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# A Message From The Chalk Face – What Casual Teaching Staff Tell Us They Want To Know, Access and Experience.

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# A Message From The Chalk Face – What Casual Teaching Staff Tell Us They Want To Know, Access and Experience.

## **Abstract**

The University of Tasmania established a project in 2009 to investigate the particular needs of casual teaching staff, identify strategies to improve access to information, and facilitate a consistent approach to employment, induction, development and recognition. The project was managed by the university learning and teaching centre, and co-ordinated by a Reference Group. A preliminary survey in 2010 explored casual teaching staff information and resource needs and a mapping exercise was undertaken to establish institutional practices. The findings of the preliminary 2010 survey and mapping exercise prompted the development of an institution-wide *Casual Teaching Staff Policy*. The preliminary 2010 survey was subsequently updated and a second survey administered in 2012 to obtain additional baseline data against which to evaluate the casual teaching staff project and implementation of the *Casual Teaching Staff Policy*. This paper presents the results of the 2012 survey designed with this dual focus in mind. The 2012 survey items were explicitly aligned to the *Sessional Staff Standards Framework* arising from the Benchmarking Leadership and Advancement of Standards for Sessional Teaching (BLASST) project. The 2012 survey results were mapped to the *Sessional Staff Standards Framework* guiding principles (Quality Learning and Teaching, Sessional Staff Support and Sustainability), standards (Good Practice, Minimum Standard, Unsustainable), and criteria spanning different institutional levels (Institutional Level, Faculty Level, Department Level, Individual Level). Together the quantitative and qualitative survey data results provide a rich depiction of the world of casual teaching staff at the University of Tasmania. On the one hand the results evidence examples of well-supported, fully engaged casual teaching staff; on the other hand, a distressing picture emerges for many such staff. The findings are presented with discussion regarding the requisite ensuing steps in this ongoing initiative to improve the employment, induction, development and recognition experiences of University of Tasmania casual teaching staff.

## **Keywords**

Casual Teaching Staff, Policy

## Introduction

Higher-education students expect a high-quality learning and teaching experience, delivered by teaching staff well versed in disciplinary context and teaching methodology. For them, the learning experience is paramount – the nature of their teacher’s employment contract is irrelevant. For the teaching staff, however, access to resources and development opportunities to enable them to deliver high-quality learning experiences may vary greatly depending on their employment status. Casual teaching staff consistently report having issues with employment conditions, induction and ongoing support (Bexley, James & Arkoudis 2011). What has been, and remains, particularly disturbing is that while casual teaching staff conduct a significant share of university teaching (DIICCSRTE 2012), there has been sector-wide failure to adequately address acknowledged quality and risk-management issues (Bexley James & Arkoudis 2011; Percy et al. 2008a). The *RED Report: Recognition – Enhancement – Development: The contribution of sessional teachers to higher education* noted, “In summary, sessional teachers make a significant but largely invisible contribution to the quality of teaching and learning in higher education. Both the quantitative and qualitative dimensions of this contribution need to be investigated and accounted for at an institutional level if risk management and quality enhancement policy and practice are to be effective” (Percy et al. 2008a, p1). The *RED Report* subsequently reported key findings framed around three core concepts: “RECOGNITION calls attention to the growing diversity of the teaching workforce and the need for better systems, policies and procedures to assure the quality of teaching and learning in a more complex operational environment; ENHANCEMENT highlights the general lack of improvement in sustainable policy and practice since the AUTC Report (2003); and DEVELOPMENT provides a series of discussion points for wholesale improvements across the sector” (Percy et al. 2008a, p6).

The University of Tasmania casual teaching staff project responded to the challenge laid down by the *RED Report* and built on national projects investigating issues surrounding casual teaching staff in the university sector, most notably the 2003 Australian Universities Learning and Teaching Council (AUTC) Sessional Teaching Project. In 2010, the University of Tasmania casual teaching staff project adopted the *RED Report's* definition of casual teaching staff: “any higher education instructors not in tenured or permanent positions” (Percy et al. 2008a, 5). The *RED Report* recommended a "whole of university approach" to enhancing the quality of the casual teaching staff experience, and identified five domains: systemic and sustainable policy and practice; employment and administrative support; induction and academic management; career and professional development; and reward and recognition. The five *RED Report*

domains, and the *Guidelines for Training, Managing and Supporting Sessional Teachers* (AUTC 2003) framed numerous Australian university casual teaching staff projects, not only those building on projects initially showcased in the *RED Report*.

