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The RED Report, Recognition - Enhancement - Development: The contribution of sessional teachers to higher education

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The RED Report, Recognition - Enhancement - Development: The contribution of sessional teachers to higher education

Abstract

This large-scale study into the recognition, enhancement and development of sessional teaching in higher education builds on the Australian Universities Teaching Committee Report (2003a) Training, Support and Management of Sessional Teaching Staff. The aim of the current Project was to identify and analyse current national practice and refocus attention on the issues surrounding sessional teachers in the university sector. The Project had three objectives: to establish the extent of the contribution that sessional teachers make to higher education; to identify and analyse good practice examples for dissemination; and to consider the possible developments for institutional and sector-wide improvements to the quality enhancement of sessional teaching. Sixteen Australian universities were involved in the Project, representing the 'Group of 8' (Go8), regional, Australian Technology Network (ATN), transnational and multi-campus institutions in all states and territories. At each of the participating universities, the number and typology of sessional teachers was audited across the institution and sixty interviews were conducted with the full range of participants, from sessional teachers to university executive staff.

Disciplines

Arts and Humanities | Social and Behavioral Sciences

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The Australian Learning and Teaching Council,
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an initiative of the Australian Government Department of Education,
Employment and Workplace Relations.
June, 2008



the RED report

Recognition • Enhancement • Development

The contribution of sessional teachers to higher education

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Project Website

<http://www.cadad.edu.au/sessional/RED>

Foreword



Professor Rob Castle
Deputy Vice Chancellor
(Academic and International)

University of Wollongong

Sessional teachers are the hidden part of the massification that has taken place in higher education in Australia over the last 30 years. One of the greatest achievements of the Australian higher education system has been the growth of student access to university study, and this could not have been achieved without the massive contribution of sessional staff.

Between 40 and 50 per cent of teaching in Australian higher education is currently done by sessional staff. This has been largely unacknowledged, and while areas such as standardisation of pay rates have been addressed over time, there are a whole range of other issues which have not been adequately dealt with, and which as a university system we can no longer ignore.

To maintain for permanent staff the ideal of being teaching and research academics, we have had to rely on sessional staff. The analogy I've always made with sessional staff is to describe them as the proletariat of the academic profession, but that Victorian description of an industrial working class just doesn't fit as well as that other part of Victorian life, the domestic servant. In many ways the lifestyle of the traditional teaching research academic is totally dependent on the contribution of sessional staff, in the way that Victorian middle class lifestyles were dependent on the domestic servant. They slept in the attic, ate in the kitchen and you grumbled constantly that what they did was actually not quite what you wanted. But nonetheless, they were absolutely essential to your being and to your lifestyle. I think this applies equally to many sessional staff today.

Today, we need to think about not just the specifics pertaining to sessional teaching staff, but to ask ourselves 'who is to do the teaching and what sort of teaching are we to do?' We must organise teaching in a way that provides a meaningful experience for our students and all our staff, including permanent staff that have come under increasing pressure during this last 30 years.

Contradictory positions such as 'I deplore casualisation – but of course I've got my research grant and I need teaching relief for it so therefore I have to be bought out of teaching' are simply no longer valid. Our times require us to think smarter; to work out, with teaching modes such as blended learning and e-teaching available, which combinations will optimise the contribution of all staff.

Teaching in a university, in my view, has to be made more professional. Whether it is coming from sessional staff or permanent staff, we can no longer afford a 19th century attitude of amateurism to operate in terms of tertiary teaching. Working out where sessional staff fit into that and ensuring they are not exploited is a real challenge. These things have obvious budget implications and university budgets are not a magic pudding. The amount of resourcing that is going to go into universities is not going to increase dramatically in the next few years. But if we are to provide a quality education for our students, we are compelled to look at all of the people who teach in universities, not just the permanent teaching and research elite.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "R Castle". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Acknowledgements



The Project Leaders would like to thank the Project Team Members, the Council of Australian Directors of Academic Development (CADAD), the Linked University Representatives, the Reference Group Members, the Administration and Production Support staff, and other consultants across the university sector whose interest and contributions to the project have ensured its success. This project was funded by The Australian Learning and Teaching Council, formerly The Carrick Institute for Learning and Teaching in Higher Education.

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Executive Summary

This large-scale study into the recognition, enhancement and development of sessional teaching in higher education builds on the Australian Universities Teaching Committee Report (2003a) *Training, Support and Management of Sessional Teaching Staff*. The aim of the current Project was to identify and analyse current national practice and refocus attention on the issues surrounding sessional teachers in the university sector.

“...sessional teachers make a significant but largely invisible contribution to the quality of teaching and learning in higher education.”

