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Teaching-focused academic appointments in Australian universities:

recognition, specialisation,
or stratification?

Professor Belinda Probert

January 2013



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Discussion Paper 1



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Executive Summary

Since 2009 there has been a consistent upward trend in the number of academic staff being reported to the Australian Government Department of Industry, Innovation, Science, Research and Tertiary Education (DIISRTE) as 'teaching-only', reaching a total of 3 489 in 2012. Nineteen universities had a provision for teaching-focused appointments before the current round of enterprise bargaining began in 2012, and many more are likely to have such a provision by the time this round is completed. This is because both union and management in many universities are supporting this development, even if for rather different reasons.

The growth of teaching-focused appointments is part of an international trend that many see as inevitable, namely the unbundling of previous academic roles and increasing differentiation within the academic workforce. Among the agreed driving forces behind this unbundling are: the demand for much greater levels of participation in higher education (from mass to universal), the pressure to provide for lifelong learning opportunities, increased competition from private providers, and the radical potential of IT.

This report for the Office for Learning and Teaching uses DIISRTE data on teaching-only appointments in Australian universities to describe their growth, their distribution by institution, and in those universities with significant numbers, their distribution by discipline and level. The report uses a case study approach to identify the range of policies being used to shape the appointment and career opportunities of teaching-only staff, and discusses the likely impact on the quality of teaching and learning in different institutions, as well as the status of teaching in the wider academic culture.

Teaching or 'education' focused appointments are not concentrated in any particular university grouping, and have been introduced for a number of quite different and contradictory reasons. These range from an explicit desire to raise the status of teaching and develop teaching-focused career paths, to the more widespread desire to improve institutional research rankings by transferring research-inactive staff to a teaching-focused classification in order to reduce the research-active denominator. The recent growth in teaching-focused staff numbers has probably been, in general, more opportunistic than strategic.

Whatever the institutional motive, the creation of a separate category of teaching-focused academic staff is occurring within a shared university culture that has increasingly privileged research over teaching over the last two decades, and in which there is widespread scepticism about the possibility of teaching-focused careers and parity of esteem between these activities. The position descriptions and methods of appointment for teaching-focused academics vary widely between institutions, but the most common approach is for a process of application from existing teaching and research staff to a fixed term appointment to a teaching-focused role. It is generally viewed as a one-way street.

Within universities, there is a strong rhetorical resistance to the concept of 'teaching-only' roles, with an explicit insistence on the scholarly nature of university teaching (in line with the new Provider Registration Standards) and the importance of research. There is, however, relatively little clarity in the definition of what constitutes a scholarly approach. Similarly, some TAFE providers are wrestling with the scholarly requirements for those TAFE teachers

responsible for higher-level undergraduate or postgraduate teaching, and with the relationship between teaching and research. The growth of teaching-focused positions in universities needs to be seen in the wider context of the growth of higher education teachers within TAFE and a range of private providers. The resolution of this question – what is the essence of higher education teaching – will have significant implications for the categorisation of different kinds of higher education providers in the future.

In the future it is widely expected that the application of IT in the development of such new approaches to course delivery as MOOCs – massive open online courses – will greatly stimulate the further unbundling of academic work and the differentiation of roles around teaching, research and other support activities.

The status of teaching-focused appointments in Australian universities, and the development of full career paths, are widely seen as dependent on greater agreement about what constitutes excellence in university teaching. There is an acknowledged danger that differentiation will, in fact, mean stratification. Some argue that the professionalisation of university teaching is necessary to establish its status. Others see the issue as one of institutional leadership and strategic foresight. Teaching-focused appointments can raise the status of teaching or continue its marginalisation. What matters is the strategic focus and values of senior management, and the extent to which this is reflected in the things that deans and heads of department or heads of school do and say.



Introduction

In 2012, Australian universities reported that almost 10 per cent of their academic workforce engaged in teaching was employed on a 'teaching-only' basis.¹ The reported teaching-only appointments are currently very unevenly spread across different universities, ranging from a high of 39 per cent to zero. Fourteen universities reported that over 10 per cent of their academic staff engaged in teaching are 'teaching-only', while 14 universities reported less than one per cent.² (This does not include the much larger number of staff employed on a sessional or casual basis that constitute another kind of 'teaching-only' higher education labour force.)

If the total number of reported continuing and fixed term teaching-only staff is still small (just under 3 500 in 2012), the trend since 2009 (when there were 1 787) has been consistently upward.³ Nineteen of the 35 last-round Enterprise Agreements reviewed by the National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU) include reference to a designation of 'teaching intensive or similar' positions, covering both continuing and fixed term appointments,⁴ and the current round of enterprise bargaining is likely to see many more universities adopt similar provisions. There are a number of different titles being used to describe these new types of appointments including the charming title of 'teaching scholar' and the less charming 'not research-active'. The different designations suggest very different approaches and objectives across the sector, but for the purpose of this report, the general term 'teaching-focused' will be used.

