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Christopher J. Klopper
Griffith University, c.klopper@griffith.edu.au

Bianca M. Power
Griffith University, b.power@griffith.edu.au

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The Casual Approach to Teacher Education: What Effect Does Casualisation Have for Australian University Teaching

Christopher Klopper
Bianca Power
Griffith University

Abstract: Universities in many countries are struggling to adapt to the competing forces of globalisation, new managerialism, entrepreneurialism and new technologies and quality agenda demands. Diminishing resources caused by restricted funding and an aging and diminishing academic workforce pose barriers. One solution to staffing shortages is the casualisation of academic teachers increasing casual or sessional teaching staff who take on significantly increased teaching responsibilities. This article explores the casualisation of university academics and reports on preliminary findings of a small scale sessional teacher development program that used data from a questionnaire on demographics of a small group of 22 sessional teaching staff employed at an Australian university. Results indicated that sessional staff believed they were effective university teachers yet their ongoing development was hampered by heavy teaching workloads, other employment and lack of time. The article concludes that universities, to provide quality outcomes for students, must address these factors.

Introduction

The casualisation of the university workforce continues to occur at a significant level in universities around the world. The result is that there is an increasing dependence on casual or sessional teaching staff who engage in activities related to student learning such as lecturing, tutoring, and assessment. Much information has been written around the escalating numbers of sessional teaching staff in universities in countries including Australia, USA, and UK (Bryson & Blackwell, 2006; Coates & Goedegebuure, 2010; Jacoby, 2006; Percy & Beaumont, 2008). Despite this there appears to be scant information about exact numbers and characteristics of sessional teaching staff. *The RED Report: Recognition, Enhancement, Development – The Contribution of Sessional Teachers to Higher Education* (Percy et al. 2008), for example, highlights the fact that information related to sessional teaching staff in Australia is sketchy and inconclusive. Exact numbers and the conditions of their employment are often unreliable and lack uniformity due to the inconsistency of record keeping by universities. Coates and Goedegebuure (2010) likewise claim there to be evidence of confusion and inaccurate reporting of the number of sessional teaching staff. Such discrepancies may be influenced by the confusing terminology related to sessional staff.

For the purposes of this paper the term ‘sessional teaching staff’ is used to describe those staff that are employed on an hourly basis to deliver tutorials, mark students’ work and enable the running of university courses. Sessional teaching staff frequently take on part time employment because they are seeking to supplement their study, other work, semi retirement or retirement. Qualifications of sessional teaching staff vary widely and may be well above, at the same level or in some cases below the level of the programs they teach into. An OECD

publication in 2008 provided the following information regarding the employment of part-time and non-tenured academic staff in several countries. The number of sessional teaching staff in Australian universities had more than doubled between 1990 and 2005. In the USA approximately 43% of academics were non tenured in 1975. By 2003 the number had risen to 64%. The number of non-permanent academic staff in the UK rose from 39% in 1994 to 44.8% in 2003 (Enders & Musselin, 2008). Other research has highlighted the rapid growth of sessional teaching staff in Australian universities. Percy et al. (2008) report that in the period 1989-1998 the employment of sessional teaching staff in the Australian higher education sector increased by 67%. May, Strachan, Broadbent and Peetz (2011) estimate that sessional teachers make up approximately 60% of all academic staff in Australian universities. They point out that at least 50% of undergraduate teaching is performed by sessional staff. Alarming, in some Australian universities there are reports (Lazarsfeld-Jensen & Morgan, 2009) of 80% of undergraduate teaching being done by sessional teachers.

In the UK sessional staff are placed on contracts however these do little to alleviate the concerns around casualisation. A large number of sessional teaching staff find that contrary to policy requirements they are given a succession of contracts with no prospect of permanent work. The claim is made that prolonged contract employment can have adverse effects on staff health, morale and productivity. The concern around the increase in UK sessional staff is highlighted in the headlines of the *Times Education Magazine*: “Negative creep of casualised labour threatens to engulf all” (Grove, 2012). The concern has also resulted in the University and College Union, the largest trade union for higher education employees in the UK, organising an anti-casualisation committee to fight against the growing increase in non-permanent versus permanent academic staff. A similar concern exists in Australia where the sessional teachers magazine, *Connect*, uses headlines that warn “The crisis in education isn’t looming, it’s here” (Jonas, 2010). The nature of the crisis is implied by May (2012) who voiced her concern in the newsletter for the National Tertiary Education Union, commenting that the over-employment of sessional staff has resulted in inadequate succession planning for a new generation of quality full time academics.