The Project had three objectives: to establish the extent of the contribution that sessional teachers make to higher education; to identify and analyse good practice examples for dissemination; and to consider the possible developments for institutional and sector-wide improvements to the quality enhancement of sessional teaching.

Sixteen Australian universities were involved in the Project, representing the ‘Group of 8’ (Go8), regional, Australian Technology Network (ATN), transnational and multi-campus institutions in all states and territories. At each of the participating universities, the number and typology of sessional teachers was audited across the institution and sixty interviews were conducted with the full range of participants, from sessional teachers to university executive staff.

The project investigated the contribution sessional teachers make to higher education. The Project found that:

All universities depend heavily on sessional teachers;

Universities are unable to report comprehensive and accurate data on the number of sessional teachers and their conditions of employment;

The DEEWR (formerly DEST) FTE¹ figures do not represent the magnitude of the contribution of sessional teachers to higher education;

The FTE disguises the supervisory load on permanent staff;

Sessional teachers are responsible for much of the teaching load, estimates suggest this could be as high as half the teaching load; and

Sessional teachers perform the full range of teaching-related duties, from casual marker to subject designer and coordinator.

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.

¹ The Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR formerly DEST) Full-time Equivalence (FTE) calculation is the Government required formula for calculating and reporting on the employment of all academic staff including sessionals.

RED report

Executive Summary

“... good practice does exist and may be widely adopted across the sector.”

The analysis of current policy and practice across the participating institutions found that:

Evidence of systemic sustainable policy and practice is rare;

There is a general lack of formal policy and procedure in relation to the employment and administrative support of sessional teachers;

While induction is considered important in all universities, the ongoing academic management of sessional teachers is not as well understood or articulated;

Paid participation in compulsory professional development for sessional teachers is atypical; and

Despite various national and institutional recognition and reward initiatives, many sessional teachers continue to feel their contribution is undervalued.

In summary, systematic attention to assuring the quality of sessional teaching in many institutions is inadequate; however, good practice does exist and may be widely adopted across the sector.

Institutional developments to the quality enhancement of sessional teaching have been categorised under the five domains that emerged from the study:

Systemic and sustainable policy and practice;

Employment and administrative support;

Induction and academic management;

Career and professional development; and

Reward and recognition.

Further detail of these domains and a selection of good practice examples have been put together to form the RED Resource that complements this Report.

Sector-wide improvement will rely on the leadership of individual universities and their capacity to promote sustainable initiatives at the faculty, school and program level. This will require ongoing support from The Australian Learning and Teaching Council (ALTC) through the promotion of scholarly research in the area, further exploration into the qualitative dimensions of the contribution of sessional teachers, the development and dissemination of creative solutions, and the inclusion of the academic management of sessional teachers in institutional benchmarking projects. The ALTC might also consider the creation of links to their project on the Quality Indicators of Teaching and other leadership projects.

Project Context

The nature of the teaching workforce in Australian universities is changing. Concurrently, the operational environment of universities has become more flexible, dynamic and complex to manage. The combination of these factors poses a significant challenge to universities seeking to monitor and refine the student learning environment.

The RED Report, Recognition - Enhancement - Development: The contribution of sessional teachers to higher education raises the question of how well universities are able to report on the nature of their teaching workforce and enhance the quality of the learning environment where the proportion of sessional teachers in the sector is high and growing. The Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR formerly DEST) reported that between 1996 and 2005, the number of casual staff calculated in terms of Full-Time Equivalence (FTE) in the higher education sector grew from 10,396 to 13,530 (DEST, 2006), representing just under 15 per cent² FTE of the academic workforce. In this context, some universities have begun the process of reviewing the diversity of academic roles to consider appropriate ways forward (see Rix et al, 2007).

Over time, the operational requirements of universities have also changed, with increased vocational orientations in academic programs combined with off-shore, multi-campus, distance and flexible delivery challenges. Add to this the diversification of the student body, evolving pedagogical paradigms and new teaching technologies, and the professionalisation of teaching can be seen as an imperative. Yet this comes at a time when these contextual and dynamic factors pose significant challenges to the quality enhancement of sessional teaching within existing information gathering and policy frameworks.

Sessional teachers' contribution to teaching and learning in higher education is substantial, and in many cases, vital to the professional quality and relevance of the degree program. Further, their professionalism and commitment to student learning is highly regarded. However, despite the publication of the *Guidelines for Managing, Supporting and Training Sessional Teaching Staff at University* by the Australian Universities Teaching Committee (AUTC) in 2003, evidence of improvement is scant.

