

University of New England

Guidelines for Employing Casual and Sessional Teaching Staff

Introduction

The past two decades have seen an increasing use of casual and sessional teaching staff within Australian universities, and the higher education sector is amongst the most casualised employment markets in Australia. Reductions in government funding, increasing student numbers and diversity, changes in educational practice, and the pressures of globalisation and broader educational markets have seen a rapid growth in the number of non-tenured academic staff employed on a part-time, sessional or casual basis as tutors, lecturers, demonstrators and markers.

This reliance on non-tenured staff who may have limited links and contact with existing Faculty raises some challenges for universities in ensuring that high standards of teaching and learning are upheld. Casual and sessional teachers are often employed in roles in which they are the primary point of contact between the student and the university and they thus play an important role in the provision of quality teaching.

These guidelines are designed to assist Heads of School and course coordinators to develop strategies appropriate for their individual school contexts to effectively support casual and sessional teaching staff, thereby ensuring that:

- all staff involved in delivery of a course share a clear vision of its objectives and ensure program coherence
- quality teaching supports the achievement of educational objectives
- students receive appropriate levels of feedback and support and are able to contact teaching staff (within reason)
- all aspects of teaching and marking are consistent throughout a unit and across programs
- student satisfaction with their experience is high and there are minimal student complaints
- staff have a positive employment experience which supports their career progression and development.

In a focus group discussion with casual and sessional teaching staff from UNE, staff noted the wide variation in experience from School to School across campus. However, the concerns expressed by this group were similar to those expressed in a survey across 10 Australian universities (Teaching and Educational Development Institute 2003) and included teaching issues, such as:

- sense of isolation and being left out of school communication loops (e.g. email lists etc.)

- difficulties in gauging standards for marking
- lack of information about expectations
- unrealistic (they felt) expectations of how long papers should take to mark - payment made on estimate rather than time actually taken
- minimal support provided in learning technology - for example, WebCT, PowerPoint
- uncertainty about rules and procedures - for example, plagiarism

and employment issues such as:

- inconsistency between one contract and the next
- poor rates of pay and expectations to attend meetings and read materials without pay
- uncertainty regarding employment conditions
- limited or no access to professional development opportunities
- problems with timesheets and delays in getting paid for work done
- nowhere to go to raise issues of concern other than course coordinator
- inadequate provision of resources - for example, computer so slow that work wasn't possible on it.

These guidelines and the associated checklist will assist Heads of School and coordinators to develop and implement strategies to alleviate these difficulties.

Broader Policy Issues

These guidelines focus on the practical day-to-day issues associated with employing and supporting casual and sessional teaching staff.

Heads of School and course coordinators who are concerned about broader policy and practice issues will find a useful resource in the Sessional Teaching AUTC Project report *Guidelines for Training, Managing and Supporting Sessional Teachers* which can be found on the web at: <http://www.tedi.uq.edu.au/sessionalteaching>

The document provides a series of questions relating to recruitment and employment practices, training and professional development, evaluation and recognition, and integration and communication, which will be valuable for Schools who employ a number of casual and sessional teaching staff and who wish to review their practice and develop and implement school-level policies.

Employment Matters

Recruitment

Many casual and sessional teaching staff provide the main point of contact between the student and the university and are responsible for delivering a significant proportion of the overall educational experience.

Usually, casual and sessional teaching staff are not appointed as a result of a formal selection process. The practice of providing opportunities to higher degree students to

undertake tutoring and marking work is a common one in many Schools, and other staff are often employed because of their industry experience and/or their availability.

However, in order to ensure that the quality of the educational experience is not diminished, course coordinators and Heads of School may wish to implement some processes in which potential casual and sessional teaching staff are selected on the basis of criteria which are appropriate to their School. For example, criteria might include some or all of these elements:

- subject and content knowledge
- understanding of teaching principles
- commitment to quality in teaching
- ability to apply effective assessment principles
- experience/knowledge of relevant teaching modes - for example, online teaching, residential schools
- experience/knowledge of teaching and learning methods - for example, problem-based learning, action research
- communication and interpersonal skills
- organisational and prioritisation skills.

Terms of Employment

Each member of staff should have a signed contract of employment prior to commencement of duty. For casual teaching staff, this takes the form of the Casual Academic Appointment Form. The period of employment is normally for an academic semester, unless other specific periods are known.

The Casual Academic Appointment Form is available online at:

<http://www.une.edu.au/hrs/forms/acstaffappoint.pdf>

The Casual Academic Staff Timesheet is available online at:

<http://www.une.edu.au/hrs/forms/academictimesheet.pdf>

Personnel Services note that non-residents of Australia **must** have the appropriate visa to allow them to undertake paid work in Australia. Non-residents on student visas have limits on the number of hours per week they are able to work per week. Original documentation relating to a non-resident's authority to work must be supplied to Personnel Services.

Sessional rates for the delivery of a lecture or tutorial incorporate an allowance for preparation time. One 'session' is one hour of face-to-face teaching. Hourly rates are paid for marking and other required academic activities, such as attendance at meetings.