Finkelstein and Schuster (2006) describe a rapid revolutionary change that is producing a new order, in line with the change in academic staffing and types of work carried out by staff referred to by Martin, Fairclough, Smith and Ellis (2010). This new order is in part the result of “market-driven and technology-enabled innovations” (p.6), contributed to by the ‘creep of casualised labour’ and ‘crisis in education’. It is often more expedient to employ sessional staff than attempt to attract new academics to a job that is underscored by uncertainty, rising workloads and comparatively low remuneration (Bexley, James & Arkoudis, 2011; DEEWR, 2009). Hence permanent academic staff are replaced by sessional teaching staff who are employed in a range of positions that include lecturing and tutoring as well as other positions such as lab assistants and technical service officers (Percy et al. 2008). With the world-wide trend now being employment of academic staff on a casual rather than a permanent basis, the increasing numbers of permanently employed academics who retire and who are not replaced or are replaced by non-permanent sessional teachers has assisted the speed of change.

According to Jacoby (2006), this high level of sessional employment is a response by universities to relieve costs brought on by funding pressures and budgetary cuts. Jacoby states that the employment of part time staff is one method by which higher education institutions can maintain their financial health. By means of example, Jacoby compared the earnings of part time faculty and full time faculty in American community colleges. He took into consideration the variance in hours worked between the two groups yet found significant differences in the annual earnings of the two. He concluded that part time faculty are paid at a significantly lower rate to full time faculty and are unable to access the same type of college benefits made available to full time faculty. Jacoby (2006) also found that between 42% and 63% of staff in higher education faculties were part time. Likewise Thedwall (2008) argues

that this type of hiring benefits higher education institutions in the USA through salary saving.

Simon Marginson (2000) attributes the significant decrease of full time academic staff and the subsequent increase in sessional teaching staff to funding issues. Likewise Lazarsfeld, Jensen & Morgan (2009) argue that in the case of the Australian university in their study “increasing casualisation was the main strategy for delivering teaching within budgetary constraints” (p.65). Marginson (ibid) reports that government funding to Australian universities sharply declined from 1986 to 1997. In 1986 the Australian government met 87% of the total costs of universities. By 1997 this had fallen to 57%. Marginson (2000) argues that in order to remain financially viable Australian universities have cut costs in the area of staffing by reducing full time, highly qualified staff and increasing the numbers of less qualified and lower paid staff, many of whom are employed on a part time basis as sessional teachers. May, Peetz, and Strachan (2013) argue the same point more than a decade later.

Changing Face of Universities

At the beginning of the 21st century, Marginson (2000) observed that Australian universities were facing a crisis due to a number of factors, including a decline in government funding; pressures of globalisation; corporatisation of management; and the changing nature of academic work due to the rise in the employment of part time or sessional teaching staff. Occurring alongside these pressures is the increasing expectation of the student population that higher education programs will offer them a pathway to employment via a flexible student centred learning environment rather than the traditional teacher centred environment. Student expectations have meant many universities develop strategic plans to promote teaching quality in learning and teaching practices with an emphasis on programs that ensure continued student success throughout the student lifecycle. In short, excellence in teaching and teacher quality plays a key role in the success of a university. Yet, researchers such as Percy and Beaumont (2008) suggest that the growth in sessional teaching staff numbers may work against achieving excellence in teaching because sessional teaching staff are frequently unable to access training or support which means they are generally unprepared to accommodate the rapidly changing needs of the education industry. This is evidenced by the frequently occurring situation of hiring sessional teaching staff who may have industry experience but not necessarily recent higher education qualifications. In this case the expediency of identifying available sessional staff to ‘cover’ the required work takes precedence over academic credentials.

It has been well documented by researchers such as Brown, Goodman and Yasukawa (2010), Coates, Dobson, Goedegebuure, and Meek (2009), and Marginson (2000) that education contributes to economic growth and development. Higher education is integral to achieving the Government’s vision of a stronger and fairer Australia, fueling economic development, productivity and high skilled jobs and supporting Australia’s role as a middle power and leader in the region. The Bradley Review of Australian Higher Education (Bradley, Noonan, Nugent, & Scales, 2008) emphasises the critical role of higher education as a contributor of skilled workers who can adapt to the changing employment requirements of the future. The importance of higher education is that its institutions provide the required human capital necessary for knowledge production, which occurs through research and its knowledge dissemination (Varghese, 2007). The production and dissemination of knowledge leads to increased productivity and economic growth as well as social growth and affluence all of which are considered necessary to Australia’s role as an influential leader in the Pacific region.