An analysis of the AUQA reports from 2003 to 2006 indicates that while there have been some improvements in the sector, few universities adequately integrate and support sessional teachers in a systemic way. The AUQA recommendations have highlighted the need for improved strategic workforce planning and the development of systems, policies and practices for the induction, management, integration and support of sessional teachers.

“Students want a seamless education. They do not want to know that their tutor or lecturer is sessional or permanent. They want high quality teaching and high quality subjects.”

Kurt Steel, University of Canberra Student Association, at the National Colloquium on Sessional Teaching, November 2007.

²This figure is rendered problematic by the findings of this Project.

RED report

Overview

In 2007, the Carrick Institute for Learning and Teaching in Higher Education commissioned the Council of Australian Directors of Academic Development (CADAD) to analyse different approaches to the support of sessional teachers in Australian higher education with a view to disseminating successful practice and identifying areas for further development. For the purpose of the project, sessional teachers were to be defined in the same way as in the earlier AUTC project; that is, sessional teachers include any higher education instructors not in tenured or permanent positions. This includes part-time tutors or demonstrators, postgraduate students or research fellows involved in part-time teaching, external people from industry or professions, clinical tutors, casually employed lecturers or any other teachers employed on a course-by-course basis.

Aim

The aim of this Project was to identify and analyse current national practice and refocus attention on the issues surrounding sessional teachers in the university sector four years after the release of the comprehensive and influential AUTC (2003b) *Guidelines for Managing, Supporting and Training Sessional Teaching Staff at University*.

Objectives

The Project sought to answer the following questions:

To what extent do we recognise the contribution sessional teachers make to higher education?

What policies and practices do universities have in place to manage the contribution of sessional teaching staff?

How can sector-wide improvements be made?

Methods

Sixteen Australian universities were involved in the Project representing the 'Group Of 8' (Go8), regional, Australian Technology Network (ATN), transnational and multi-campus institutions in all states and territories.

For the purpose of this Project, the following definition was used:

'sessional teachers including any higher education instructors not in tenured or permanent positions, and employed on an hourly or honorary basis'
(Project Team, December 2006).

The first phase of this Project attempted to identify the full extent of the contribution sessional teachers make to teaching and learning, by collecting information about current numbers and types of teaching roles undertaken. An audit form seeking the number and 'types' of sessional teachers was distributed

Overview

to the participating university representatives and the returns collated. While this process allowed the team to develop a typology of the roles of sessional teaching staff, it proved ineffective for obtaining reliable comparative data on numbers and contribution.

In order to provide a broad picture of the number of sessional teachers working in the higher education sector, Human Resource (HR) units at a selection of the participating universities were contacted to obtain a snapshot of raw numbers of academic staff with teaching-related duties according to their employment status. The final analysis can be found in Section 2, Recognition. A thorough qualitative analysis of the contribution of sessional staff to teaching and learning was beyond the scope of this Project, and has been identified as an important site for ongoing research.

The second phase of the Project involved an analysis of current policies and practices within the 16 participating universities. To sample current national practice, 60 interviews were conducted with individuals, each identified by the Project Team as potentially involved in 'good' practice. A 'grand tour' approach was employed to ensure a number of perspectives were included. This involved interviewing university executive staff, Associate Professors, Directors of Learning and Teaching units, Heads of School, HR representatives, subject coordinators, sessional staff coordinators and sessional staff. Each interview was conducted around five main themes: expectations, recruitment, implementation, sustainability and ideal situations. The interviews were recorded and used to identify issues and significant variables, as well as to generate case studies of notable practice.

Five domains were drawn from the analysis:

- Systemic and sustainable policy and practice;**
- Employment and administrative support;**
- Induction and academic management;**
- Career and professional development; and**
- Reward and recognition.**

The results of this process are provided in Section 3, Enhancement.

Products

RED Report

RED Resource

National Colloquium on Sessional Teaching in Higher Education

RED Website



RED report Overview

the RED Report

The RED Report presents the key findings of the Project:

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 (2003a); and

DEVELOPMENT provides a series of discussion points for wholesale improvements across the sector.

the RED Resource

The RED Resource:

elaborates on the five domains that emerged from this Project as requiring attention;

identifies the characteristics of good practice and key challenges to implementation; and

includes a collection of case studies that represent good practice at all levels of a university.

the National Colloquium on Sessional Teaching in Higher Education

The National Colloquium on Sessional Teaching in Higher Education was held at the Australian National University on November 28, 2007. This Colloquium was the main dissemination event for the project, presenting the findings to date and stimulating further discussion.

Academic leaders influential in policy and practice were invited, along with universities' change agents, Heads of Faculty/School, subject coordinators, Directors of Learning and Teaching units, Human Resource representatives and professional associations. Sessional staff were also invited and in several cases sponsored to attend.