Most recently, in 2013, the Benchmarking Leadership and Advancement of Standards for Sessional Teaching (BLASST) project published its Sessional Staff Standards Framework, which "positions the Institution's approach to sessional staff within the institutional policy framework, while allowing enough flexibility to include and support Individual Staff Members; Department (Unit Convenor/Coordinator/Subject Coordinator/Subject Leader); and Faculty (School/Division) – level responses to sessional staff issues" (Harvey 2013 p1). The BLASST project also released an accompanying online interactive tool, in the form of a generic spreadsheet. This provided an accessible audit instrument for universities to examine their casual teaching staff practices, benchmarked against the Framework at four levels: individual, department, faculty and institutional.

### ***Background***

The University of Tasmania's heavy reliance on casual staff reflects an Australian university sector-wide trend of both proportionate increases in casual-staff numbers (12.5% of total teaching staff in 1996 to 16.5% in 2011) and absolute increases (10,396 in 1996 to 19,009 in 2011) (DEETYA 1997, DIICCSRTE 2012). In 2011, the University of Tasmania employed 2,670 full-time-equivalent (FTE) staff, including 338 FTE casual staff (academic and professional) (DIICCSRTE 2012) or 2,996 casual staff members (academic and professional), which represents just over half of all University of Tasmania staff (51.66%) (University of Tasmania 2011). This contrasts with 205 FTE casual staff (academic and professional) in 1996. In 2011, 111 FTE casual staff were classified as "teaching only" academic staff (60 FTE women; 51 FTE men), which represented 50% of all University of Tasmania "teaching only" academic staff. The remainder of the casual staff were employed under professional staff classifications. The proportion of casual staff at the University of Tasmania was lower than the national average (12.65% and 16.5% FTE academic and professional staff, respectively). Consistent with national trends, females represented a larger proportion of casual staff than males at the University of Tasmania (7.05% of female staff and 5.6% of male) (DIICCSRTE 2012).

The Australian University Quality Agency (AUQA) *Report of an Audit of the University of Tasmania* recommended "that (the University of Tasmania) pay further attention to the induction and training of tutors and sessional staff across

the University” (2005, p6). In response, the University of Tasmania initiated centrally delivered professional-development days and provided opportunities for casual teaching staff to enrol in the Graduate Certificate of University Learning and Teaching. In addition, a flexible pathway – the Early Career Academic stream – was introduced to enable casual teaching staff to complete a University Learning and Teaching Foundations course. Concurrently, the human resources department developed a comprehensive, online induction resource for all staff, inclusive of the particular information needs of casual teaching staff.

Despite the availability of such centralised professional development and induction, authority for employment and responsibility for support resides predominantly with the organisational unit in which casual teaching staff work – usually a school. In some cases, significant effort has been made to ensure that casual teaching staff are well supported through a combination of central and localised processes. The Faculty of Education, for example, provides a suite of targeted resources, conducts an induction day and funds attendance for casual teaching staff at centrally delivered professional-development initiatives. The Faculty also supports casual teaching staff through teaching teams. The Faculty of Law implements an annual induction for new tutors, and other schools encourage and financially support attendance at centralised programs. University of Tasmania programs that place current students in (largely casual) teaching-related roles, such as peer-assisted study sessions, provide comprehensive training, ongoing mentoring and peer review and access to resources (Skalicky 2008; Green & Skalicky 2013; Skalicky & Caney 2013). However, casual teaching staff have divergent experiences. Anecdotal accounts of practice from casual teaching staff attending centrally delivered workshops, and disproportionate attendance at such events from particular schools, suggest that good practice is yet to be embedded consistently across the institution. Thus, there were significant challenges to improving the student learning environment at the inception of the University of Tasmania casual teaching staff project. In particular, there was no coherent or consistent business intelligence, data-collection mechanism or framework to support quality enhancement with respect to casual teaching staff; and there were neither a university policy nor consistent practices towards the recruitment, induction, management, integration and support of casual academic teaching staff.