There is evidence of the growth of higher education in Australia within the last thirty years. Coates and Goedegebuure (2010) note that in 1985 there were 138,666 university

students enrolled in 20 universities. Statistics from Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR, 2011) indicate that currently over one million students are enrolled in higher education institutions. This growth moves towards achieving one of the key recommendations of the Bradley Report (Bradley et al., 2008) of increasing the number of young Australians who have a degree to 40% by 2025. Yet, Hugo (2005) warns, although academic staff numbers increased in the 1986-1991 period they declined in relation to the large increase in student population with the result that student teacher ratios increased considerably. Hugo reports that teacher student ratio increased by 33.3 % from 1986 to 2003. Likewise, Brown, Goodman and Yasukawa (2010) report that the student academic staff ratio increased from 13:1 in 1990 to 20:1 by 2006. Put simply, as student numbers have increased teaching staff numbers have decreased resulting in escalating teaching workloads and escalating demands on academic staff.

The Challenges Posed by a Casualised Workforce

The concern at the growing numbers of sessional teaching staff is twofold. First, they are in danger of becoming the underclass of university staff. Kimber (2003) refers to this concern as a 'two-tiered' (p. 41) divide between tenured and non-tenured staff and notes how the lack of permanency makes for precarious working conditions. Industrially, according to the NTEU (2005) the lack of permanency for sessional teaching staff means they experience higher levels of job insecurity and financial uncertainty. Furthermore the NTEU observe that a high proportion of sessional teaching staff remain in that unstable employment position for prolonged periods with the university re-employing the same staff under the same casual conditions over many semesters. The problem here is that sessional teaching staff do not receive the benefits such as sick leave, holiday leave, parental leave and other entitlements that all workers should be entitled to. More recently, the NTEU (2013) has reiterated these concerns, further stating that recent university funding cuts would result in "more casualisation of university teaching, which means that more students are relying upon lecturers and tutors paid for a few hours a week during semester to provide their learning and teaching" (p. 1), referring to the casualisation of the workforce as the "dirty little secret of university expansion" (p. 1).

The second concern around the number of sessional teaching staff centres on graduate outcomes. Marginson (2000) argued that the increased corporatisation of universities and the associated change to the nature of academic work could result in universities losing their key role in society in the areas of teaching, research and scholarship. It could be argued that a more recent indication of this is contained in the Bradley Report (Bradley, et al., 2008). The report acknowledges the strategic importance for Australia as a competitor in the international market economy. Bradley et al. raise the concern, however, that Australia has reduced its investment in higher education. As a result the country has declined in terms of educational performance compared to many other OECD countries who invest more money in higher education and set higher targets for achievement of degree-level qualifications especially for the 25-34 year group. Bradley et al (ibid) recommend Australia set a target of 40% of 25-34 year olds to have a Bachelor degree by 2025.

This article argues that achievement of the target could be hampered in part by the casualisation of academic teaching roles. Many sessional teachers bring a range of valuable skills to higher education teaching, however the employment of sessional staff executed mainly as a matter of expediency. There appears to be little emphasis on appropriate qualifications or an understanding of the learning needs of university students. As a result, concern has been raised regarding the poor teaching quality of sessional teachers and the lack of appropriate professional development (Lazarsfeld-Jensen & Morgan, 2009). It has further been argued that sessional teachers are not held to the same accountability regimes and

surveillance of teaching quality, student satisfaction and student outcomes that tenured staff undergo (Percy & Beaumont, 2008). A study by Jacoby (2006) of the relationship between student graduation rates at American community colleges and the increase of part time faculty employment suggests that the latter was accompanied by a decrease in graduation rates. In other words, employment of sessional teaching staff adversely affected student success. Jacoby argues that employing large numbers of part time or sessional teaching staff in relation to full time faculty entails dangers to student success.

Universities, then, are faced with dual and frequently competing expectations. On the one hand each institution is expected to meet tight budgetary demands in a climate of reduced government spending, increased pressure to develop new means of self-funding and increasing accountability to external organisations as well as an expanding diverse student population. To meet these conflicting demands universities aim to boost student enrolments by offering the student consumer readily accessible programs built around the most up-to-date learning management systems. At the same time individual universities are cutting permanent academic staff numbers while increasing sessional teaching staff numbers. In short, universities face three demands: responding to the needs of the student as a consumer; increasing enrolments; and preparing graduates to become successful contributors to the economic needs of a changing society. Demands such as these have led Scott, Coates and Anderson (2008) to question whether the past notion of a university as the place to develop a nation's social and economic wealth continues to be valid given the rapidly changing demands of the 21st century.