One hundred and one participants registered for the event with over 90% attendance. The participants represented 33 of the 38 universities across Australia. The Program, presentations and transcripts can be found on the RED Website.

the RED Website <http://www.cadad.edu.au/sessional/RED>

The RED Website contains:

the RED Report,

the RED Resource,

presentations and transcripts from The National Colloquium on Sessional Teaching in Higher Education,

links to websites, handbooks and resources, and

the project literature review.

Recognition

Key findings

The Project investigated the contribution sessional teachers make to higher education. The project established that:

Most universities are unable to report comprehensive and accurate data on the number of sessional teachers and their conditions of employment

This Project was unable to establish the full contribution of sessional teachers to teaching and learning across the participating universities due to:

- the diverse data collection and reporting systems within and between universities;
- the inconsistency and inaccuracy of some central Human Resource records, faculty records and employment practices;
- the diversity of workload models within individual universities and across the sector; and
- the over-reliance on the DEEWR (formerly DEST) FTE formula for calculating and reporting figures on sessional employment.

Two universities informally reported that up to 80 per cent of undergraduate teaching is conducted by sessional teachers. This figure is in stark contrast to the DEST estimate that less than 15 per cent FTE (DEST 2006) of the academic workforce are employed on a sessional basis.

Implication

In general, universities are not generating reliable data on the teaching workforce that allow for evidence-based quality enhancement and risk management planning and practice.

All universities depend heavily on sessional teachers

Comparative data on the number of individuals engaged in sessional, fixed-term and continuing appointments were collected from a selection of the participating universities' Human Resource units. The data, therefore, is only as accurate as the central data collection system in each university. The proportions of these staff are provided in Figures 1-8.

Implications

While operational requirements vary across institutions, the employment structure of universities includes large proportions of sessional teachers.

The 'full-time, permanent, centrally-located teaching/research academic' is no longer the norm around which policy and practice can be formed.

The changed employment structure is likely to have outgrown existing policy and practice in universities.

To what extent do we recognise the contribution sessional teachers make to higher education?

Reliable numbers are not readily available

Universities depend heavily on sessional teachers

FTE³ figures are not representative of their contribution

The FTE disguises the supervisory load on permanent staff

Sessional teachers are responsible for much of the teaching load

Sessional teachers perform the full range of teaching-related duties

³The Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR formerly DEST) Full-time Equivalence (FTE) calculation is the Government required formula for calculating and reporting on the employment of all academic staff including sessionals.

RED report Recognition

Head count of academic staff employed with teaching and related duties according to employment status, Semester 1, 2007⁴

■ Sessional ■ Fixed-term ■ Permanent

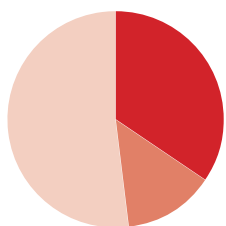


Figure 1: University A

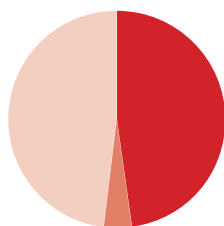


Figure 2: University B

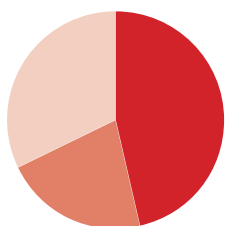


Figure 3: University C

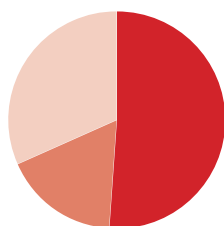


Figure 4: University D

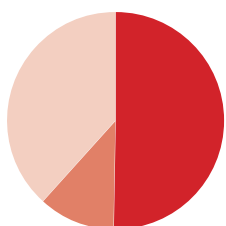


Figure 5: University E

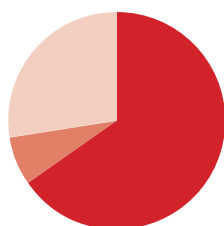


Figure 6: University F

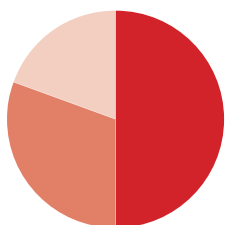


Figure 7: University G

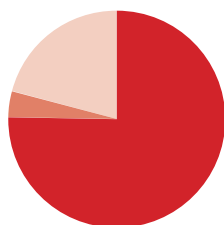


Figure 8: University H

⁴Head count data obtained from central Human Resource units in selected universities for Semester 1, 2007.