### ***The Casual Teaching Staff Project***

With this background in mind, the University of Tasmania casual teaching staff project commenced in 2009 to develop an institutional response to the *RED Report* and systematically address the needs of casual teaching staff. The core

concepts of the *RED Report* (recognition, enhancement and development) provided the framework for project activities, beginning with the development of an information portal for casual teaching staff. The objective of the portal was to provide a range of information that these staff may need to effectively deliver quality learning experiences. A reference group was established involving casual teaching staff, staff who supervised casuals and staff from the human resources department and university learning and teaching centre. The reference group initially undertook a mapping exercise to explore institutional practices with respect to casual teaching staff. The exercise revealed significant institutional risk, evidenced by inconsistent practices in the recruitment, employment, induction and supervision of casual teaching staff; communication mechanisms; and the level of integration of such staff with their learning and teaching community. In addition, the mapping exercise found limited opportunities for casual teaching staff performance review, professional development, recognition and reward.

To further inform their work, the reference group developed a preliminary survey, based on an environmental scan of other university initiatives in response to the *RED Report*, to obtain baseline data. The findings of the first survey, administered in 2010, prompted the development of a whole-of-institution policy to guide practices concerning casual teaching staff and provide a foundation for systemic change. The Casual Teaching Staff Policy was collaboratively developed in 2011/12 to articulate the university's position. In addition to being informed by the 2010 survey and consultations with policy stakeholders, the policy-development process drew on broader sources including the *University of Tasmania Academic Staff Agreement* (University of Tasmania 2010), recommendations from the *RED Report* (Percy et al. 2008a) and *RED Resource* (Percy et al. 2008b), and the BLASST Framework (Harvey 2013). Following the development of the Casual Teaching Staff Policy, the 2010 survey was updated and administered in 2012.

## **Methodology**

The research described in this paper was underpinned by a pragmatist frame (Creswell 2003) based on a concern for the real-world problem of supporting casual teaching staff to provide quality learning and teaching experiences to their students. This paper examines the findings from the 2012 survey.

The 2012 survey was administered as part of a larger project that collected data from multiple sources. The overarching project included benchmarking against Australian universities with respect to the *RED Report* domains (systemic and sustainable policy and practice; employment and administrative support;

induction and academic management; career and professional development; and reward and recognition), the 2012 survey of University of Tasmania casual teaching staff, a pilot workshop using the BLASST online interactive tool and focus-group interviews with casual teaching staff in 2013.

The 2012 survey built on the preliminary 2010 survey through mapping against the draft Casual Teaching Staff Policy headings (Recruitment and Employment; Professional Development in Teaching and Learning; Evaluation and Recognition; Integration and Communication) and cross-referencing to the BLASST Framework guiding principles (quality learning and teaching, sessional-staff support and sustainability). The 2012 survey was specifically designed to understand the information needs of casual teaching staff; obtain additional baseline data against which to evaluate the casual teaching staff project and implementation of the Casual Teaching Staff Policy; and make recommendations to improve the experiences of casual teaching staff in line with the BLASST Framework.

Permission for minor alterations from the preliminary 2010 survey was obtained through the University of Tasmania human ethics approval process. This modification was also supported through a pilot benchmarking workshop held in conjunction with the BLASST project.

The 2012 survey was delivered online using Survey Monkey to facilitate the collection of data from the large number of casual teaching staff employed across the institution. The 2012 survey was advertised through the University of Tasmania staff news site, and an email invitation was forwarded to all University of Tasmania casual teaching staff with the support of the Provost. For the purposes of this research, the email invitation and survey instrument defined casual teaching staff as “anyone who is employed casually at (the University of Tasmania) in a teaching capacity that is not on a contract lasting 12 months or more or who is not a tenured member of academic staff” (University of Tasmania 2012). A total of 199 respondents completed the 2012 survey, which incorporated 17 items on a Likert scale that ranged from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree"; a "not applicable" option was also available for each item. The 2012 survey included the opportunity for respondents to make free-text comments or provide explanations of their answers to each question; 78 of the 199 respondents provided additional comments. In addition, there were 13 questions that enabled collection of demographic data, including the area in which the respondent was working, hours worked and professional development completed. Forty-six respondents indicated their interest in participating in a follow-up focus group.

