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# Taking the Long Road: a Faculty Model for Incremental Change Towards Standards-based Support for Sessional Teachers in Higher Education

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# Taking the Long Road: a Faculty Model for Incremental Change Towards Standards-based Support for Sessional Teachers in Higher Education

## **Abstract**

Despite decades of dependence on sessional teaching staff, universities in Australia and internationally still find it difficult to support the teaching work of this large, casual workforce. A significant consequence of casually-employed teaching staff is risk; sessional academics' professional identity is compromised, quality assurance of students' learning experiences is uncertain, and this in turn, jeopardises universities' teaching and learning programs. These risks have existed in universities for decades, yet policies and practices that support the work of sessional staff remain inconsistent or absent. The implementation model for supporting sessional staff described in this paper, the Four Phase Model, (the 4P Model) is informed by the Sessional Staff Standards Framework (BLASST 2013), and, the Collective Impact Model, known as the CI Model (Kania & Kraner 2011). The 4P Model could help faculties systematise actions towards standards-based support for sessional staff that are inclusive professionally and contribute to the development of quality teaching and learning practice. The authors explain the thinking behind the new 4P Model, and, discuss its usefulness as a vehicle for managing incremental progress within this 'difficult to change' context. An evaluation of a completed trial of Phase One of the 4P Model has been included to assist faculty with implementation of all four phases of this model.

## **Keywords**

sessional standards, higher education, implementation model

## Sessional teaching and the context for change

In Australia and internationally, critical discourse on the subject of sessional staff in higher education has been evident in the research field for some time, especially in relation to the inherent workplace inequity experienced by sessional staff. This is particularly so in those Australian universities where the core teaching structure is commonly one subject coordinator leading a number of sessional staff. For the purpose of clarity, the authors refer to casually employed academics as sessional staff, in line with the Australian BLASST (Benchmarking Leadership and Advancement of Standards for Sessional Staff) framework for supporting sessional staff (BLASST.edu.au). It is noted here that the term for sessional staff varies across institutions within Australia (casual staff, sessional teachers, sessional academics, demonstrators) and internationally (for example, the terms “adjunct faculty” and “temporary faculty” are used in the United States, and in the United Kingdom the term is often “part-time teachers”, meaning in this instance hourly-paid and fixed-term) (Anderson 2007, p.111). In Australia, the term used most often in university discourse for discussing employment status of sessional staff is “casual”. This in itself contributes to professional-identity issues for academics employed on a sessional basis. As Kift (2002) observed, definitions matter, and the commonly adopted term “casual” is an unfortunate label, for “they are not in the least bit casual – they are, actually, ‘quite professional’” (2002, p. 3).

While in Australia sessional teaching staff numbers remain unclear (Brand 2013), it is known that they teach the majority of undergraduate classes in Australian universities (Coates & Goedegebuure 2010; May, Strachan & Peetz 2013). Compared to industries nationwide, the higher-education sector has the third-largest casualised workforce after health care and social assistance, and retail industries, and before the hospitality sector (Ryan, Burgess, Connell & Egbert 2013). Bryson (2013) found that sessional staff undertake at least half of all teaching in Germany, Canada, the United Kingdom, France and Japan. The United States, similarly, is increasingly dependent on sessional (adjunct) staff to teach most classes in community colleges (Dolinsky 2013; Jacoby 2006). The casualisation of teaching staff shows no signs of abating, and in fact is likely to increase (Marshall 2012). Before the turn of this century, Banochowski’s literature review (1996) of research about casually employed faculty in American community colleges noted the emergence of an impermanent workforce described as an “academic underclass” (Benjet & Loweth 1989; Reed 1985). Previously, such a work status had been more commonly associated with seasonal, unskilled labor markets. In the last decade, seminal research and reports in Australia have presented the unfavorable consequences of the current employment arrangements of sessional teaching staff for the Australian university sector as a whole, for the quality of students’ learning experience and for sessional staff themselves within the professoriate (Knight & Trowler 2000; AUTC 2003; Brown, Goodman & Yasukawa 2010; Bryson 2013; Harvey 2013; May, Strachan & Peetz, 2013; Percy & Beaumont 2008; TEQSA 2015). Despite the dedication of sessional academics to teaching and learning in universities, the reality of the fragmented nature of the teaching work offered to them affects overall teaching and learning quality. As Percy and Beaumont argue, “Professional learning and quality enhancement are the product of open collaboration and collegial social practice” (2008, p.139), and sessional staff are excluded from that process.

The imperative for change in the area of sessional support appears to be evident, and in Australia benchmarked standards of practice (BLASST 2013) in relation to sessional-staff support have articulated the outcomes universities need to address. However, policy and standards are unlikely to be enough to initiate change to what has now become the trend in higher-education employment practices in many parts of the world (Klopper & Power 2014, p. 102). Why have universities found it so difficult for so long to address workforce inequity and teaching-quality issues that exist as a result of a highly casualised teaching model?

This paper discusses why universities have struggled to change practice relating to sessional staff, and presents an action-oriented model that may add to existing research and practice in

the field. Using two existing models – the Sessional Staff Standards Framework (BLASST 2013) and a model aimed at implementing large-scale cultural change, The Collective Impact Model, known as the CI Model (Kania & Kramer 2011) – we developed a third model, which we call the 4P Model, for specific faculty-level actions. The 4P Model is a four-phase model for creating the conditions for sustaining systemic change to university practices relating to sessional teaching. The authors include an evaluation of one university school's implementation of Phase One of the 4P Model, as it proved critical to improving the continuing implementation; it is hoped that this evaluation will help other faculties in their own change process.