Staff who are employed on a regular weekly basis for an entire semester may be more appropriately employed on a temporary, fractional appointment.

Induction

An effective induction process for casual and sessional teaching staff will alleviate many of the frustrations that can arise due to lack of information and clarity about expectations.

The induction process should enable the staff member to find out about the School and their role within it; it introduces them to colleagues and key contacts, and ensures that they understand how their teaching role contributes to the School's and the University's teaching objectives.

Effective induction has many benefits for casual and sessional teaching staff:

- It is efficient in assisting the staff member to become productive quickly, by ensuring there is no confusion about roles and expectations.
- It ensures that the new staff member understands the purpose and contribution of their position to the School's teaching strategy, and enables them to align their efforts to support that purpose.
- It takes care of the person's human concerns and supports them to perform at their full potential.
- It demonstrates in a practical manner the commitment of the School to its staff and to the goal of quality teaching.

The induction checklist can be adapted for use according to specific school requirements. It includes both teaching and employment issues.

Ongoing Administration/Employment Issues

Course coordinators and Heads of School should familiarise themselves with conditions of employment for casual and sessional teaching staff as they relate to their role, for example:

- levels of pay
- expectations regarding pay for other required academic activities such as meetings, field trips, attendances at lectures, etc.
- timesheet requirements and submission times.

Including casual and sessional teaching staff in the school communication loops - for example, email lists, pigeon holes and meetings as appropriate - will help encourage a sense of belonging to an academic community. It will also help to ensure that they do not miss out on important announcements and information, such as:

- opportunities to provide feedback on proposed changes to policies/processes that affect them
- variations to deadlines for timesheets
- professional development and training opportunities
- changes in school staffing and/or responsibilities
- unit and program review issues.

While casual and short-term temporary staff are not required to participate in the Goal Setting and Performance Review process, establishing some processes whereby they are able to receive feedback on their work may be beneficial both to the staff member and to the academic unit, particularly if the staff member is an early-career academic who wishes to continue in their field.

Teaching and Career Issues

The suggested induction checklist for casual and sessional teaching staff includes a summary of teaching issues that are recommended to be covered during the induction meeting.

As all Schools are committed to the provision of quality learning experiences for their students, and casual and sessional teaching staff play a significant role in the delivery of that experience, supporting casual and sessional teaching staff effectively will enhance the quality of the learning experience for students and will also assist in the career development of the teaching staff themselves.

Providing casual and sessional teaching staff with an information pack about the School, its teaching philosophy, programs and staff will create a framework and foundation for staff to develop their teaching strategies.

All casual and sessional teaching staff should be provided with:

- Unit Study Guide
 - Unit learning outcomes
 - Assignment details, including assessment criteria
 - Textbooks and reading lists
- Resource materials provided to students
- Marking Guide
- Answer Guide
- Referencing Guide
- Plagiarism Policy.

Course coordinators might also consider bringing all the casual and sessional staff working on a particular unit or program together for a meeting in which the specific aims and strategies of the unit/program are discussed, and opportunities provided to clarify issues. A similar meeting towards the end of each semester or teaching period can be a valuable part of the unit evaluation process, bringing together all those involved in teaching the unit.

Questions to clarify with marking staff:

- How many assignments/exams will they be expected to mark?
- How long is it estimated that each one will take to mark?
- What turnaround time is expected?
- Who do they speak to for advice?

- If there is more than one marker, what moderation processes will be put in place?
- How do they submit the marks?
- What do you both understand by each of the criteria?
- What will constitute evidence in an assignment to demonstrate that a student has met the criteria?
- What do you both understand about the marking guide?
- What are the expectations regarding the nature and form of the feedback to provide to students?

Ongoing Support

Many casual and sessional teaching staff are in the early years of developing an academic career. However, their casual status usually limits their involvement in academic activities and in the collegial life of the School, although some may be employed repeatedly over a period of years. Course coordinators and Heads of School can support the career development of casual and sessional teaching staff by:

- Discussing career goals and, where possible, providing opportunities for further experience in the desired directions
- Providing formative feedback
- Encouraging participation in professional development activities, for example, Teaching and Learning Centre workshops.

Web Links

The following web sites may be of interest to casual and sessional teaching staff.

Independent Study Materials for Tutors

University of Sydney

<http://www.itl.usyd.edu.au/Tutoring/study/index.html>

AVCC Guidelines for Effective University Teaching

<http://www.itl.usyd.edu.au/Tutoring/info/avcc.htm>

Nine Principles Guiding Teaching and Learning in the University of Melbourne

<http://www.cshe.unimelb.edu.au/pdfs/9principles.pdf>

First Words - A Guide to Teaching and Learning

<http://www.brookes.ac.uk/services/ocsd/firstwords/fwconts.html>

Supporting Casual and Sessional Teaching Staff

In addition to the support provided by course coordinators and other academic colleagues, several units within the University can provide assistance to casual and sessional teaching staff.

Teaching and Learning Centre (TLC)

The Teaching and Learning Centre promotes a culture of excellence in teaching and learning at the University of New England. The Centre provides services to staff and students directed at maintaining UNE as a leader in distance education and in flexible approaches to teaching and learning.