### ***Analysis Framework***

The demographic data and Likert-scale items allowed a descriptive picture to emerge regarding those University of Tasmania casual teaching staff who responded to the 2012 survey. Percentage agreement or disagreement with each of the Likert-scale questions was collated and evaluated using the guiding principles of the BLASST Framework (quality learning and teaching, sessional-staff support and sustainability) as an analytic lens. The 2012 survey results were also loosely mapped to the BLASST Framework rankings (good practice; minimum standard; unsustainable), and criteria spanning different levels (institutional; faculty; department; individual). The 2012 survey questions elicited responses that mapped primarily to the department and individual level, principally as the respondents answered from their individual perspectives and experiences within a department or school.

The qualitative comments in the 2012 survey responses included those directly prompted by specific questions and those in response to the open-ended question, “Is there anything else about your experiences as a casual academic teaching employee at the University of Tasmania that you would like to add?” The qualitative responses in each of these cases have been treated differently. Those that were in direct response to specific questions have been used as examples to supplement the discussion of the Likert-scale questions.

Analysis of the open-ended responses was through thematic analysis (Boyatzis 1998). These responses were read through in their entirety with a view to engaging with the ideas in the data. The subsequent coding was theory-driven (Braun & Clarke 2006) in that the responses were reviewed systematically to extract ideas that related to the BLASST Framework guiding principles. In essence these guiding principles became meta-themes to frame the data analysis. Data relating to each principle was grouped inclusive of surrounding data to ensure context was maintained. Where extracts appeared to fit under more than one principle, they were listed under both. Extracts were then reviewed to identify themes, and the coding process was repeated. A thematic map was then prepared and extracts revisited to refine the themes. This enabled a visual representation of the ten themes and their relationship to the three principles (Figure 1).

## **Results and Discussion**

### ***Demographics***



The sample was predominately female (66%) and evenly spread through the age ranges offered in the survey (25-34 years, 22%; 35-44 years, 24%; 45-54 years, 27%; >55 years 24%). Twenty-one percent stated that they undertook casual teaching as a pathway to enter full-time academic employment, while just 1% reported that casual teaching was their chosen career. The length of time employed as a member of the University of Tasmania casual teaching staff ranged between less than one year to more than 10 years, with almost one-third (32%) employed on a casual basis between two and five years. More than half (54%) had an estimated one to two appointments per year in most years, while 36% reported more than two appointments per year. The majority (81%) of respondents claimed payment for at least five hours per fortnight (of whom 20% claimed for more than 20 hours). All respondents were employed as casual academic staff with a teaching responsibility. Respondents indicated that they had undertaken a range of duties as a casual teaching academic, including tutoring (83%), marking (74%), lecturing (52%), unit development (33%) and unit coordination (30%). Most (65%) had been recruited via a direct approach from another staff member.

### ***Quantitative Insights***

Based on the principle of quality learning and teaching as a meta-theme, and referring to the Framework standards (good practice, minimum standard, unsustainable), responses to a number of survey questions suggest that some institutional practices were sound and sustainable, whereas others were unsustainable. The majority of respondents (76%) indicated they had regular contact with staff responsible for units in which they taught, and 60% were included in a teaching team with experienced staff members. Similarly, a large percentage of respondents (80%) reported they were supported in their assessment tasks, and 71% were able to gain feedback from students through student evaluations of learning and teaching. Conversely, fewer than half (46%) were mentored by an experienced colleague, only 26% were able to undertake qualifications relevant to teaching practice and 28% were involved in peer review of their own or others' teaching.

The principle of sessional-staff support was used as a conceptual lens for the support meta-theme, evidence from the 2012 survey indicates an inconsistent and, in some instances inappropriate, level of support for University of Tasmania casual teaching staff. While the majority (71%) of respondents reported they were adequately briefed on their responsibilities for remuneration specified in contracts, and 60% of respondents considered they were sufficiently briefed about teaching responsibilities, 67% of respondents did *not* receive orientation to working in their school or faculty. Evidence from the 2012 survey also suggests that communication with casual teaching staff regarding professional-

development opportunities is inadequate: 71% of respondents were *not* aware of casual teaching staff professional-development days, and 64% were *not* aware of formal casual teaching staff induction.