The growth of teaching-focused appointments at this time is not confined to Australia. The UK has seen a dramatic increase in the percentage of academic staff employed on teaching-only contracts. In 2003–4, the UK Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) recorded 29 000 teaching-only academics, amounting to 20 per cent of the total higher education (HE) academic workforce, compared to 15 000 in the previous year.⁵ In 2004, in a move that foreshadows the appearance of teaching-only universities, the Higher Education Act eliminated the requirement that the definition of an English university include research degree awarding powers.⁶

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- ¹ 'Teaching-only' is the reporting term used by DIIRSTE, and includes continuing and fixed term employees. This percentage is the proportion of the total teaching workforce (teaching and research plus teaching-only) who are reported as teaching-only. There is a much larger number of research-only staff employed in Australian universities than teaching-only, but they are excluded from this analysis of the changing make-up of the higher education workforce. Teaching and research remains much the largest category of employment overall. See DIIRSTE Higher Education Data 'Research Only, Teaching Only and Teaching and Research staff as proportion of all staff for each Higher Education Provider, 2001–2012' <http://www.olt.gov.au/resource-teaching-focused-academic-appointments>
 - ² Two other higher education providers reported high levels of teaching-only appointments, Avondale College (18.84%); MCD University of Divinity (33.83%).
 - ³ DIIRSTE Higher Education Data <http://www.olt.gov.au/resource-teaching-focused-academic-appointments>
 - ⁴ Excerpt from NTEU analysis of Higher Education Round 5 Bargaining Outcomes provided by Ken McAlpine, Senior Industrial Officer (Strategy and Policy), NTEU, 13 July 2012.
 - ⁵ Association of University Teachers (AUT) Research (2005) 'The rise of teaching-only academics: changes in the employment of UK academic staff', AUT. Unfortunately the HESA data distinguishes between 'teaching-only', 'research-only' and 'teaching and research' staff, but – somewhat surprisingly – does not provide a breakdown between full-time and sessional appointments. It is therefore difficult to get a sense of the numbers of full time, 'teaching-focused' posts. An added complication is the different contractual status between academic staff in the pre-1992 ('Old') and those in post-1992 ('New') universities (i.e. the extent to which research, as opposed to scholarship, is part of their contractual responsibility).
 - ⁶ In contrast, the Bradley Review Report (2008) recommended that research remain central to the definition of an Australian University.

In the US great concern has also been expressed about the growth of teaching-focused appointments. A major review of contemporary American academic careers published in 2006 begins:

We take as our point of departure a bold and unqualified assertion: American higher education and the academic profession that serve it are on the edge of an unprecedented restructuring that is changing the face – indeed, even the very meaning – of higher learning.⁷

The growth of teaching-focused appointments raises many different questions about the evolving nature of higher education. For example, it has been suggested that encouraging teaching-only institutions, and perhaps teaching-only faculties, would be a way of delivering higher education at lower cost⁸; or that more teaching-only academic positions could solve the quality problems emerging from the explosion of casual teaching.⁹ It has also been argued in Canada that the development of teaching-only positions ‘changes the nature of the academic appointment, by unbundling teaching from scholarship and service’.¹⁰ In the US, UK and Australia, the increasing differentiation of academic roles and careers, is seen as fundamentally linked to the move from mass to universal participation in higher education.¹¹

This report, commissioned by the Office for Learning and Teaching, has a more immediate and specific focus, namely the impact, if any, that increasing numbers of teaching-focused appointments is having on the quality of teaching and learning in Australian higher education. This necessarily involves analysing where they have been introduced and why; the expectations around the role and conditions of employment, including the selection criteria and career possibilities; as well as perceptions of teaching-focused staff within the wider academic culture, and among students. To put the question into a contemporary policy framework, should a prospective student interpret a higher ratio of teaching-focused staff to total teaching and research staff as a positive indicator of the student experience on something like the *MyUniversity* website, or as a negative indicator? There is probably no simple answer to this question, but this project will look at the evidence that might support either side of the argument.

The Australian higher education sector is in the midst of a major transformation, triggered by the Bradley Review (2008)¹², the implementation of which is already being re-shaped by the current period of fiscal stringency. The resulting rapid expansion of the sector and the ambitious equity targets established by the Australian Government are encouraging the growth of higher education provision in a range of TAFE institutions and private providers such as Navitas. Any analysis of the role of teaching-focused academics needs to recognise that this group includes TAFE higher education teachers as well as teachers working for private providers – most of whom do not resemble the ‘traditional’ university academic.

