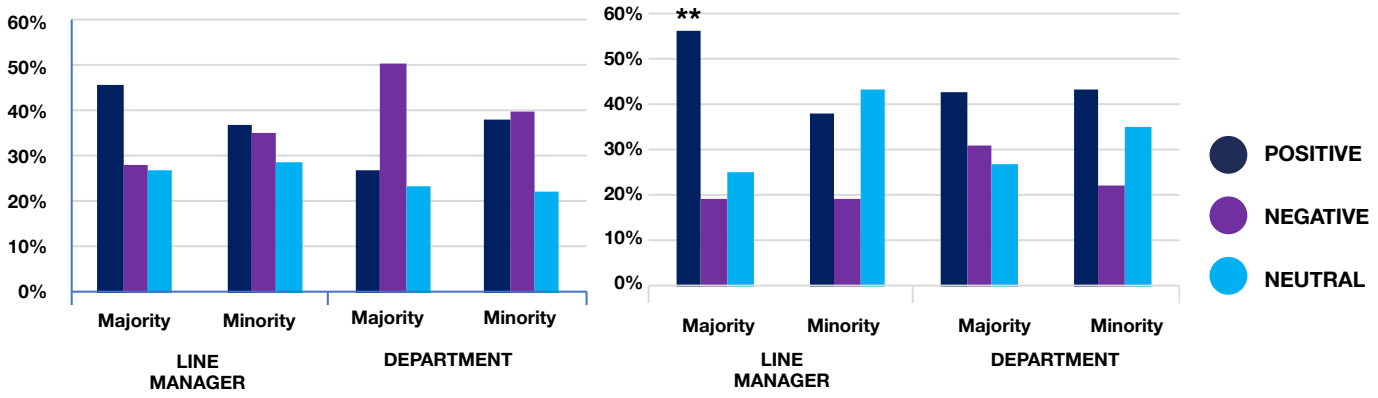

Fig 24a: Support during the pandemic

Fig 24b: Post pandemic support

Note: where there is a ** (p-<0.05) or * (p<0.1) on the chart, it shows the statistical significance of a category to indicate stronger perception on the impact of the pandemic given a starting position of neutral.

Our analyses of ECA's perceptions based on institutions are shown in Figures 25a and 25b. Overall, positive experiences of support between both categories of ECAs were similar during the pandemic and post pandemic. However, negative support experiences were higher among non-Russell group ECAs. 42% of non-Russell group ECAs and 28% of Russel group ECAs reported negative experiences during the pandemic (Figure 25a). Even though the post pandemic support experiences have been better for both categories when compared to the pandemic levels of support, negative experiences for non-Russell group ECAs remain higher at 26%. The corresponding percentage for Russel group ECAs is 15%.

With regards to the delivery of support, perceptions of ECAs from both institutions during the pandemic about line manager support was better than departmental support (Figure 25a). Whilst 43% and 40% Russel group and non-Russell group ECAs respectively had positive line manager support experience during the pandemic, positive departmental support experience was 30% and 33% for both Russel group and non-Russell group ECAs (see Figure 25b). It is also clear from the survey result shown in Figure 25a that negative experiences of ECA support from both line managers and departments were higher among non-Russell group ECAs with a minimum difference of 10% compared to Russell group ECAs. The same can be said for post pandemic ECA support although the results show a significant reduction in the percentage of ECAs with negative experiences.