### **The disabling of educational leadership**

Much has been written about the dramatic changes in the tertiary sector in Australia and internationally since the 1980s (Burgess & Strachan 1996; McWilliam & Hatcher 1999; Marginson 2000; Bryson 2004; Apple 2004; Lazarsfeld-Jensen & Morgan 2009; Ball 2012). Globalisation and neoliberalism (Ryan et al. 2013) became the steering agenda for adopting workplace practices that privileged economic imperatives over all other managerial priorities. Deregulation of higher-education places and the ensuing competition between universities for students within a massification imperative has required sector management to structure a workforce that can come and go according to short-term needs within a highly volatile market (Bryson 2004; Burgess & Strachan 1996). Over three decades, this approach to human resource management within the higher-education sector has become the accepted institutional model. When considering sessional staff within this construct, educational leaders at faculty level struggle to imagine how the current model for employment of teaching staff can be anything other than what it is. Some have argued that the number of sessional staff supervised by ongoing academics in itself increases workload (Percy & Beaumont 2008; Lazarsfeld-Jensen & Morgan 2009), yet providing more sessional staff to teach and assess students is often the response to addressing the unacceptable work loads of ongoing academics (Percy & Beaumont 2008, p.150). There has been a general degradation of university work for ongoing academics (McWilliam & Jones 2007; Percy & Beaumont 2008; Lazarsfeld-Jensen & Morgan 2009; Lefoe et al. 2011; Vilkanas 2009) that may affect their ability to make sense of their own teaching and learning roles within the university and thus give them the perspective from which to further challenge the institutionalised model of sessional staff's (inequitable) place.

### **The great divide: an ongoing lecturer's role versus a sessional lecturer's function**

While acknowledging the impact of the fiscal constraints devolved to faculty from higher management (that governments had initially devolved to universities' governing bodies), strongly held perceptions at faculty level of *how things are done and by whom* have contributed to the failure to develop support standards for sessional staff. A deeply embedded routine of how things are done is often difficult to see and challenging to unlearn (indeed, our evaluation of Phase One of the 4P Model later in this paper draws attention to the authors' own inability to see and change an embedded routine). Perceptions of a professional divide are well established between sessional and ongoing academics; as with all spaces that contain actors, a kind of game is repeatedly played out that confirms that all are aware of the game's rules (Di Napoli 2014). While academics with ongoing employment are part of an established international community who share an understanding of what it is to be an academic, sessional staff, who do the same work, are excluded from this shared understanding. This divide has developed as a result of the language used to name the employment status of an academic (ongoing versus sessional or casual status), as well as the absence of opportunities for sessional academics to further their academic research, engage in professional learning and develop service-related skills through committee experience.

Sessional academics can find their sense of self-identity as qualified and contributing members of the academic professoriate difficult to sustain against the power of now-entrenched attitudes in universities that enable work functions to replace academic roles. Sessional academics experience invisibility under such conditions for a variety of reasons, including the absence of a sessional academic voice due to exclusion and isolation (Ryan et al. 2013, citing Lazarsfeld-Jensen & Morgan 2009a, 2009b; Nadolny & Ryan 2012). Fragmentation of an academic's work (Siemens 2010, p.9) can result in many sessional staff becoming known for a single function they carry out, rather than for a number of functions that might at least approximate to some extent the variety of work done by an ongoing academic. Fragmented work can reduce sessional staff to markers only, or practical demonstrators only, or tutors only. As Percy and Beaumont (2008, p.154) note, there is a devaluing effect on teaching and learning when it is broken into a form of piece work; this is revealed by common references to "buying in" casual teaching staff for "teaching relief" or "marking relief".

This fragmentation, worryingly, illustrates an acceptance that sessional staff are somehow *lesser* academics in this two-tiered employment structure (even if they have an equivalent higher degree). In this way academics who carry out the typically limited functions of sessional staff unintentionally *contribute* to acceptance of this lesser academic identity. As long as all participants in the game (Di Napoli 2014) continue to play by the game's rules, the belief remains self-sustaining and difficult to disrupt. An action that powerfully captures the means by which all participants are drawn into supporting the game's status quo is the recruitment of sessional teaching staff. Existing operational conditions within a faculty often require recruiting sessional staff *just in time* for the start of a semester, once enrolment numbers become known (AUTC 2003). This has a significant impact on the extent of support available to new sessional teachers, especially for those who are inexperienced in teaching. "Many sessionals have limited educational qualifications and are recruited hastily before commencement of a teaching session" (Peters, Jackson, Andrew, Halcomb & Salamonsen 2011, p.36). The urgent nature of securing sessional teaching staff is often the focus of faculty thinking about them, and therefore helps to shape perceptions of them as *just-in-time functionaries* who can be called on at will.