7 Jack H. Schuster and Martin J. Finkelstein (2006) *The American Faculty: the Restructuring of Academic Work and Careers*, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, p. 3.

8 Andrew Norton (2011) ‘Paying for higher education is not popular’, *The Age*, 28 June.

9 A suggestion made by Andrew Norton (2012) *Mapping Australian higher education*, Grattan Institute, Melbourne, pp. 46-7, and also currently the focus of NTEU bargaining.

10 Moira Farr (2008) ‘For teaching-only faculty, a controversial role’, *University Affairs*, 3 November.

11 Martin Trow (2000) ‘From mass higher education to universal access; the American advantage’, Centre for Studies in Higher Education, University of California Berkeley, Research and Occasional Paper Series CSHE 1.00.

12 Denise Bradley, Peter Noonan, Helen Nugent and Bill Scales (2008) *Review of Australian Higher Education: Final Report*, DEEWR.



The methodology adopted for this project involved a number of different elements including:

- analysis of the national data on teaching-only appointments collected by DIISRTE
- more detailed analysis of this data (by level, discipline and gender) for those 14 universities which in 2012 reported more than 15 per cent¹³ of their teaching staff as teaching-only
- interviews (in person, by phone/skype and by email) with senior managers responsible for the appointment of teaching-focused staff in their institution
- analysis of policy documents relating to the definition, selection and appointment of teaching-focused academics
- review of the literature relating to teaching-focused academics and the differentiation of the academic labour force in Australia, the UK and the US.

¹³ Including The University of Queensland with 14.61%.



Part 1

The evolution of teaching-focused academic appointments

1. The unified national system and the traditional academic

The 'traditional' academic to whom it is tempting to compare the new teaching-focused academic is not, in fact, very traditional. The Australian university system as it exists today is young, emerging from the Dawkins reforms of 1988 that led to a dramatic increase in the number of universities. Nonetheless, the idea of a traditional academic is real enough, and many of the newer universities have invested considerable resources over the last twenty years in developing a workforce based on this model. It is a model which is shared by the higher education systems of the UK and the US, and whose historical evolution in the US has been richly described by Jack Schuster and Martin Finkelstein.

What are the characteristics of this ideal type? American writers define them eloquently in terms of different kinds of scholarship and service. Schuster and Finkelstein argue that in the US as early as World War II 'the various components of the contemporary academic role had thus crystallized into the highly differentiated model of today – teaching, research, and institutional and public service, all rooted in the faculty member's disciplinary expertise. The "modern era" of faculty roles and academic work had begun'.¹⁴ In Australia today these characteristics are perhaps most succinctly captured in the somewhat prosaic terminology of so many Enterprise Agreements with their 40:40:20 clauses. The University of Sydney Agreement (2009) illustrates the general principles:

for teaching and research staff (i.e. staff other than "research only" and "teaching focused" staff), academic work will be assigned to ensure a well-balanced portfolio encompassing...on average:

- teaching and teaching-related activities – 40%;
- research and scholarship – 40%;
- professional and community engagement and administration – 20%.¹⁵

Between 1986 and 1994, 18 new universities were created out of the country's Colleges of Advanced Education (CAEs) and Institutes of Technology. Within this unified national system, they were all now funded on the same basis as the older group of universities, including provision of a dollar figure per student that was intended to cover the costs of academic staff undertaking research.

For the most part, these new universities have spent the last 20 years transforming their academic staff profiles from 'teaching-only' to 'teaching and research'. The policy settings and incentives all worked to encourage every new university to become increasingly like the most research intensive and traditional ones. Staff in the newly created universities were supported to undertake PhDs even if they had been teaching successfully over a long career. Industrially, the NTEU embedded the 40:40:20 norm in agreements, and devoted considerable energy to supporting the 'research' rights of all academic staff.

¹⁴ Schuster and Finkelstein, *op. cit.*, p. 33.

¹⁵ The University of Sydney Enterprise Agreement (2009), Clause 211.

More recently, the emergence of international university rankings that are overwhelmingly reflective of research strength has added to these pressures.¹⁶ No university has been willing to say that its focus is primarily on undergraduate education, for example.

The 40:40:20 formula suggests, at least superficially, an equality of effort and standing between teaching and research. In reality, however, in the period following the creation of the unified national system, research became the dominant element in defining the status of both individual universities and individual academics. At the university level, it has been hard for any university to challenge the emergence of a status hierarchy based on research reputation. For individual academics, the dominance of research was most clearly expressed in the formal academic promotions policies that characterised most universities, and which required evidence of disciplinary research performance.