FTE figures do not represent the magnitude of the contribution of sessional teachers to higher education

The FTE collapses large numbers of contingent and often dispersed sessional teachers into small numbers. For example, in one university 69 sessional teachers with various roles dispersed across a range of locations were collapsed into 9.25 FTE; in another, 62 sessional teachers were collapsed into 2.64 FTE; and in another, 198 individuals were collapsed into 16 FTE⁵.

Implications

While the FTE calculation may be useful for the national comparison of employment figures across the sector, it is unsuitable for institutional strategic workforce or quality enhancement planning.

Evidence-based improvement to quality enhancement practices requires alternative data collection and reporting procedures.

The FTE calculates sessional teachers according to teaching and related hours when other calculations might be more telling; for example, calculations of student load.

The FTE disguises the supervisory load on permanent staff

A striking illustration of the way the FTE disguises the supervisory load on permanent staff can be found in Figures 9 and 10 which provide data from one university with a mid-range usage of sessional teachers. In Figure 9, the FTE data suggests a minimal supervisory load on permanent staff. Compare this to Figure 10, which illustrates the same data as a head count, and the supervisory burden is clear.

Implication

The supervisors of sessional teachers have the responsibility of assuring the quality of teaching in their programs with large numbers of sessional teachers.

Sessional teachers are responsible for much of the teaching load, estimates suggest this could be as high as half the teaching load

Although the proportion of teaching conducted by sessional teachers could not be determined reliably in this project, estimates can be made. In Figures 11 and 12, the previously quoted FTE figures have been adjusted so that the total teaching allocation of permanent staff has been reduced to one third of their overall workload (a widely accepted estimate of the academic workload) while sessional teachers have retained a full teaching load, which was commonly reported.

Implication

If the quality of the student learning environment is to be assured, appropriate integration, management of and communication with sessional teachers must also be assured.

⁵Data obtained from central Human Resource units in selected universities for Semester 1, 2007.

Recognition

Figure 9: FTE Permanent to sessional teaching staff at one university⁶

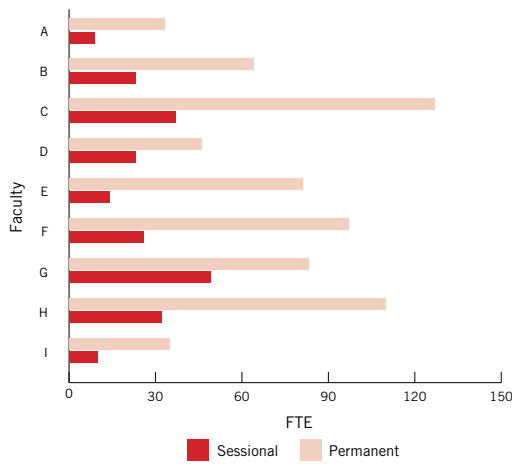


Figure 10: Headcount of permanent to sessional teaching staff at the same university⁶

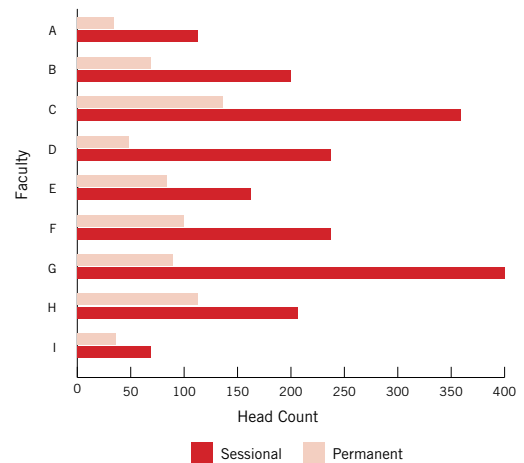


Figure 11: Estimated faculty differences in the proportion of teaching conducted by permanent and sessional staff at one university⁷

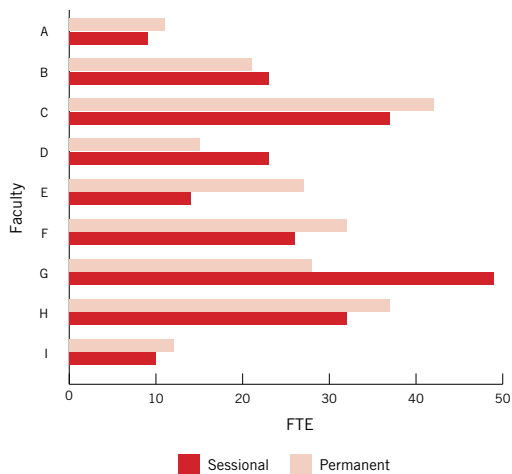
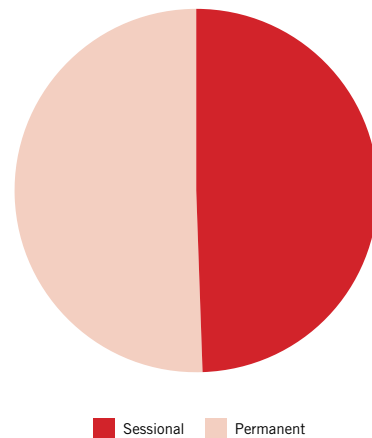


Figure 12: A summary of the estimated proportion of teaching conducted by permanent and sessional staff at one university⁷



⁶Data obtained from central Human Resource unit at one university.