Finally, evidence collated from the responses to the 2012 survey indicated that the sustainability (the third principle) of some University of Tasmania practices is questionable. Approximately half (52%) of casual teaching staff surveyed were involved in future or ongoing unit planning. Additionally, since 60% of respondents did not receive information or support for teaching awards, excellence in teaching by many casual teaching staff is unlikely to be recognised or rewarded. Similarly, with just 30% of surveyed staff having the opportunity to attend or present at conferences, the sustainability of sharing good practice and knowledge is limited.

### ***Qualitative Insights***

Seventy-five staff responded to the invitation to provide additional comments with respect to their experiences as a casual teaching staff member. A clear message through the qualitative data was the passion and commitment of the casual teaching staff towards their roles:

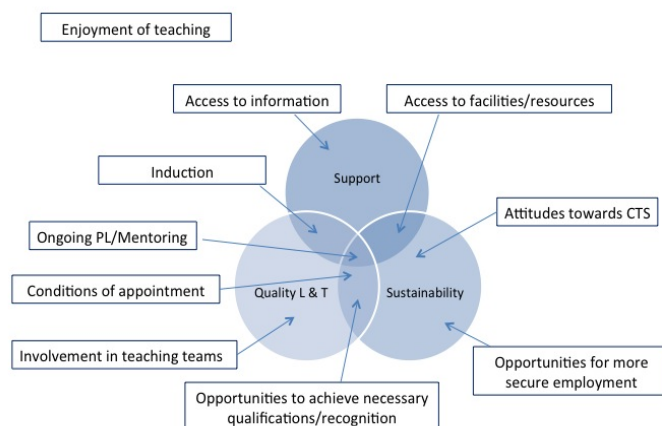
*Teaching is one of the most enjoyable aspects of my job, it is a joy and an honour to be able to engage with students – the next generation of practitioners and academics – in ways that are interesting and meaningful. (Survey respondent 69)*

However, the majority of the open-ended responses raised concerns experienced by casual teaching staff. These comments were by no means exclusively negative:

*Despite my comments about some aspects I feel have been missing, I want to point out that through undertaking an M. Ed. this past year I have been given much greater access to forms of professional development (through feedback sessions with supervisors etc.). I very much appreciate the many forms of support I do receive as a casual academic. (Survey respondent 70)*

Analysis of the open-ended responses from the 2012 survey arrived at 10 themes (Figure 1). Four themes were aligned against one of the meta-themes (access to information; attitudes towards casual teaching staff (CTS); opportunities for more secure employment; involvement in teaching teams); and five spanned more than one meta-theme (access to facilities/resources; opportunities to achieve necessary

qualifications/recognition; ongoing professional learning/mentoring (PL); induction; conditions of appointment). The tenth theme (enjoyment of teaching), sat outside the framework.



**Figure 1: The Three Meta-themes and 10 Themes Emerging from the 2012 Survey**

Under the support meta-theme, the *Access to information* theme was raised in both general terms ("out of the loop"; "need better information"; "need to understand requirements") and specific terms ("more information on occupational health and safety"; "requests for a position description have been ignored"). Specific requests for induction were more commonplace – and from the contexts of respondents' comments, this included both general information (the *Access to information* theme) and information, skills and experiences directed towards the teaching and learning process (the *Induction* theme). The latter appeared to span both the support and the quality learning and teaching meta-themes.

*There is a distinct lack of orientation and induction afforded to those on casual teaching/lecturing contracts. The level of support you are provided with is entirely dependent upon the coordinator of the subject.* (Survey respondent 30)

Interestingly, the issues of orientation, induction and access to information also came through strongly in the quantitative data.

The theme *Access to facilities/resources* also appeared to span two meta-themes (support and sustainability). For example, the respondents reported that the restriction of email access at the cessation of the casual teaching employment contract was problematic and had a negative impact in many ways. This included knowing about teaching in subsequent semesters and allowing student contact between semesters; moreover, they reported that it added to a feeling of marginalisation. Several respondents cited no, or poor, office facilities and difficulties in accessing resources needed for teaching within their school:

*I had no access to facilities such as photocopying, but I was required to photocopy class handouts. The library photocopier was not capable of producing class handouts so I had to use uniprint. (Survey respondent 4)*

*I effectively spent all of my unpaid time in the breaks between classes working because I had no access to a staff room so had nowhere to go away from students, who took the opportunity to ask questions.... I felt it was unfair that I had to do so much unpaid work. (Survey respondent 4)*

Such situations reduced the enthusiasm of casual teaching staff for continued employment with the University of Tasmania. Another facilities/resources-related issue raised was that of parking, as casual teaching staff are ineligible to apply for a staff parking permit at the University of Tasmania.