### **Shared values as a prerequisite for systemic change**

Cultural change is difficult in large organisations like universities, even if there is consensus that change is required. There is a need to "unlearn" current accepted practice and underpin the new practice by sharing and communicating the values and actions that represent the agreed change. A system can reflect and facilitate the manifestation of "a shared values set that guides employees to communicate and act explicitly in the day to day workplace context" (Castaneda & Toulson 2013, p.88). This is especially true of a teaching and learning workplace where there is a historical understanding that learning is a social enterprise (Vygotsky 1978), not just for students but for the educators who create and manage learning environments. The act of identifying as teachers (and contributing to the teaching and learning capacity of a university) is bound by the construction of shared meaning, often within a complex, personal, social and often elusive set of embedded processes and practices (Olsen 2008). Systems need to emerge as a result of sharing discourse and activities, as suggested by Vygotsky (1978), rather than a prescriptive schema. These organisational conditions together describe the degree of challenge in contemporary faculties to systematise good practice for supporting sessional teaching staff, especially in relation to the shared construction of meaning required to enact change. For this reason, it is understandable that any improvements to supporting sessional staff are likely to have occurred in a singular space, such as in one subject within a course, or across all subjects in one course, rather than more systematically across a school or faculty. Coates and Goedegebuure (2010) note that the most basic of observations about the effects of a large casualised academic workforce is that more strategic leadership and coordinated management is needed at a local (e.g., faculty) level, and that this

be supported by a system-wide approach to both bringing sessional staff into the fold and managing the institutional and national implications.

Generally, initiatives to support sessional staff focus on improving the individual sessional teacher rather than systematising support for sessionals (Percy & Beaumont 2008, p.149). Systematic support of sessional staff across a university or faculty is therefore a complex interplay between many parties to determine where shared values lie. By what means could a faculty, for example, begin the process to achieve the kind of shared values that could result in changed practice? The long road, as named in the title of this paper, supports the premise that although organisational change is difficult to achieve in higher-education settings, change can occur incrementally if the road is navigable, and marked by achievable, agreed-on milestones. A model for change that provides standards-based strategies as a series of options and choices can provide a scaffold for investigating where shared values lie within a faculty with regard to supporting sessional staff.

### **The conditions influencing opportunities for change**

As central academic developers of an Australian university, the authors were invited by a teaching and learning leader to contribute to her school's new teaching and learning induction of new sessional staff. Through this work the authors were able to suggest a collaboration between the academic developers and the school to trial Phase 1 of the 4P Model. This collaboration was also supported by other critical factors affecting the university community.

First, the university was entering a teaching and learning policy renewal period. This provided an opportunity for academic developers to propose specific teaching and learning principles for policy development relating to sessional staff that would be shared with faculties. This was particularly timely, as the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency's (TEQSA) new Higher Education Standards Framework (2015, p.18) stated that:

an unusually high reliance on casual staff poses risks for the quality of the students' experience and TEQSA will investigate where high reliance on casual staff is combined with data indicating lower student outcomes.

The university's policy-renewal period, in conjunction with TEQSA's Standards Framework (2015) placed the issues relating to sessional teaching in front of educational leaders in faculty and university management.

Second, the national dissemination of the Sessional Staff Standards Framework was a considerable fillip to engaging faculty in discussion about supporting sessional staff. The federally funded BLASST project provided relevant standards within which strategies could be nominated and aligned to the specific standards. The Sessional Staff Standards Framework was widely accessed by academics through an innovative online resource called the B-BIT tool (BLASST 2013). This is a self-evaluation tool that allows benchmarking against the sessional staff standards within the Framework. The BLASST project leaders provided workshops and conference presentations nationally; there were also examples of good practice aligned with sessional standards. These resources were instrumental in helping to engage university staff in important conversations about how things are done and how they might be done in the future.

### **Creating the 4P Model with reference to existing process and standards frameworks**

As we were designing the 4P Model for helping faculty to develop strategies over time, we were aware that it should be explicit in its links to the familiar, established standards of the Sessional Staff Standards Framework. Additionally, we sought out an existing framework that focused on coordinating large-scale organisational change. For this type of significant change to occur, particularly within sites of contested values such as universities, we considered it helpful to link the 4P Model to an existing and successful process-orientated framework

(Hanleybrown et al. 2012) that aids in systematising large-scale change. As a result, the 4P Model was further informed by a framework for managing systematic change, as described in the CI Model. Table 1 shows how the three models relate to each other using the example of an action from Phase One of the 4P Model aligned with the CI Model and the BLASST Sessional Staff Standards Framework.

**Table 1.** Action Two, Phase One, of the 4P Model aligned with the CI Model and BLASST Standards

<b>4P model Phase One:</b> Establishing Identity <b>Actions</b>	Phase of Collective Impact (CI) Model (Kania & Kramer 2011)	BLASST Sessional Staff Standards Targets (BLASST 2013)
<b>Action Two: Faculty/school establishes and maintains current email distribution list of sessional staff</b> This identifies sessional staff by name at a faculty or school level and provides communication means between the academic leader and all sessional staff.	<b>Phase 1: Initiating action</b>  Analyse baseline data to identify key issues and gaps.	<b>2.2a Faculty/school system for communication with sessional staff in place</b>  Complete, accurate, updated list of sessional staff for regular communication.

In the first column, the 4P Model suggests that in Phase 1 (Establishing Identity) it is important to establish the personal identity of sessional staff by creating and maintaining an up-to-date email distribution list of sessional staff. This aligns with the Phase 1: Initiating action focus listed in the CI Model, where the stakeholders come together to establish baseline data. In the third column, the Sessional Staff Standards Framework criterion 2.2a relates to establishing a system of communication with sessional staff (and therefore aligns with the 4P Model Phase 1, Action Two). The complete 4P Model is attached to this paper as Appendix One.