⁷This estimate of sessional teaching in one university is suggestive only. It was produced through the manipulation of the FTE data provided by one university for Semester 1, 2007. It should not be read as a reliable estimate or representative of sessional teaching across the sector.

RED report Recognition

The audit phase of the project identified the following roles undertaken by sessional teachers:

Common Roles

Lecturer
Tutor
Demonstrator
Course/Unit/Subject Coordinator
Course/Unit/Subject Designer
Clinical Supervisor
Practicing Professional
Conjoint & honorary appointment
Auditors of marks & grade
Laboratory Supervisor
Field Supervisor
Casual Marker

Additional Roles

Editor
Outdoor Educator
Exam Invigilator
Peer Leader/Mentor
Teacher Liaison
ESL teachers
Music Coach
Indigenous Tutorial Assistants
Hotel and Hospitality Staff
Portfolio Leader
Robotics Mentor
Shark Patrol Pilot

Sessional teachers perform the full range of teaching-related duties, from casual marker to subject designer and coordinator

In a number of cases, sessional teachers undertake a variety of roles: for example, a practicing professional may be a curriculum designer, a subject coordinator, a tutor and a casual marker. One sessional teacher interviewed for the Project was a subject coordinator who prepared and delivered all the lectures, laboratories and tutorials and conducted marking for 160 students across three subjects.

In addition to the diversity and potential intensity of roles, sessional teachers come to the university with a wide variety of experience, qualifications and career aspirations. For example, in a single teaching team, one sessional may be a retired professional with tertiary teaching qualifications and extensive teaching experience, another might be an industry professional with no teaching qualifications or teaching experience, while another might be a PhD student in the discipline who is new to teaching but is highly familiar with current disciplinary teaching methods.

Implication

Sessional teachers represent a diverse sector with diverse roles and professional needs that are most appropriately accounted for and addressed at a local level.

Possible Actions

The development of data collection and reporting systems that accurately represent the changed employment structure.

The development of policy and risk management practices that recognise the changed employment structure.

Improved means of accounting for and comparing the contribution of sessional teachers, whether it is in terms of teaching and related hours or through other calculations, such as student load.

The articulation of clear lines of management and sets of responsibilities for supervisors of sessional teachers.

Provision of professional development and support networks for the supervisors of sessional teachers.

Attendance to the professional needs of sessional teachers within quality enhancement frameworks.

The development of quality enhancement processes at local levels that recognise the diversity of roles, qualifications and experience and the complex challenge this poses for induction, management and professional development.

Key findings

The project investigated current policy and practice across the participating institutions. The Project found that the management and support of sessional teachers remain similar to the situation reported by the AUTC Report (2003a) despite the increasing contribution that sessionals have made to teaching and learning.

Evidence of systemic and sustainable policy and practice is rare across the participating institutions

Of the 16 universities participating in this study:

- few universities have attempted a 'whole of university' approach to addressing the professional needs of sessional teachers (see Cases 1 & 2 in the RED Resource);
- few have formalised policies and practices specifically for sessional teachers;
- several have informal policies and practices, usually at a faculty or school level;
- the majority rely on policies and practices for permanent staff which may or may not be relevant to sessional teachers;
- a few have developed some form of advocacy body, such as a university or school-based Sessional Teaching Working Party, to investigate and address employment issues and the quality enhancement of sessional teaching;
- only one has a formal mechanism for sessional teachers to provide feedback on their satisfaction with their engagement, support and experience of teaching with the university; and
- examples of good practice are often developed and delivered by a committed individual, a discipline with professional networks, or a university with strong leadership in a specific area.

Implications

Support of sessional teachers is still largely ad hoc and contextual, with very little policy-driven practice, consistent with the AUTC's (2003a) finding.

Quality assurance of sessional teaching in many institutions is inadequate.

Institutional risk management could be compromised by the lack of embedded policies and processes that specifically address sessional teachers.

What policies and practices do universities have in place to manage the contribution of sessional teaching staff?