Figure 25: ECA perceptions pandemic and post-pandemic support by Institution

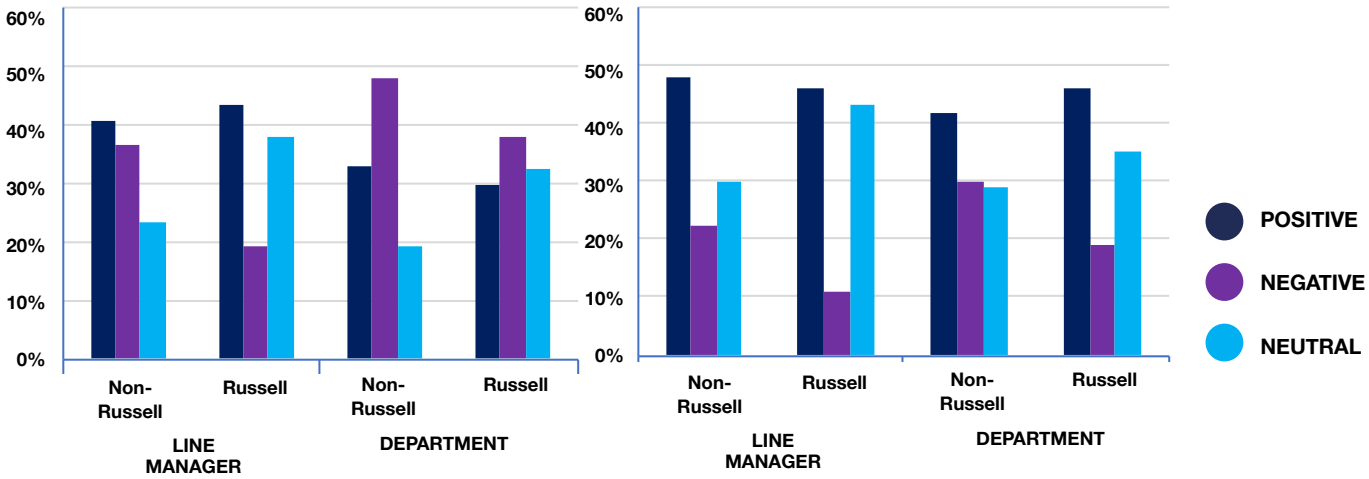

Fig 25a: Support during the pandemic

Fig 25b: Post pandemic support

Note: where there is a ¨ (p-<0.05) or ˙ (p<0.1) on the chart, it shows the statistical significance of a category to indicate stronger perception on the impact of the pandemic given a starting position of neutral.

During the interviews, ECAs' experiences of receiving support during the pandemic were varied. Institutional support was mainly in the form of stipend extensions, provision of necessary equipment and software resources and training. These measures were seen as crucial at the time, even though they were sometimes reactive and did not always address individual needs.

"Eventually, in September 2020, the university provided support, allowing us to bring equipment like monitors and keyboards home... The support came late, and I think the university could have acted sooner to help us access our resources."(ECA, South Asian Male, Non-Russell)

"The main support was data bundles for the internet. However, we had to source laptops and mobile phones on our own. The support wasn't as much as we expected" (ECA, Black Female, Non-Russell)

At the departmental level, line managers and sometimes Head of departments, played a crucial role in providing 'soft support.' In cases where this worked well, ECAs experienced support through regular check-ins and moral support provided. However, in cases where it did not, ECAs mention the lack of clear communication and increasing sense of isolation as a result.

"And she was very good. She was, you know, emotionally supporting me, you know. And she said, how are you doing? You know, because we've got children at home and managing. She didn't put pressure on me. You know, in terms of how the program should be run. She was very good in terms of providing that, what do you call emotional support? Yeah, but no guidance either, and I don't blame her because she didn't know either." (ECA, White Female, Non-Russell)

"Yet you worked in silos. You became very isolated in what you were doing. I had no idea what was going on in the department at the time because it wasn't communicated… (ECA, White Female, Non-Russell)

"She was very good. She was, you know, emotionally supporting me... She didn't put pressure on me"

Additionally, the novelty of the pandemic created unexpected pressures for institutions, which had to be managed by those providing support, sometimes resulting in a limited capacity to do so. As one ECA points out: *"But beyond that my sense was that my line manager was in crisis mode... she was working extremely hard, but didn't really have time for any of us..." (ECA, White Male, Non-Russell).* To fill these gaps in support, ECAs often took the initiative to create their own peer support groups.

"As PhD students, we were kind of left to figure things out on our own. But I think that's understandable, given the circumstances…. We managed to create a bit of a community online, organizing Zoom meetings and supporting each other." (ECA, White Female, Non-Russell)

"As PhD students, we were kind of left to figure things out on our own... We managed to create a bit of a community online"

Some ECAs also felt that while institutional focus on students was to be expected, greater recognition of the challenges faced, and involvement of ECAs in decision making was needed.

"So, we extended deadlines for assignments. You know there was a lot of support to say. Oh, they're [students] going through a hard time, you know. We need to be lenient with them. But there was nothing for us. There was no deadline, an extension of marking and stuff" (ECA, White Female, Non-Russell)

"But I was also really dissatisfied with how early career researchers and early career teachers were treated. And it was just basically only when you know, like five different crises collided, that's when someone said, Oh, maybe we should hear from the people who actually interact with our students on a daily basis" (ECA, White Female, Non-Russell).