## The existing Sessional Staff Standards Framework: the BLASST Model

The Sessional Staff Standards Framework defines criteria and standards that describe the quality of performance and outcomes of practices relating to sessional teaching. For example, one criterion in the Sessional Staff Standards Framework at the faculty level is: *1.2a: Sessional staff are provided with an induction to learning and teaching*. For this criterion there are three standards of achievement: *Good Practice* denotes that the criterion is being met; *Minimum Standard* denotes that a basic standard has been achieved; and *Unsustainable* establishes that current practice fails to address the criterion (Luzia, Harvey, Parker, McCormack, Brown & McKenzie 2013, p.6). The table below illustrates how standards can be identified and described for criterion 1.2a in the Sessional Staff Standards Framework.

**Table 2.** Extract reproduced from Sessional Staff Standards Framework.

Principle 1: Quality of Teaching and Learning			
Criterion	Good Practice	Minimum Standard	Unsustainable
<i>1.2a Faculty Level</i>			
<i>1.2a</i> Sessional staff are provided with an induction to learning and teaching.	Paid induction to learning and teaching is provided to all sessional staff.  There is a range of strategies to support	Induction is provided and includes the basics of learning and teaching, and use of IT tools such as Blackboard, Moodle.	Induction to learning and teaching is not part of the Faculty's strategic or operational planning or practice.

	<p>sessional staff in learning and teaching (face to face and/or online).</p> <p>Induction is monitored periodically, and is ongoing.</p> <p>Induction is updated periodically.</p>	Resources for induction to learning and teaching are provided to all sessional staff.	Induction only focuses on administrative matters. Induction is not provided.
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Source: [blasst.edu.au/index.html](http://blasst.edu.au/index.html)

As the desirable goal for change is reaching good practice, the 4P Model outlines which Sessional Staff Standards Framework good-practice standard the 4P Model Action relates to, rather than describing the current standard of practice, which may be at an unsustainable level of performance for a particular institution. In Phase Four of the 4P Model, however, the emphasis is on evaluating good-practice standards against the Sessional Staff Standards Framework.

### The existing change-management framework: the Collective Impact Model

The Collective Impact Model was devised as a process for supporting change in areas of significant social importance and complexity (Gemmel 2014). The authors of this paper found that the collaborative imperative of the CI Model was a critical consideration in informing a model for the complex change management required in universities to address sessional teaching and learning standards of support. The CI Model establishes five tenets for a systemic approach that aligns individuals' and groups' efforts with coordinated actions for agreed change: common agenda, shared measurement systems, mutually reinforcing activities, continuous communication and a backbone support infrastructure (Kania & Kramer 2011, p.39). Within these tenets, three phases of change that include specific actions guide all individuals and groups towards the common goal. For example, one tenet, a common agenda, sets out a precondition that there needs to be a sense of urgency for change, that a core of dedicated staff is organised for action and that tasks and strategies are implemented to sustain action that creates change. Table 3 shows how core tenets and phases are mapped in the CI Model.

**Table 3.** The Collective Impact Model phases and core tenets.

Core tenets	Preconditions	Phase 1: Initiating action	Phase 2: Organising for action	Phase 3: Sustaining action and impact
<b>Common agenda</b>	Sense of urgency for change Core staff		Creating backbone organisation and dedicated staff and resources	Implementation of tasks and strategies
<b>Shared measurement</b>		Influential champions	Develop common agenda, goals and strategies	Collection, tracking and reporting data Identifying areas for improvement
<b>Mutually reinforcing activities</b>	Understanding limitations of current approaches	Community involvement	Build common and public will	Mutually reinforcing activities
<b>Continuous</b>			Identify a shared system of measurement for	Continuous communication



<b>communication</b>			accountability	
<b>Background support</b>		Use of data to help identify key issues and needs	Cross-sector efforts Continuous communication Mutually reinforcing activities	Accent on innovation and creating new approaches

**Source:** Flood et al. (2015), adapted from Kania & Kramer (2011) and Hanleybrown, Kania & Kramer (2012)

## Bringing the threads together to create the 4P Model

**Table 4.** Overview of the main actions within the four phases of the 4P Model

<b>1. Establish Identity</b>	<b>2. Engage Key Practitioners</b>	<b>3. Identify Key Strategies</b>	<b>4. Achieve Standards</b>
<b>Actions</b>	<b>Actions</b>	<b>Actions</b>	<b>Actions</b>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Faculty/school BLASST workshops</li> <li>2. Develop email list of sessional staff</li> <li>3. Communicate with sessional staff, i.e., blog</li> <li>4. Produce faculty/school teaching and learning handbooks for staff</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Review current paid induction</li> <li>2. Conduct professional learning on managing sessional staff</li> <li>3. Begin development of subject-chair guide for working with sessional staff</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Revisit ideas from BLASST workshops</li> <li>2. Review support partnerships in planning BLASST initiatives</li> <li>3. Review policy relating to sessional staff</li> <li>4. Share policies and strategies with other faculties and schools</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Implement BLASST ideas</li> <li>2. Implement inclusion of sessional staff in paid curriculum development</li> <li>3. Include sessional staff in faculty paid professional development</li> </ol>
evaluate	evaluate	evaluate	evaluate