The Development Project

This article responds to the arguments introduced above in relation to the need for high quality sessional teaching staff. It reports on the preliminary findings of a small-scale development project aimed at identifying and developing the most effective means of providing a model for induction, training and management to sessional teaching staff. Ethical approval from the participating University Ethics Committee was obtained for the project. A significant outcome of the project was the development of a sustainable on-line professional development program and a resource kit for sessional teaching staff with the potential to enhance teaching and learning outcomes of university programs.

The Research Instrument

A 20-item questionnaire was distributed to the 22 sessional teaching staff who elected to be involved in the professional development program, out of a total of 65 sessional teaching staff employed by this particular faculty during that semester. Twelve respondents completed the questionnaire during a professional development workshop for sessional teachers at the beginning of the academic year, while the remaining 10 sessional teaching staff responded to a mail-out of the questionnaire soon after. Rigorous steps were taken to ensure the anonymity of all respondents.

A questionnaire format was chosen because, as Walonick (1993) argues, questionnaires are easy to analyse, and most statistical analysis software can easily process them. Surveys are useful for identifying how people feel and think about a topic (Martella, Nelson, Morgan & Marchand-Martella, 2013). Additionally, questionnaires are familiar to most people, and they generally do not make people apprehensive. They are less intrusive than telephone or face-to-face surveys and reduce interviewer bias because there is uniform question presentation. Unlike in-person interviewing, there are no verbal or visual clues to

influence a respondent to answer in a particular way. Open-ended questions were asked to elicit the personal views of respondents and closed questions were used to limit response options that would provide information such as demographic data. The qualitative data was used to augment the findings of the quantitative data. Empirical themes were identified as they emerged through data analysis, and subsequently applied to address the research question. The manual coding took place by cleaning and reading the data to elicit the emerging thematic indicators. To assist this process, content clouds were generated that reflected the most predominantly used words by respondents and supplements a summary of the key themes from responses to each question. Content clouds are described by Cidell (2010) as “a type of visualisation that summarises the contents of a document by depicting the words that appear most often in larger, darker type within the cloud” (p.514). In other words, the most important points of a document are represented by large bolded type single words whereas the least important are presented through words that diminish in size and lighter type.

The questionnaire had two purposes: to gather data related to the demographics of 22 sessional teaching staff involved in the development program; and to obtain a measure of self-efficacy of individual group members. An important quality of excellent teachers is that they possess a well-developed sense of self-efficacy. Self-efficacy is a key construct grounded in social cognitive theory that refers to an individual's belief in their own capability to organise and implement actions to reach a certain level of performance (Bandura, 2012). Bandura argued that people's beliefs in their own abilities had an effect on their performance. The role of teachers' self-efficacy and their personal attitudes and beliefs is that they have a powerful influence on their instructional decisions and classroom practices. Allinder (1994) concluded that teachers with a strong sense of efficacy exhibit high levels of planning and organisation, are open to new ideas and are more willing to experiment with new methods to better meet the needs of their students. Teachers with high self-efficacy also exhibit enthusiasm for teaching, are more committed to their profession, and are therefore likely to exert a positive influence on students' achievements and their own sense of efficacy. Ross (1994), who reviewed 88 teacher efficacy studies in higher educational settings investigating links between teachers' sense of efficacy and their behaviours. Results indicated that teachers with higher levels of efficacy are more likely to learn and use new approaches and strategies for teaching, use management techniques that enhance student autonomy, and are more effective in building on students' own self-perceptions of their academic skills. Similarly Woolfolk Hoy (2004) claim that teachers with a high sense of efficacy about their teaching capabilities may have an easier time motivating their students and enhancing their cognitive development. Woolfolk Hoy suggests that teachers may be able to rebound from setbacks and demonstrate increased willingness to experiment with new ideas or techniques whereas teachers with low self-efficacy may rely more on a controlling teaching style and tend to be more critical of students.

Analysis of Data

Of the 22 respondents, 14 were female and eight were male. The majority of respondents were 41 years or older (41-50yrs: 8; 51-60yrs: 4; 61-70yrs: 6), with one respondent in the 20-30 years age group and three in the 31-40 years age group. When asked to indicate level of qualification, nine respondents indicated 'Bachelor'; seven indicated 'Masters', one 'Doctorate of Education', and five 'PhD'. 14 of the 22 respondents were registered teachers with the professional accreditation body Queensland College of Teachers, and nine respondents had paid employment outside of their university work. Three respondents relied solely on university work as a means of income.