As Ingrid Moses noted back in 1997, 'there was/is too much emphasis on the research university, too much emphasis on research excellence as the defining factor for university excellence'.¹⁷

But if all higher education in Australia is being conducted in or through universities, is it realistic to think that 50 000 academic staff can all be researchers who contribute significantly to knowledge and understanding? And is it necessary?¹⁸

Even when the evidence does not exist to support it, academic staff generally *believe* that only research really counts when it comes to getting promoted.¹⁹ The increasing primacy of research in the self-definition of academics was not confined to Australia, and has been particularly eloquently documented in the US. In 1990 Ernest Boyer noted how quickly faculty members were coming to believe that research was essential to their tenure.²⁰ At the same time US colleges and universities have been plagued with 'mission creep'. It has been argued that this led to 'concomitant changes in the expectations of faculty - from one of primarily concentrating on teaching to one of doing more research than teaching... The over-all result was a movement away from a singular focus on the organisation's *raison d'être* - student learning'.²¹

16 Robert Zemsky (2009) *Making Reform Work: The Case for Transforming American Higher Education*, Rutgers University Press, ch. 5 'The rain man cometh - again'.

17 Ingrid Moses (1997) 'Redefining academic roles: in support of teaching' in John Sharpham and Grant Harman (eds) *Australia's Future Universities*, UNE Press, Armidale, p. 177.

18 *ibid.* p. 178.

19 Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee *The great barrier myth: an investigation of promotions policy and practice in Australian Universities*, 2006, p. 15; Emmaline Bexley, Richard James and Sophie Arkoudis (2011) *The Australian Academic Profession in Transition*, The Centre for the Study of Higher Education, The University of Melbourne, p. 52.

20 Ernest Boyer (1990) *Scholarship Reconsidered: Priorities of the Professoriate*, The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching; see also Richard Arum and Josipa Roksa (2011) *Academically Adrift*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, ch. 1 'College cultures and student learning'.

21 Dominic J. Brewer and William G. Tierney (2011) 'Barriers to innovation in U.S. higher education', in Ben Wildavsky, Andrew P. Kelly and Kevin Carey (eds), *Reinventing Higher Education*, Harvard Education Press, Cambridge, p. 20.

2. Destabilising 40:40:20

The dominance of the 40:40:20 model has been relatively short lived, even if so many of today's Australian academics see it as the norm. Indeed, perhaps the key to the contemporary policy debate about academic careers is the pressure to displace any kind of 'norm', and to introduce differentiation – both at the institutional level, but also at the workforce level. This is illustrated with great clarity in The University of Melbourne's 'Work Focus Categorisation Policy', adopted in 2009. This announces that all new and existing fixed term and continuing academic staff will be allocated to one of four categories of 'work focus'. These are:

- teaching and research
- research-focused
- teaching specialist
- academic specialists.

Most innovative here is the creation of this last category of academic staff who 'are not expected to undertake teaching or research activities', but who are involved in 'community engagement, academic policy development, research service and leadership and senior management roles such as the Vice-Chancellor and Deputy Vice-Chancellor'.²²

More commonly, the explicit diversification of academic roles has been confined to some variation of the first three. An interesting comparison with The University of Melbourne is Bristol University, a member of the Russell Group of Universities, with very high global rankings. Bristol has recently introduced its new academic career structure framework, in which all staff are appointed on one of three distinct pathways, illustrated on the following page.

Importantly, the policy on movement between these pathways provide that movements from Pathway 1 to Pathway 3, and from Pathway 3 to Pathway 1 'will be exceptional'. Only movement sideways between Pathway 1 and 2 'should not be regarded as exceptional and may be part of the way a particular career progresses'.²³ The significance of different policies on method of appointment and movement between categories is discussed below in Part 2 of this report.