Table 4 is an abbreviated version containing the first column of the 4P Model (Appendix One contains the full model). The 4P Model is a series of actions within four phases of change: 1. Establishing Identity, 2. Engaging Key Practitioners, 3. Identifying Key Strategies and 4. Achieving Standards. Each phase describes four actions that can be adopted, or adapted, according to each educational group's interpretation of what is best for their specific context. Importantly, each phase includes an evaluation point. The intended audience for the model is at the site of action – the faculty, school or subject where sessional staff are working with ongoing academic staff. The actions within the 4P Model's phases can be interpreted as sequential, with the final phase, Phase 4, describing actions that achieve good-practice standards of support for sessional teaching as described by the Sessional Staff Standards Framework. However, it is not argued here that all actions should occur, nor that the actions should occur in a specific order. One illustration of a non-linear approach identified by the authors related to the sessional staff handbooks (Phase 1, Action Four). Unlike the trial school, which progressed through the actions of Phase 1 in order, other schools and a faculty began by developing the sessional staff handbook resource.

To summarise, the actions described in the 4P Model are informed by frameworks (the CI Model and the BLASST Framework) that are evidence-based and relevant to the educational and social changes required to achieve quality outcomes in higher-education sessional teaching. For purposes of clarity and transparency, these frameworks are made explicit as columns two and three in the 4P Model (Appendix One).

## Trialing and evaluating Phase 1 of the 4P Model

Phase 1 of the 4P Model aims to establish professional identity of sessional staff at a faculty level. The main aim of this phase is to let ongoing academic staff and sessional academic staff get to know each other, and to enable sessional staff to develop a sense of collegiality and belonging. This Phase was trialed in one school in our university. Each of the Actions (a BLASST workshop, an up-to-date email distribution list, a dedicated sessional blog and the development of a suite of handbooks for sessional staff) was undertaken and championed by the teaching and learning leader of the school. The final item in Phase 1 (and in all Phases) is the evaluation point (Appendix One); accordingly, each of these four actions in Phase 1 was evaluated.

Twenty-five academics attended the BLASST workshop, having been invited by the teaching and learning leader of the school. Discussion during the workshop and with the teaching and learning leader found that the workshop achieved the goal of initiating familiarity with the BLASST framework as well as identifying shared beliefs about the nature of the issues affecting sessional staff.

Obtaining the information for an accurate email distribution list of current sessional staff was surprisingly challenging. The teaching and learning leader had responsibility for compiling the list and found that there was no one central place to retrieve all required information. Once compiled, the email distribution list had the desired outcome of including all sessional staff in all communication originating from the teaching and learning leader of the school. Importantly, a system needed to be devised for keeping the updated.

Actions Three and Four were less successful in establishing a collegial identity for sessional staff. A dedicated blog for sessional staff was created by the teaching and learning leader with the assistance of the authors of this paper, but its effectiveness was limited. Insufficient attention was paid to the frequency of blog posts. Eleven staff across the university subscribed to the blog, but only two subscribers were sessional staff from the school. It was found that more than one champion was required for creating and sustaining a successful sessional blog, as the teaching and learning leader was new to blogging. As the aligned tenet from the CI Model indicated, more than one champion was recommended for this action (Appendix One). In future it is recommended that the teaching and learning leader recruit a writing team.

The creation of school sessional handbooks (Phase 1, Action Four) was evaluated as part of an ongoing, larger, ethics-approved study of the effectiveness of an interdisciplinary, co-written teaching and learning handbook for sessional staff. This research to date consists of open-ended interviews with four ongoing academics who participated in writing the handbooks and 10 sessional staff who received the handbooks. For the purposes of this paper, only the data concerning the trial teaching and learning leader who co-wrote her school's sessional handbooks and that of her school's five sessional staff who received the handbooks will be discussed here. In an interview, the teaching and learning leader of the trial school strongly approved of the development of the school-specific handbooks for sessional staff.

*Well, I think they give them [sessional staff] a sense of belonging, where they fit into the bigger faculty into which they are now employed. So they are now part of a much*

*bigger organisation. Yes, I think you put a humanised, personalised touch on it and so it's going to have an impact.* (Trial school teaching and learning leader)

The five sessional staff from the trial school who had received hard copies of the handbook rated it highly in interviews.

*This is my first year demonstrating, so I had a lot to learn. So for me it was really great to read, and there is a video attached to one of them about different styles of learning. Some people want to hold things, some people just want to read things and other preferences and how we can help engage kids. And there was another part about what a good demonstrator was, and that was really good to read, just to make myself open and engaging to the students straight away instead of waiting and...that was really good.* (Trial school sessional staff member 1)

*I didn't have anything like that when I started in 2001 at XXX university, so when I read it, it was after I had done it. So it was good what I had really had to work out for myself, and to see it written down. Stuff that's really helpful, like planning stuff and the kind of constraints you put on the class as well. It was good to read it and think, "Yes, that is kind of what I do, and this is what is recommended to do," and I read things and thought, "This will be helpful next time." I think it would be super helpful if you haven't done any teaching before, and good for me as a review as well.* (Trial school sessional staff member 2)

*Yeah, it helped going from a student to a teacher. I'm not talking to my peers anymore. So you understand the switch in your role to teaching.* (Trial school sessional staff member 3)

However, the study found that not all sessional staff received hard copies of the handbooks as planned.