In general, ECAs experiences highlight the fact that beyond the immediate challenges of dealing with the pandemic, structural issues such as inadequate communication channels, limited resources, unclear procedures for accessing assistance and/or the difficulties in navigating institutional structures created barriers that hindered the provision of effective support.

4.2.1 Reflections of business school leaders on the changing environment

Interviews with business school leaders regarding supporting ECAs during the pandemic, highlighted measures such as regular check-ins, pastoral and community support, as well providing necessary resources and training; in line with what was mentioned by ECAs. In addition, we find that many measures were a continuation of existing strategies to provide support rather than as a result of the pandemic, as one BSL indicates: "*We did continue during that period with our research excellence. So that's an early career researcher, a mentor scheme. We*

didn't stop that. We had an equivalent for education and that didn't stop either." (BSL, Female, Non-Russell) and, in many cases, are mainly driven by individual leaders.

"Well, I think more people should have done that. I think there should have been a policy of ensuring that more time was made available online with people as a group. So not just individual supervision, but that group coming together and spending time together. Because I think that's really important to offer support and to build community." (BSL, Female, Russell)

"Since the very beginning of my career I've always tried to pull in early career researchers where I can or support them... It's been very interesting. So I remember early in my career, when I was an early career researcher. I really benefited from working with people so much more established than I was." (BSL, Male, Non-Russell)

Regarding the overall impact on the academic environment and, in particular on ECAs, BSLs felt that the pandemic has drawn attention to existing inequalities and diversity of challenges which is seen through the increased number of requests for reasonable adjustment, as one BSL states: "*the pandemic, has given it a face, so to speak, and it has given it [diversity] a voice, and it has given it a visibility that didn't exist before. And if that is the case, then of course, then things [reasonable adjustments] will be asked…. It's a bit like many of the other EDI initiatives that we've seen over the years." BSL, Male, Russell).* The constant and continuing disruptions in the sector has resulted in a challenging environment that is characterized by constant crises and increasing expectations. This has resulted in tensions between achievement and collegiality; with colleagues having to choose what to prioritize.

"As an early career academic, it's really beneficial to be in the same space as the people that you're working with"

"But the thing that we, the level we appoint at, has changed. So to come in as a lecturer back in the day, it used to be, have or almost completed your Phd. Now you have to have equivalent to 3 and 4 star publications before you can come in as a lecturer, so that does result in a change in the support that's given…" (BSL, Female, Non-Russell)

"I think it's very difficult to have very precise and difficult to achieve targets in things like research and have huge collegiality on the other hand. They [ECAs] look at how they're judged." (BSL, Male, Non-Russell)

Changing practices in ways of working is also perceived to have a negative impact on ECAs who in their current career stage need to increase visibility, build networks and build communities to identify potential collaboration opportunities.

"As an early career academic, it's really beneficial to be in the same space as the people that you're working with. It allows you to form relationships more quickly. It allows you to form trust more quickly. It allows you to have more detailed conversations, more in depth conversations…it's really difficult to have the same quality of conversation that you would have in a face to face situation." (BSL, Female, Russell)

However, collegiality has a cultural aspect to it, and as one BSL indicates, compelling academics back into the same office will not necessarily solve the issue. The increased isolation could also result in a more instrumental relationship with the institution in the long term, ultimately impacting the work environment:

"I think the biggest problem right now, and this is not just for ECRs, but also just across the board, is the university is trying to get people back into the office.… My point is that it is a cultural issue…So if universities think that solving the problem of the pandemic will be, well to compel people back into the office, it won't solve anything…you've got to create opportunities for them to interact" (BSL, Male, Non-Russell)

"And that can create you know, social isolation, and also a kind of a very different relationship between the institution and the employee that can be kind of more instrumental" (BSL58, Male, Non-Russell)

"the universities, did not learn the lesson. People's lives are not always perfect… their needs need to be accounted for"

Lessons that still need to be learnt include the need to continually consider individual circumstances and embrace differences, even as institutions shift back to 'normal' working practices.

"we, as a community, the universities, did not learn the lesson. People's lives are not always perfect… their needs need to be accounted for. I think good leaders do factor that in" (BSL, Male, Non-Russell).