The *Conditions of appointment* theme was positioned across the quality learning and teaching and sustainability meta-themes. This theme incorporated timeliness of appointments. Respondents reported that appointments are often made at the "last minute, which affects presentation; and sometimes the material provided is poor" (Survey respondent 12). Further, Survey respondent 13 noted that the "budget constraints and unrealistic expectations of time it takes to perform duties (especially marking) caused much frustration".

Indeed the frustrations caused by inappropriate remuneration were raised a number of times, and went beyond discussion of time allocated for marking and unit coordination. In the example provided where the respondent organised her handouts from a printing company, their collection affected her conditions of appointment; specifically, not being paid for the extra time needed:

*This meant I had to travel there in my own car and at my own expense to collect handouts because it was not open at the time when the classes were scheduled. (Survey respondent 4)*

The theme *Involvement in teaching teams*, incorporating mutual communication and planning for teaching, review and feedback on materials, and sharing of teaching resources mostly arose through positive comments regarding these experiences. In contrast, two respondents noted that they had little or no opportunity to work in a team, with another suggesting the use of technology or social networking to build and maintain a community of permanent and casual teaching staff.

*I feel isolated, and not at all a part of a staff team, outside of my own unit. I receive emails from staff members I do not know, and I am not even sure that I know where they fit in a structure within the university. I enjoy working collaboratively, and need to feel part of a team, and I do not feel that I know people within my own faculty, or that they know me. (Survey respondent 64)*

Isolation from colleagues was also raised by casual teaching staff who worked fully online, at a distance. Being off-campus exacerbated difficulties making connections with colleagues. Another very specific issue raised by remote respondents was professional development in online learning and teaching. This certainly is cited within the *Ongoing professional learning/Mentoring* theme, but represents an important and quite specific need (that is, professional learning delivered flexibly to cater for casual teaching staff working at a distance).

The theme *Ongoing professional learning/Mentoring* spanned all three meta-themes. Although predominantly connected with the Quality Learning and Teaching meta-theme, casual teaching staff also viewed *Ongoing professional learning/Mentoring* as an important avenue of support, and a reflection of the institutional commitment to sustainability (that is, the second and third meta-themes).

*Although there is a lot of collegial support from other staff members, there is little formal support. For example, I have never been given any information on policies or any formal teaching guidance, and was not aware of much of the material available on line until a more experienced staff member guided me to it. (Survey respondent 71)*

*Access to teaching staff, mentoring and an opportunity to observe (exceptional) teachers are the most important things to my mind. I have been very fortunate in this regard. (Survey respondent 61)*

A key theme under the sustainability meta-theme was the theme of *Opportunities for more secure employment*.

*I was reappointed every year for over 15 years, even becoming eligible for long service leave pro rata, but there was always a chance that I would not receive work there is a perception that sessional staff are expendable and temporary. (Survey respondent 3)*

For many casual teaching staff, financial insecurity was a real concern:

*One central thing about being a tutor in the Faculty of X that really needs improvement is that there is little or no security – our School is unable to tell us, from one year to the next, whether there will be any tutoring available in the next year at all. This has a strong negative effect on the morale of both the staff and the postgraduate students. (Survey respondent 50)*

Respondents raised issues regarding career advice, and opportunities to develop professional skills and qualifications that would enable them to obtain a permanent position (*Opportunities to achieve necessary qualifications/recognition* theme). They also reported the ineligibility to obtain conference funding or apply for grants as obstacles to gaining the experience and recognition required to better position them for permanent academic staff positions.