Systemic sustainable policy rare

Formal employment policies rare

Academic management of sessional teachers not well understood

Professional development rare

Many feel their contribution undervalued

RED report Enhancement

Employment and Administrative Support

There is a general lack of formal policy and procedure in relation to the employment and administrative support of sessional teachers

Of the 16 universities participating in this study:

- there are few examples of formalised policies and procedures for the recruitment and employment of sessional teachers;
- transparent and timely employment processes are not widely evident;
- employment practices are often carried out at a unit or school level with limited central Human Resources guidance or support;
- many universities have dedicated administrative support at the faculty or school level, but these are not always well communicated to sessional teachers; and
- few universities allow for the negotiation of rates of pay or salary sacrifice (see Case 3 in the RED resource).

Implications

The employment structure has outgrown existing policy and practice.

Faculties are largely responsible for the administrative support of sessionals.

Induction and Academic Management

While induction is considered important in all universities, the ongoing academic management of sessional teachers is not well understood or articulated

Induction

Of the 16 universities participating in this study:

- there is wide variation in how induction is offered within and between universities (centrally, locally or both; mandatory or voluntary);
- there is a wide variation in payment for induction;
- most induction focuses on policy requirements with only a few including aspects of teaching and learning;
- since sessional teachers often work in dispersed locations, there are significant organisational difficulties in providing induction; and
- some universities are trialling alternative modes for the delivery of induction (see Cases 5, 6 & 7 in the RED Resource).

Implications

Universities need to develop creative and resourceful approaches to providing induction in a complex operational environment.

Academic Management

Given the variation in induction provision, the role of the academic supervisor of sessional teachers is often the most crucial in establishing quality processes in teaching and learning. Of the 16 universities participating in this study:

- there are some instances of a dedicated role of Tutor Coordinator at the university, school and subject level;
- the academic management of sessional teachers is normally undertaken at a subject level by the subject coordinator;
- there are a number of examples of subject coordinators providing subject briefings, detailed tutor notes, meetings, opportunities to be part of curriculum design, review and assessment moderation (see Cases 5, 9 & 10 in the RED Resource);
- the casual contract does not always allow for paid quality practices, such as moderation in marking and team meetings;
- there is little formal acknowledgement of or support for the subject coordinator's leadership role in ensuring quality teaching practices; and
- there are virtually no instances of formalised standards of practice or professional development for the subject coordinator's role in managing the teaching team.

Implications

The role of the academic supervisor of sessional teachers is the most crucial in establishing quality processes in teaching and learning.

The supervisors of sessional teachers must be supported in their role as (team) leaders.

Universities have an obligation to establish and formalise quality practices in relation to the supervision of sessional teachers.

Paid participation in compulsory professional development for sessional teachers is atypical

Of the 16 universities participating in this study:

- in most cases, there is no clear distinction between induction, professional and career development;
- examples of good practice are often developed and delivered by a committed individual, a discipline with professional networks, or a university with strong leadership in a specific area;
- only two universities in the study mandate and pay for professional development that is linked to articulation and career development for sessional teachers, and in one case, this was restricted to a single school (see Cases 3 & 4 in the RED Resource);

Professional and Career Development

RED report

Enhancement

- professional development at a school or subject level is largely unpaid and, where it is present, is developed and supported by individuals in that university;
- the logistics of providing relevant and accessible professional development for diverse and dispersed communities of teachers is a complex challenge for most universities; and
- some universities are trialling alternative modes of delivery (see Case 8 in the RED resource).

Implications

The quality of the student learning environment is jeopardised by a lack of attention to the professional development of sessional teachers.

The general lack of performance management of sessional teachers is a high risk factor for universities.

Arbitrary approaches to moderation and marking compromise academic standards and are a serious risk to universities.

Universities need to develop creative and resourceful approaches to the professionalisation and quality assurance of teaching in such a complex environment.

Reward and Recognition

Many sessional teachers continue to feel their contribution is undervalued despite various national and institutional recognition and reward initiatives

Of the 16 universities participating in this study:

- informal rewards and recognition occur at many of the universities in the form of letters, gifts and invitations to social functions;
- some universities specifically designate awards for sessional teachers (see Cases 1, 3 & 5 in the RED Resource);
- some sessional teachers observed that recognition of their capacity to contribute to curriculum design and development would be sufficient acknowledgement of their role; and
- in general, there are no formal mechanisms for sessional teachers to provide feedback on subject design and delivery or their satisfaction with the way they are engaged at an institutional level.

Implications

Universities are not aware of how sessional teachers expect their contribution to be valued or recognised.

Awards and trinkets alone do not represent appropriate integration into the teaching and learning community.