*I am reading the handbooks now and they would have been great when I started – all the suggestions. I didn't get them.* (Trial school sessional staff member 4)

Insufficient attention had been given to systematising the distribution of the handbooks. Again, the aligned CI Model tenet to Action Four, organising for action, had not been carried out across all parties communicating with the school's new sessional staff. In future, the distribution process will be cross-checked by the school's business manager.

The authors were interested in reviewing whether the bigger picture of Phase 1 had been successful: was a collegial academic identity of sessional staff members established? We would suggest that this was partially achieved in the increased awareness of school staff through the BLASST workshop and the establishment of inclusive email practices. However, the less-than-successful sessional staff blog as an inclusive community of practice and the failure to ensure that all sessional staff received the sessional handbooks created for them resulted in our assessment that more work needs to be done in systematising the change process suggested by the CI Model. We believe, however, that the 4P Model does provide a successful, iterative evaluation strategy (the evaluation point in each of the four Phases) that alerts faculty leaders to what needs to be done to achieve successful implementation in each Phase.

## **Why would faculties use the 4P Model?**

The 4P Model is offered to faculties as a useful stimulus resource for designing processes to achieve standards-based outcomes that support sessional teaching. As academic developers, we saw an opportunity for articulating actions that could offer a gradual adoption of good practice, particularly as the way forward to improving practice related to sessional teaching to date has been unclear, or disputed. At the time of writing, actions from Phase 1 have been implemented in one school within our university. Other standards-based actions not initiated by the 4P Model have also occurred. We predict that a growing awareness of standards for supporting sessional teaching, new university policy related to supporting sessional teaching and the implementation of new teaching standards as set out by the Australian regulatory body, TEQSA, will set the scene for sharing the strategies and processes of change that are described in, but not exclusive to, the 4P Model. Importantly, the 4P Model evaluation point in Phase 1 revealed that more attention to the CI Model would have established the greater collegial identity that is essential to the overall implementation of standards-based support for sessional staff.

## **Conclusion**

Despite decades of reliance on sessional staff in higher education, universities in Australia and internationally find it difficult to change how they support sessional teaching (Harvey 2014). Sessional teachers often experience professional exclusion from their full-time colleagues, in addition to poor working conditions and uncertain career prospects. The casualisation of higher-education teaching can lead to fragmentation of the learning process – putting students' learning outcomes at risk.

The reasons for the current casualised model for the delivery of teaching are well-known: fiscal constraints arising from increasingly limited government funding continues to lead universities to increase the number of casual academics they employ (Ryan et al. 2013). As a result of the normalisation of a highly casualised workforce in higher education over many decades, the players in the game (Di Napoli 2014), the ongoing academics and the sessional staff, enact and confirm the roles and functions of the casualised model despite an awareness of the learning and teaching inequities that may arise for many academics.

While particular catalysts (such as national benchmarks of standards by nationally funded bodies) can prompt a desire for change to institutionalised models of operation, the change process itself is a complex one. Shared values are required for systemic change to take place, but most importantly, ways to plan, enact and sustain change are important in achieving system-wide impact. Actions for sustainable change are best decided in the particular context of schools and faculties (Percy & Beaumont 2008), but there is room for the existence of centrally designed change models. Central academic developers who work across faculties are well-positioned to design flexible models to guide new practice – as an example, resource, stimulus or explicit pathway to demonstrate how gradual change can lead to desirable benchmarked standards. The 4P Model is intentionally flexible on this point, as transferability across subjects, courses, universities and locations is an essential feature of process models.

The 4P Model described in this paper acknowledges that the question of payment for sessional teachers' time in curriculum planning and professional development acts as an inhibitor to exploring strategies for change. However, in Australia the nationally funded BLASST project has established benchmarked standards with specific criteria and levels of performance relating to when universities should pay sessional teachers for their professional knowledge and time, including their time for curriculum planning, meetings, assessment moderation and professional development. In light of this, and in light of the added emphasis on quality of teaching matters arising from regulatory bodies such as TEQSA, and increasing student survey data about their learning experiences, it is possible that the current casualised teaching

model in higher education in Australia may be destabilised. If so, could we begin to imagine alternative, standards-based practices?

It is suggested here that those alternative practices could begin to exist at a grassroots level, thereby setting the conditions for system-wide change. Inclusive practices such as inviting sessional academics to curriculum-planning and professional-development events can, over time, help challenge the current practice of exclusion and non-payment of sessional teachers outside actual teaching time. When full-time academics can no longer imagine sessional staff not invited to curriculum planning and professional development, the case for changing the current funding models will reflect an existing cultural practice.

The practical emphasis of the 4P Model is illustrated by the specific descriptors of actions that can be undertaken to move towards good-practice standards. The implementation frameworks (the CI Model for facilitating large change, and the BLASST Standards Framework for supporting the work of sessional staff) aligned with the 4P Model actions make explicit the links between the suggested actions, the change process and the desirable long-term goals (that is, the achievement of the benchmarked standards). The long road of the 4P Model suggests that sustainable, incremental change over time to achieve good-practice standards requires small steps by many, rather than a giant leap by a few.