"you've really got to get across, is these biases against age, against career, stage, etc. and against the, you know, challenges that people are working with, those cannot just be damaging; they can be lethal." (BSL, Female, Non-Russell).

Some BSLs also felt that the pandemic highlighted the limited resilience within academic systems to deal with unexpected events, and the need to build resilience as a property rather than a state going forward.

"I've tried to make the argument that resilience is a property, not a state. So in the pandemic, I think a lot of universities got into a situation where they became resilient, but it was resilience as a state. They were resilient at that point. But they never developed resilience as a property of the organization…" (BSL, Male, Non-Russell)

Moreover, there is a need to find the right balance between targeted initiatives and standardizing good practice to effectively support all ECAs' career development and progression.

"And it's finding that balance where there is a reasonable adjustment… versus ensuring individual strengths, capabilities, and resilience to deal with a very complex world."

"And it's finding that balance where there is a reasonable adjustment… versus ensuring that individuals have the individual strengths, capabilities, and resilience to deal with a very complex world. I think that boundary has become quite blurred and has made it very difficult for organizations to navigate that, particularly for individual line managers." (BSL, Male, Russell)

In summary, the challenges and tensions resulting from the pandemic, and evolving academic environment has influenced the provision of support, resulting in many cases, in changes in practice, rather than policy.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The aim of this study was to understand how the pandemic impacted the career life cycle of ECAs, with a specific focus on marginalized groups including women and ethnic minorities. The results provide insights based on the analyses of online survey responses and semi structured interviews with ECAs. The first part of the study examined the impact of the pandemic on their career pathways and progression, while the second part explored how business school leaders supported ECAs during the pandemic. The research focused on four main aspects: workload, productivity, well-being and career development and aspirations.

Our results indicate that the drastic and rapid changes in work practices brought about by the sudden shift to remote and online working, resulted in workload challenges for all academic staff, but especially for ECAs, most of whom were less experienced academics and felt overwhelmed by the transition. ECAs' experiences of the transition were worsened by the uncertainty of the immediate and long-term impact of the crisis. Our survey results further suggest that while these disruptions majorly impacted teaching and learning, for ECAs, research productivity was the most affected. Therefore, even though some ECAs identified opportunities related to increased flexibility in working arrangements and new ways of collaborating, the resulting trade-offs in terms of invasion of personal space and blurring of boundaries, seems to have worsened most ECAs' lived experiences. Moreover, while digital platforms might have increased networking opportunities, online interactions did not adequately substitute in-person interactions, and could rarely replicate the spontaneous and serendipitous connections that occur at work places.

"The trade-offs between positive and negative aspects of the pandemic resulted in worsened perceptions and lived experiences"

Furthermore, the steep learning curve and additional mental labour involved in not only shifting to digital delivery, but in providing pastoral support to students also resulted in a constant strain on ECAs' already limited resources. This led to increased stress and in extreme cases, burnout. It is therefore not surprising that amongst the four areas explored, ECA well-being was the most negatively affected, with survey respondents indicating a decline in their mental and physical well-being. Additionally, the perceived lack of adequate and timely support, while varying from one institution to the next, was mainly viewed as worsening the situation for ECAs, who were already grappling with uncertainties around career progression in an altered work environment. The crucial role played by line managers in providing the essential moral and emotional support during the crises is also widely acknowledged, by both interviewees and survey respondents. Individual and collective agency is also observed through the self-organizing efforts of ECAs in order to fill perceived gaps in support.

Institution's primary focus on dealing with the online transition and supporting students, as well as the lack of clarity from institutional leaders and departmental heads meant that ECAs' career development needs were put on hold, with most ECAs yet to understand the full implications this has had on their career development and progression. However, even with these challenges, there appears to be no significant impact on most ECAs' career aspirations and imagined futures. However, while progression up the academic ladder is still viewed as important, greater value seems to be afforded to the aspects such as collegiality and making an impact. The pandemic seems to have acted as a catalyst for many ECAs, resulting in changing attitudes towards work. There seems to be both a prioritizing of a healthy work-life balance and a re-evaluation of what a successful academic career entails.