Development

University level

Developing recognition

Developing a thorough recognition of the contribution of sessional teachers at the university level will require:

- data collection and reporting systems that accurately account for the diversity of the teaching workforce;
- policy, risk management and quality enhancement practices that recognise the diversity of the teaching workforce; and
- means of accounting for, comparing and analysing the contribution of sessional teachers, whether it is in terms of teaching and related hours or through other calculations such as student load.

Enhancing sessional teaching

Enhancing sessional teaching will involve utilising both the AUTC Guidelines and the RED Resource to develop a contextual approach to the recognition, enhancement and development of sessional teaching at an institutional level. This would include the following:

Systemic and Sustainable Policy and Practice

- taking a 'whole of university' approach to the quality enhancement of sessional teaching as recommended by the AUTC 2003 Project;
- improving communication channels with sessional teachers, so the university can review its relationship with them and systematically address their developmental needs;
- developing responses that are appropriate to the context and the specific needs of sessional teachers;
- formalising good practice in policy and embedding procedures in operational plans with targets to ensure it is both systemic and sustainable;
- attending to the professional needs of sessional teachers within all quality enhancement initiatives;

(For more information, see Domain 1 in the RED Resource)

How can sector-wide improvements be made?

“Wholesale improvements across the sector will require better means of recognising and quality assuring the contribution of sessional teachers at the individual university and sector level.”



RED report

Development



Employment and Administrative Support

- reviewing central recruitment and employment policies for their relevance to sessional teachers;
- developing specific faculty or school procedures in relation to the employment of sessional teachers;
- communicating the administrative support available to sessional teachers;
- providing mechanisms for the negotiation of pay and other benefits such as salary sacrifice;

(For more information, see Domain 2 in the RED Resource)



Induction and Academic Management

- improving the relevance and accessibility of induction for sessional teachers;
- including relevant teaching and learning components in induction processes;
- articulating clear lines of management and sets of responsibilities for the supervisors of sessional teachers;
- providing professional development and support networks for the supervisors of sessional teachers;
- developing better communication channels between sessional teachers, their teaching team and the school/ faculty/ university;

(For more information, see Domain 3 in the RED Resource)



Professional and Career Development

- developing contextualised, accessible, mandatory and paid approaches to the professional development of sessional teachers;
- including professional development in overall performance management systems for sessional teachers;

(For more information, see Domain 4 in the RED Resource)



Reward and Recognition

- developing improved means of rewarding and recognising the contribution of sessional teachers;
- developing mechanisms for sessional teachers to provide feedback on their engagement at the faculty and university level.

(For more information, see Domain 5 in the RED Resource)

Advances at the sector level

The Australian Learning and Teaching Council (ALTC) holds a significant place in encouraging wholesale improvements across the sector. The Institute may consider strategies such as the ones outlined below in order to continue to support sessional teachers across Australian universities:

- form links with the current ALTC Project *Teaching Quality Indicators* (Chalmers 2007) by considering how the various indicators of quality learning and teaching proposed under each of the four dimensions (Institutional climate and systems; diversity and inclusivity; assessment; and engagement and learning community) adequately encapsulate the necessary improvements required for the quality enhancement of sessional teaching and an increasingly diverse teaching workforce;
- encourage related projects, such as the ALTC Project on Building Academic Leadership Capability at the Course Level: Developing Course Coordinators into Academic Leaders (Carrick Institute 2007) with a view to the widespread dissemination of good practice for the supervisors of sessional teachers;
- encourage scholarly research relating to the integration and management of sessional teachers;
- encourage localised investigations into the qualitative dimensions of the contribution of sessional teachers to student learning;
- encourage the development and dissemination of creative solutions to the complex issue of assuring the quality of teaching and learning in this environment; and
- encourage universities to include the academic management of sessional teachers in their benchmarking activities.

“... encourage the development and dissemination of creative solutions to the complex issue of assuring the quality of teaching and learning in this environment.”

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A full list of references can be found in the Literature Review on the RED Website

www.cadad.edu.au/sessional/RED

Glossary

The following terms are used for consistency:

Faculty – also Division

School – also Department

Subject – also Unit

Subject Coordinator – also Unit Convenor

RED Resource

More information about the Domains and examples of good practice can be found in the RED Resource.



The Red Resource is available as a .pdf on the RED Website.

Hardcopies can be obtained from the Council of Australian Directors of Academic Development (CADAD)

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*“...if we are to provide a quality education for our students,
we are compelled to look at all of the people who teach in universities,
not just the permanent teaching and research elite.”*

Professor Rob Castle

Deputy Vice Chancellor
(Academic and International)

University of Wollongong