The final theme was *Attitudes towards casual teaching staff*:

*I have been fortunate in that I felt accepted as a genuine member of staff most of the time, but I know that this is not always the case with tutors. There is a perception that they are expendable and temporary. (Survey respondent 3)*

This excerpt reflects much of what the 2012 survey revealed about attitudes towards casual teaching staff. Although there were reports of positive experiences in terms of attitudes, they were not the majority. Respondents spoke of marginalisation, lack of respect, not being valued and being discriminated against. One respondent quoted a professional staff member who had advised her that she needed "a real job" (Survey respondent 59). Clearly, in situations where casual

teaching staff feel welcomed and part of a team and where their expertise and time is respected and valued, the outcome for all is reported very positively. In cases where this recognition and support does not occur, the situation is unsustainable from the perspective of the individual casual teaching staff member (and also, on occasion, continuing staff).

The quantitative and qualitative data supported the validity of the criteria spanning two of the levels of the Framework's guiding principles. Most responses were mapped to individual- or department-level criteria, rather than institutional- or faculty-level.

The themes coded under the quality learning and teaching meta-theme included articulation of employment conditions; provision of induction, professional development and mentoring; and facilitation of genuine involvement in teaching teams. The qualitative comments also evidenced differential treatment leading to stark contrasts in the experiences of individual casual teaching staff across the university. The degree of achievement of one criterion under the Framework's quality learning and teaching principle, "an institutional system is in place for communication with sessional staff" (Harvey 2013, p3), could be inferred from the qualitative survey data (for example, where one respondent lamented the lack of contact with the head of school, and others reported being unable to access information due to email being terminated between employment contracts).

The responses coded under the support meta-theme similarly reflected the criteria under the Framework's corresponding guiding principle. Although recruitment and appointment processes didn't emerge as a strong theme, this may have been due to the fact that the staff surveyed had successfully negotiated this element. There were, however, comments regarding ongoing appointment that were, at least partly, picked up under both access to information (about ongoing casual teaching opportunities) and opportunities for more-secure employment. As mentioned previously, induction, role descriptions and resources were reflected in themes that sat across more than one meta-theme.

Responses relevant to the sustainability meta-theme were least represented in the qualitative data. Given that many of the criteria for the Framework's corresponding principle sit at the institutional level, this is not unexpected. Certainly the lack of opportunities to contribute to units in an ongoing way came across more strongly in the quantitative data; it should be noted that respondents were specifically asked about this. In the same way, the lack of information for casual teaching staff on teaching-award processes was also strongly reflected in the quantitative data, but did not emerge as a theme in the qualitative data. This

may say more about the design of the survey than the importance of this guiding principle.

It is noteworthy that a number of themes that reflected the Framework criteria appeared to span the meta-themes - and therefore the Framework guiding principles – when analysed with the associated contextual data. This perhaps reflects the level of inter-relatedness of the three guiding principles on which the Framework was built. At the same time, the emergence of themes closely correlated with the Framework criteria further supports its usefulness in providing a conceptual framework for casual teaching staff policy and initiatives.

### ***Conclusion***

The findings of the 2012 survey clearly indicate there is room for improvement with respect to meeting the needs of casual teaching staff. As identified at the start of the casual teaching staff project in 2009, there were pockets of good practice at the University of Tasmania, and the 2012 survey results certainly evidence this. What is perhaps most disturbing is that additional support measures, put in place centrally, do not appear to be reaching the casual teaching staff at the chalkface. Lack of knowledge of professional-development opportunities, induction resources and access to assistance with teaching awards are key examples. There does therefore seem to be a disconnect between institutional stakeholders and casual teaching staff.

There are, however, signs that encourage optimism. The level of support from University of Tasmania senior management for the casual teaching staff project, from assisting with advertising the survey through interest in exploring the use of the BLASST interactive tool to benchmark practices across the institution, is certainly positive. With the pending approval and implementation of the new Casual Teaching Staff Policy, in conjunction with consideration of the outcomes of the 2012 survey, there exists an opportunity for renewed focus on recruitment and employment, professional development, evaluation and recognition, integration and communication efforts to enhance quality learning and teaching, support and sustainability for University of Tasmania casual teaching staff.

This is a study of a single university; however, from the literature, we know that sessional teaching is an issue of concern sector-wide (Bexley, James & Arkoudis 2011). The approach we have used at our university could be repeated at other institutions to provide a measure of alignment between institutional, department and school initiatives and what is actually experienced by teaching staff employed on casual or limited-term contracts.



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