The TLC web site address is: <http://www.une.edu.au/tlc/>

Academic Skills Office (ASO)

The Academic Skills Office provides support to students on a variety of academic topics. Casual and sessional teaching staff should be aware of the services offered as they may want to refer students with particular learning needs to the ASO or to the ASO mentor in the Faculty for advice about teaching and learning academic skills. The ASO web site is an extremely useful site for both students and teachers. Information and guidance can be found about:

- Study skills
- Academic writing
- Academic reading
- Oral presentations.

The ASO provides workshops and courses for students on a variety of academic learning topics and even provides a one-to-one consultancy service. The ASO's fact sheets - available from the ASO, the TLC and online - are a useful resource for many aspects of academic work.

The ASO web site address is: <http://www.une.edu.au/tlc/aso/>

Organisational Development Unit (ODU)

The Organisational Development Unit is part of the Human Resource Services Directorate, located on the top floor of the TC Lamble building.

ODU's role is to support the work of the University by the ongoing development, implementation and monitoring of policies, strategies and procedures to assist individuals, teams and work units to effectively and efficiently perform their work.

The ODU conducts a workshop program on a wide variety of topics which may be relevant to the development needs of casual and sessional teaching staff. ODU's workshop program can be found at: http://www.une.edu.au/od/calendar_4.htm

The ODU web site address is: <http://www.une.edu.au/od/>

UNE Equity Office

The Equity Office provides advice, assistance and training to management, staff and students of the University in an integrated approach to equity issues. The work of the Equity Office includes:

- policy development, coordination and implementation, and monitoring and evaluation of progress

- training and development in the areas of cultural diversity, antiracism strategies, conflict resolution and mediation, and strategies to eliminate harassing and discriminatory attitudes and behaviour
- provision of educational and promotional materials
- management and support of the Equal Opportunity Advisers team and the Disability Contact People group
- facilitation of effective complaint handling and resolution of complaints
- provision of disability services and advice to students with special needs
- elimination of impediments to students' equitable access to the services and resources of the University
- provision of advice on affirmative action initiatives
- preparation of statutory reports to government agencies, such as, Affirmative Action Agency and Office of the Director of Equal Opportunity in Public Employment (ODEOPE), and the Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST)
- implementation of the UNE Indigenous Employment Strategy 2003 -2006 (<http://www.une.edu.au/eoo/publications/aronbayanaaya.pdf>).

The Equity Office web site address is: <http://www.une.edu.au/eoo/index.html>

References

Teaching and Educational Development Institute 2003, 'Sessional teaching survey results', *Sessional Teaching AUTC Project*, Teaching and Educational Development Institute, University of Queensland. Retrieved 24 March 2004 from http://www.tedi.uq.edu.au/sessionalteaching/pdfs/Lit_review/Survey_results.pdf

Induction Checklist

Basic Introduction

- Arrange a time for an induction meeting. If the staff member is not based in Armidale, make an appointment for a telephone induction meeting
- Introduce yourself, and your role, and explain the reporting relationship
- Ensure new staff member has completed necessary paperwork for Personnel so that they will get paid correctly and on time
- If office space is being provided, show the staff member and discuss arrangements, such as:
 - Provision of/ access to computing equipment and Internet
 - Access to office equipment (e.g. phones, fax, copying arrangements) and stationery
 - Access to laboratory equipment
- Show staff member around the School - tea rooms, lecture theatres, tutorial rooms, laboratories, offices, etc., and introduce staff member to colleagues, especially those with whom they will be working closely, or who are undertaking a similar role
- Provide a copy of the Handbook for Casual and Sessional Teaching Staff
- Other

Policies and Procedures

- Relevant procedures relating to reporting, time sheets, staff meetings
- Expected levels of performance - for example, turnaround time for marking, attendance at team meetings
- OH&S issues - contact officer, emergency procedures
- Where lab work or other technical work is involved, arrange an induction with the local OH&S contact officer to cover safety procedures with specific equipment and expectations with regard to supervision of students
- Other

Teaching Issues

- Provide background as well as specific information by explaining:
 - the School's philosophy of teaching, and how it links to UNE's Strategic Goals
 - the type of students - for example, internal/external etc. - and numbers
 - how the unit/s that the staff member will be teaching/marking/demonstrating for relate to other units within the course program

- how the graduate attributes are incorporated within the unit
- Provide a copy of the study guide for the unit and go through it with the staff member, noting learning outcomes for the unit and the teaching approaches used
- For marking staff, provide a copy of an answer guide and marking guide for assignments
- Explain how many assignments/exams they will be expected to mark, how long each should take, and the School's expectations with relation to feedback to students
- Explain what professional support is available - for example, who to contact to discuss problems; and what access is provided to professional development opportunities
- Explain the availability of student evaluation of teaching, nomination process and timelines
- Set dates for regular contact to discuss issues arising out of teaching and/or marking
- Other

Other Issues

- Ensure staff member is added to the School's communication system - for example, email lists, pigeon holes, mailing list
- Follow-up with staff member after a week or so to ensure that there are no outstanding questions or issues