Respondents were asked to indicate which, if any, university programs they had previously taught in: 18 respondents had previously taught in the Undergraduate program, 11 in the Postgraduate program, 11 in the Master of Education, six in the Master of Teaching, and seven in the Graduate Diploma program. One respondent had not previously taught in any of the aforementioned programs, consistent with the response of one respondent indicating no experience as a tutor or lecturer.

Respondents were required to indicate length of past experience working in a university sector. Three respondents indicated less than one year, six had 1-3 years of experience, seven had 3-6 years of experience, and six had more than six years of experience. Eight respondents have past experience as a tutor, 13 respondents have past experience as both a lecturer and as a sessional teacher, and one respondent had no experience as either. When asked to respond to the question: *In relation to your current university work are you currently teaching courses for which you have disciplinary qualifications?* 20 respondents answered 'Yes', two indicated 'No'.

Respondents were asked to indicate which statements best describe/s their past experience as a tutor, from a given list of statements. These statements and the number of positive responses for each are outlined in Table 1.

Statement	Number of responses
I have been expected to design, prepare and present all tutorial activities	13
I have been expected to prepare and present all tutorial activities	13
I have been expected to design and implement assessment	6
I have been expected to contribute to the design and implementation of assessment	12
I have been expected to contribute to the design of lectures	8
None of the above	2

Table 1: Best description of past experience as a sessional teacher.

Note: Total number of responses does not sum to 22 (number of respondents). This was a multiple-response format question.

Respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with a series of statements around pedagogical skills and practices using a four-point scale (4 = Strongly Agree; 3 = Agree; 2 = Disagree; 1 = Strongly Disagree). The statements and number of responses in each category are outlined in Table 2.

Statement					No Response	Unusable Response
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree		
I am confident I possess the necessary skills to teach university students.	1	-	6	15	-	-
I enjoy working with university students.	1	-	2	19	-	-
Most university students are generally eager to learn.	-	1	14	7	-	-
The pedagogy I use for teaching school age students is appropriate to use with University students	2	4	7	7	1	1
I believe I am an effective teacher of university students.	-	1	7	14	-	-
I believe I am more effective teaching university students than school age students.	-	9	5	4	1	3
I have a clear understanding of my role as a sessional teacher.	-	2	6	14	-	-
I feel confident in my ability to use university teaching resources such as the Blackboard learning management system	-	3	8	11	-	-
I feel confident in asking my course convenor for help	1	-	3	18	-	-
I am confident of my understanding of university policies and practices.	-	5	12	4	-	1
I have a clear understanding of the role of the course convenor.	-	2	6	13	1	-
I know who to go to for help when I have to deal with an issue that is related to my teaching.	-	1	1	20	-	-
I feel confident in my ability to assess students' work even if it means I have to fail their achievement or performance.	-	1	8	13	-	-
My role is to help students apply theory to practice.	-	2	3	17	-	-
I need to improve my teaching skills for working with university students.	2	8	9	1	-	2
I receive adequate support from my course convenor	-	1	10	11	-	-
My role is to help students understand theory.	-	2	10	9	1	-

Table 2: Level of agreement with specified statements.

Note 1: (-) Indicates no response in this category.

Note 2: Cronbach for all items Alpha = 0.95.

As can be seen from Table 2, the statements receiving greatest level of *agreement* were: ‘I enjoy working with university students’; ‘I believe I am an effective teacher of university students’; ‘I feel confident in asking my course convenor for help’; ‘I know who to go to for help when I have to deal with an issue that is related to my tutoring’; and ‘My role is to help students apply theory to practice’. Statements receiving most level of *disagreement* according to Table 2 were: ‘The pedagogy I use for teaching school age students is appropriate to use with University students’; ‘I believe I am more effective teaching university students than school age students’; ‘I feel confident in my ability to use university teaching resources such as the Blackboard learning management system; and ‘I need to improve my teaching skills for working with university students’. This suggests sessional staff are not confident in their self-efficacy of teaching university students compounded by their own lack of confidence in using university teaching resources. These compounding limitations promote the need to improve teaching skills, use of resources and the associated mechanisms of the university sector. **Figure 1** emphasises the significance of professional development in technology.