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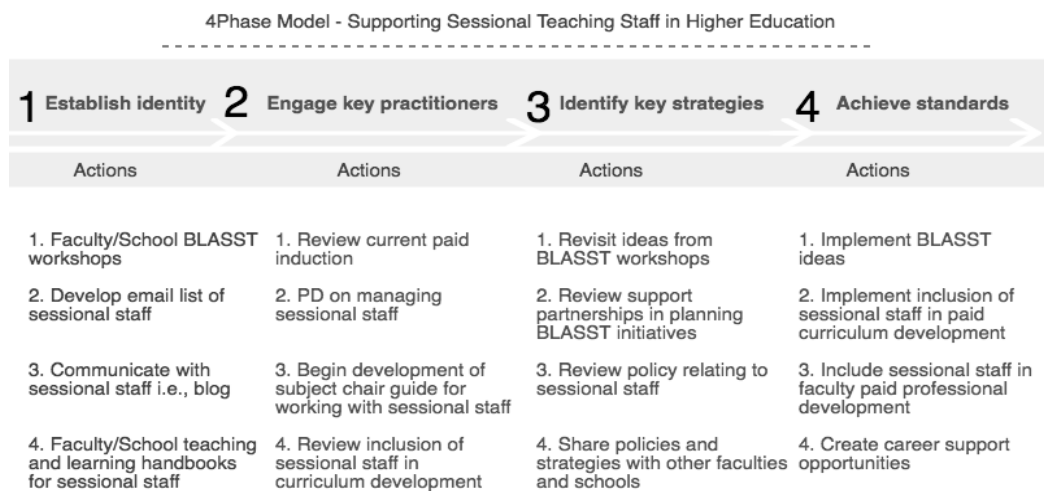
## Appendix One: The 4P Model (with aligned process and standards frameworks – Columns 2 and 3)

4P Model Phase One: Establishing Identity Actions	Phase of Collective Impact (CI) Model (Kania & Kramer, 2011)	BLASST Sessional Staff Standards Targets (BLASST, 2013)
<p><b>One: Faculty/School runs BLASST standards workshop for ongoing academics</b></p> <p>Awareness-raising of growing focus on working with sessional teaching staff.</p> <p>Early ideas-gathering for adopting good-practice standards for sessional support.</p>	<p><b>Phase 1: Initiating action</b></p> <p>Convene community stakeholders.</p> <p>Map the landscape.</p> <p>Analyse baseline data to identify key issues and gaps.</p>	<p>Preparation to support all BLASST standards.</p>
<p><b>Two: Faculty/School establishes and maintains current email distribution list of sessional staff</b></p> <p>Identifies sessional staff by name at faculty or school level.</p> <p>Provides communication means for academic leader to all sessional staff.</p>	<p><b>Phase 1: Initiating action</b></p> <p>Analyse baseline data to identify key issues and gaps.</p>	<p><b>2.2a Faculty/school system for communication with sessional staff in place</b></p> <p>Complete, accurate updated list of sessional staff for regular communication.</p>
<p><b>Three: School Teaching and Learning leader communicates with sessional staff via email and writes sessional blog</b></p> <p>Includes sessional staff in school teaching and learning discourse, with opportunity to seek sessional opinion and feedback.</p>	<p><b>Phase 1: Initiating action and Phase 2: Organising for action</b></p> <p>Identify champions.</p> <p>Facilitate community outreach.</p>	<p><b>2.2a Faculty system for communication with sessional staff is in place</b></p> <p>An active, two-way communication system is in place between school leader and sessional staff.</p>
<p><b>Four: Faculties/schools co-write and share across disciplines the teaching and learning handbooks for new sessional staff for hard copy distribution</b></p> <p>Provide welcome and non-electronic copy of vital information about teaching and learning, resources and contacts.</p> <p><b>Evaluation point</b></p>	<p><b>Phase 1: Initiating action and Phase 2: Organising for action</b></p> <p>Form cross-party group.</p> <p>Establish evaluation system.</p>	<p><b>2.2c Faculty provides sessional staff with resources necessary for their roles</b></p> <p>Faculty ensures timely access to all necessary resources.</p>
4P Model Phase Two: Engaging key practitioners Actions	Phase of Collective Impact (CI) Model (Kania & Kramer, 2011)	BLASST Sessional Staff Standards (BLASST, 2013)
<p><b>One: Current (paid) induction of new sessional staff at school or faculty level is reviewed</b></p> <p>Is there a need for more than one induction?</p> <p>Does the induction include a teaching and learning emphasis?</p>	<p><b>Phase 1: Initiating action</b></p> <p>Analyse baseline data to identify key issues and gaps.</p>	<p><b>1.2a Sessional staff provided with induction to learning and teaching</b></p> <p><b>1.2b Sessional staff kept updated about standards, procedures and policies affecting learning and teaching</b></p>
<p><b>Two: Faculty/school provides professional</b></p>	<p><b>Phase 2: Organising for action</b></p>	<p><b>2.2d Supervisors</b></p>