"The pandemic exacerbated existing inequalities based on identities such as gender, ethnicity, social class, caring responsibilities, type of contract"

Our results also suggest that the pandemic might have aggravated pre-existing inequalities and pressures based on identities such as gender, ethnicity, social class, caring responsibilities and type of contract. It was notable that whilst women ECAs in general perceived greater challenges with workload, wellbeing and career development during the pandemic, those with caring responsibilities tended to

perceive even greater challenges due to balancing family responsibilities, and felt that this had an overall adverse effect on their career progression. Additionally, ethnic minority women ECAs seem to perceive a greater impact of intersecting gender and ethnic inequalities on their career life cycle. In addition, the precarious nature of academic careers in times of uncertainty is also perceived to play a greater role in adversely impacting ECA's career pathways; especially for those on fixed term contracts and/or depending on one's visa status. Overall, ECAs' lived experiences during the pandemic emphasize the need for sustained institutional practices that provide more proactive, regular and tailored support, while paying greater attention to individual circumstances.

Reflections by the business school leaders highlight the challenges in supporting ECAs during a disruptive period were characterized by increasing uncertainty, limited resources and rising expectations. While a range of support measures and initiatives are provided, these are often individually driven and/or based on existing practices. This emphasizes the importance of standardizing and mainstreaming existing good practice in order to ensure equitable access and that all ECAs feel adequately supported. Existing perceptions and discourses regarding career progression that sometimes seem to create tensions between individual achievement and collegiality, contradict changing ECA attitudes to work-life balance. This would imply that individual level initiatives, such as mentoring and training, while crucial for ECAs' career development, need to be implemented together with broader structural initiatives aimed at changing organizational culture, practice and policies, in order to create a more inclusive and supportive academic environment.

While this research provides an evidence base and insights on the impact of the pandemic on ECAs' career life cycle, it also highlights various avenues for further research. For example, while the study highlights ECAs' perceptions of experiences during and since the pandemic, the longer-term impact on ECAs' career progressions and aspirations still needs to be explored. It would be useful to also build knowledge on how ECAs are balancing their changing attitudes towards work, versus increasing pressures due to the continuous cycle of crises the academic sector is facing. Future studies building further knowledge on how intersectional challenges influence ECAs career life cycle are needed. Lastly, comprehensive evaluations of support initiatives aimed at creating a more inclusive and supportive environment, would assist in determining their effectiveness in addressing ECAs' developmental needs, and identifying any persistent gaps in support.

"Challenges in supporting ECAs during a disruptive period were characterized by increasing uncertainty, limited resources and rising expectations"

5.1 Recommendations

Some of the main recommendations based on the report findings and discussions with stakeholders on developing best practice for creating a more inclusive and supportive working environment for ECAs include:

- Pay greater attention to the potential long-term impact of the pandemic and its effect on ECAs' career life cycle and progression
- ECAs' changing attitudes to work and career aspirations requires a systemic change in practice, policy and overall organizational culture
- Embed EDI principles in work practices to ensure greater awareness of existing inequalities that could create additional barriers for the career progression of marginalized groups
- Develop career development schemes that take into account the intersectional positionalities of ECAs
- Develop better policies around mental health that acknowledge the impact of career precarity on ECAs mental wellbeing
- Standardize existing good practices around building ECA's research

and teaching capabilities to improve their ability to meet ever increasing expectations, while ensuring equitable access to such resources

- Ensure ECA representation at multiple decision-making working groups to improve visibility and voice
- Create or foster a ‘safe’ environment where individuals feel empowered to request for reasonable adjustments that reflect their personal circumstances
- Protect ECAs’ and other academics time allocated for research related activities and pedagogy development by ensuring proper timetabling and workflow planning.
- Provide clear guidance on the purpose and aims of support interventions, such as mentorship schemes (e.g. peer mentoring, reverse mentoring)
- Equip and empower line managers, given their critical role in providing pastoral support and mentorship to ECAs
- Provide clear institutional guidelines of valued outputs and collaborations, with efforts being made to manage ECAs’ expectations regarding their career development and progression
- Ensure equitable recognition of contributions; which could involve the celebration and communication of ECA ‘wins’ at institutional level. Such recognition should take into account academic citizenship activities
- Work to replace systems of ‘patronage’ for advancement by developing transparent and inclusive opportunities for promotion criteria
- Develop institutional resilience by prioritizing the building of a resilient culture at all levels, ensuring necessary resources are available to support ECAs in dealing with the constant crises facing the academic sector
- Encourage wider adoption and implementation of the Researcher concordat by institutions

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