Building the Capacity of the Sessional Teaching Staff

When respondents were asked: *What would assist you to become a more effective teacher?* a number of ideas including having meetings with the course convenor and gaining feedback from course convenor during the semester that could be classified under the broader theme of ‘collaboration and collegial support’ were listed. **Figure 3** reports on the results of the question: *The area/s I need to further develop is/are.* Responses to this suggest that respondents required more time to collaborate and develop technological skills to improve their effectiveness as a teacher. Skills in the use of technology, were deemed necessary to network academic staff and communicate with students. Respondents saw technology as a conduit for effective collaboration and for sustained collegial support. Yet other data clearly indicated that lack of time and outside employment (17 respondents indicated that they currently have other paid employment outside of their university work) adversely impacted the opportunity for building such capacity.



Figure 3: Resources required to build the capacity of sessional teaching staff

Discussion

It was unsurprising that the sessional teacher cohort in the main was comprised of females in the 50+ age bracket. Rowbotham (2010) and the NTEU (2005, 2013) have both observed large increases in the number of female sessional teaching staff in Australian universities. Apart from the gender and age imbalance the rapid growth in sessional teacher numbers is cause for alarm. DEEWR (2009) notes we are rapidly approaching a time when a significant number of academics will retire yet universities are failing to attract new academics to the profession; rather, universities continue to hire a growing number of sessional staff. This situation highlights the arguments made by Kimber (2003), Bradley et al (2008), and Martin et al (2010) that budgetary cuts have resulted in a reduced level of investment in higher education.

Percy and Beaumont (2008) warn that the growth in numbers of sessional staff may jeopardise student success because of their lack of teaching excellence. A concern around this sessional teacher cohort was the fact that 9 of 22 had only an undergraduate degree yet the majority of the project’s sessional staff had heavy teaching workloads and responsibilities that included the design and delivery of lectures and tutorials as well as the design implementation and marking of assessment at both undergraduate and post graduate level. Furthermore a substantial number of the sessional cohort had other paid employment outside

the university. The sessional cohort clearly identified their need to improve in areas such as technological skills. Whilst they felt confident of their skills around the use of the learning management system they identified further professional development of technological skills to be essential. They also noted that time constraints due to other employment, as well as heavy university teaching loads, prevented them from developing the skills they perceived necessary to teach university students. Whilst sessional teaching staff make a significant and valuable contribution to university teaching activities it is also true that high quality sessional teaching staff can impact on the quality and effectiveness of programs that ensure a student-centred success culture and quality graduate outcomes (Anderson, 2007; Percy et.al 2008). In order for this to occur we argue that universities need to be proactive in employing highly qualified sessional teachers as well as making ongoing professional development available for them.

Researchers such as Allinder (1994) and Woolfolk Hoy (2004) emphasise the relationship between high self-efficacy and quality teaching. Data collected from the sessional cohort indicated that the cohort demonstrated behaviours consistent with qualities that university students want from effective teachers. Student perceptions of the qualities of effective teachers in higher education were studied by Delaney, Johnson, Johnson and Treslan (2010). The study identified characteristics that included being respectful, knowledgeable, approachable, engaging, communicative, responsible, and professional. The sessional cohorts' responses to questions relating to self-efficacy illustrated an interesting dilemma. On the one hand the majority were committed and enthusiastic in their roles as sessional teachers and believed they were effective teachers. This is a positive affirmation of their effectiveness as teachers. On the other hand they acknowledged they were more effective as teachers of school age children rather than university students. As such they perceived the need to engage in more skill development. This appears to indicate that the sessional teachers in our cohort were steeped in pedagogical content knowledge for school settings but not for the university sector in which they find themselves working. So whilst the sessional staff in the project were cognisant of the gaps in their pedagogy as university teachers, at the same time their heavy workload and lack of professional development opportunities presented barriers to self-efficacy enhancement.

The continuing trend of replacing permanent academic staff with sessional teaching staff together with increased demands of universities to produce quality outcomes means that that sessional staff should have access to professional development opportunities. However, lack of time for professional development and collaboration highlighted by sessional teaching staff in the above project presents a challenge to the quality of their university work as well as a challenge to providing them support and opportunities for development. The challenge for universities today is how they can most effectively build capacity in sessional teaching staff who have limited time in which to attend teaching development initiatives.

Universities, therefore, need to engage in strategic workforce planning for professional development of sessional teachers as well as their management and support. Such an initiative will develop sessional teachers who can support pedagogical initiatives through their use of quality teaching to engage students in their learning. Furthermore, it is critical to the development of sessional teaching staff that universities develop sustainable practices and procedures that result in quality improvement of sessional staff through professional development and ongoing evaluation and review processes.

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