<p><b>development about managing sessional staff for subject coordinators</b></p> <p>Critical action, as subject coordinators are supervisors and mentors of sessional teachers.</p>	<p>Engage community, build public will.</p> <p>Create common agenda.</p>	<p><b>have the skills to manage sessional staff</b></p>
<p><b>Three: Faculties and schools collaborate to construct and implement subject-chair guide to working with sessional staff</b></p> <p>Key forms of communication, teaching team plans and resources sessional teaching staff need as a baseline.</p>	<p><b>Phase 2: Organising for action</b></p> <p>Evaluation system.</p> <p>Create common agenda.</p>	<p><b>2.2d Supervisors have the skills to manage sessional staff</b></p>
<p><b>Four: Inclusion of sessional staff in curriculum planning meetings and professional development events is reviewed</b></p> <p>Invite sessional teachers to contribute to curriculum development and to attend professional learning events.</p> <p><b>Evaluation Point</b></p>	<p><b>Phase 2: Organising for action</b></p> <p>Engage community, build public will.</p>	<p><b>3.2a Sessional staff are included in academic communities (this 4P Model Action relates to this standard, but the standard will be met fully in Phase 4)</b></p>
<p><b>4P model Phase Three: Naming the key strategies</b></p> <p><b>Actions</b></p>	<p><b>Phase of Collective Impact (CI) model (Kania &amp; Kramer, 2013)</b></p>	<p><b>BLASST Sessional Staff Standards (BLASST, 2013)</b></p>
<p><b>One: Early ideas from BLASST workshop in Phase One are revisited</b></p> <p>Which BLASST initiatives (or variations of) are suitable for the school/faculty? Select strategies for implementation.</p>	<p><b>Phase 2: Organising for action</b></p> <p>Create common agenda.</p>	<p><i>Will meet BLASST standards, but the initiative will determine the relevant criteria</i></p>
<p><b>Two: Support partnerships in planning BLASST initiatives are reviewed</b></p> <p>Work with other faculties/schools, central unit, other services in the provision of teaching and learning support strategies for sessional staff.</p>	<p><b>Phase 2: Organising for action</b></p> <p>Create infrastructure (backbone and processes).</p>	<p><b>3.1b Sessional staff interests are considered and incorporated into appropriate decision-making processes</b></p>
<p><b>Three: Policy relating to sessional staff at institution level is reviewed, and faculty-level policies and strategies that require leader engagement are written</b></p>	<p><b>Phase 2: Organising for action</b></p> <p>Create infrastructure (backbone and processes).</p>	<p><b>3.1b Sessional staff interests are considered and incorporated into appropriate decision-making processes</b></p>
<p><b>Four: Policies and strategies are shared with other faculties and schools</b></p> <p><b>Evaluation point</b></p>	<p><b>Phase 2: Organising for action</b></p> <p>Create infrastructure (backbone and processes across institution).</p>	<p><b>3.1b Sessional staff interests are considered and incorporated into appropriate decision-making processes</b></p>
<p><b>4P Model Phase Four: Achieving standards</b></p> <p><b>Actions</b></p>	<p><b>Phase of Collective Impact (CI) Model (Kania &amp; Kramer, 2011)</b></p>	<p><b>BLASST Sessional Staff Standards (BLASST, 2013)</b></p>
<p><b>One: Implement Phase Three Action One: review of BLASST ideas to identify initiatives with clearly identified strategies for implementation</b></p> <p>Acceptance that BLASST ideas require a standards-based level of support. Ideas could be, for example, new recruitment standards, or teaching awards for sessional staff.</p>	<p><b>Phase 3: Sustaining action and impact</b></p> <p>Support implementation (alignment to goals and strategies).</p>	<p><i>Will meet BLASST standards, but the initiative will determine the relevant criteria</i></p>

<p><b>Two: <i>Implement</i> inclusion of sessional staff in curriculum planning as paid work</b></p> <p>Having established opportunity for sessional inclusion in Phase Two, Action Four as accepted practice, and consequent evidence of good outcomes, <i>paid curriculum planning work as accepted practice</i> is the next logical step.</p>	<p><b>Phase 3: Sustaining action and impact</b></p> <p>Support implementation (alignments to goals and strategies).</p>	<p><i>Meets BLASST standards</i>  <b>1.3b Sessional staff engage in decision-making about learning and teaching issues</b>  <b>1.3c Sessional staff are involved in teaching teams</b></p>
<p><b>Three: Include sessional staff in faculty professional development as paid work</b></p> <p>Having established opportunity for sessional inclusion in Phase Two, Action Four as accepted practice, and consequent evidence of good outcomes, <i>paid work as accepted practice</i> is the next logical step.</p>	<p><b>Phase 3: Sustaining action and impact</b></p> <p>Support implementation (alignment to goals and strategies).</p>	<p><i>Meets BLASST standards</i>  <b>1.1b The institution provides and supports professional development for sessional staff in learning and teaching</b></p>
<p><b>Four: Create career support opportunities for sessional staff, and opportunities for contracts including coordination work rather than intensive teaching sessions only</b></p> <p>For example, assistance with career portfolios, publication, online professional presence.  <b><u>Evaluation point</u></b></p>	<p><b>Phase 3: Sustaining action and impact</b></p> <p>Support implementation (alignment to goals and strategies).</p>	<p><i>Meets BLASST Standards</i>  <b>3.2b Succession planning is in place at faculty level</b>  <b>3.2c Good sessional teachers are identified and retained</b></p>

## Appendix Two: Illustration of the main Actions of the 4P Model



Developed by XXX, based on BLASST and the Collective Impact Model