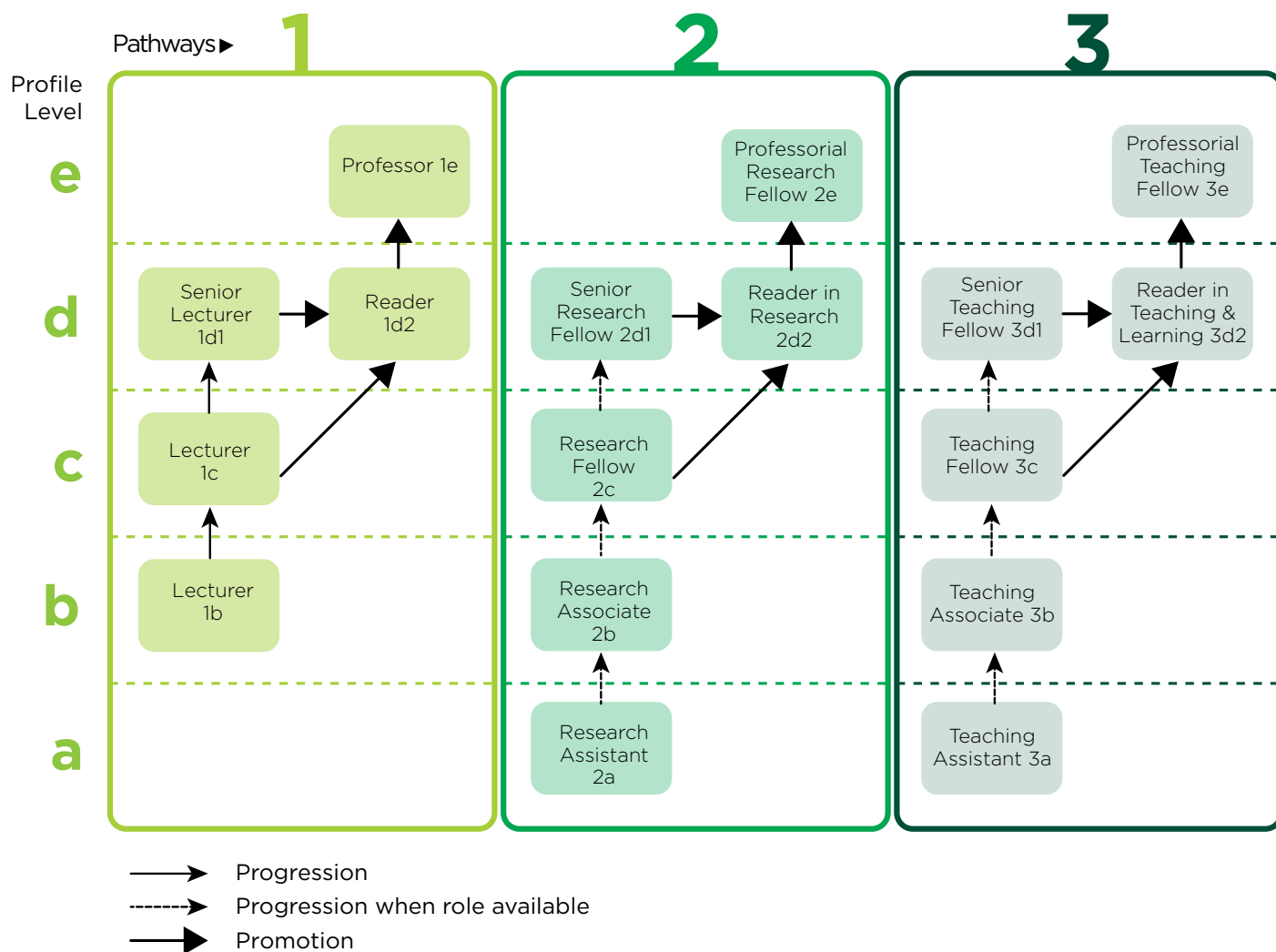
The pressures that have led to this formal differentiation of academic roles are many and contradictory, and need to be disentangled and weighed up in order to evaluate their likely impact on the quality of teaching and learning. Among the pressures have been the increasing importance of formal quality audits by the Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA) and the thematic assessments to be undertaken by the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) of university performance in research and teaching; the increasing importance of university rankings; the massive expansion of higher education; policy enthusiasm for greater institutional differentiation; and increased competition from different kinds of higher education providers.²⁴

22 The University of Melbourne *Categories of Employment Procedures* <https://policy.unimelb.edu.au/MPF1154>

23 University of Bristol, Human Resources 'Movement between pathways' <http://www.bristol.ac.uk/hr/grading/academic/pathways/> accessed 13 September 2012.

24 Hamish Coates and Leo Goedegebuure (2010) *The Real Academic Revolution: Why we need to reconceptualise Australia's future academic workforce, and eight possible strategies for how to go about this*, LH Martin Institute, Melbourne.

Bristol University
Academic Staff Career Pathways



2.1 Quality auditing

The rapid expansion of higher education brought about by the creation of the unified national system, followed by steady growth in student numbers, was accompanied by the development of new systems of quality audit and accountability. The initial Australian approach was not based on specific disciplinary reviews, but on whole of institution quality assurance assessments, requiring a self-audit, followed by a visit from a review panel. It is not clear that the early rounds (1993–1995) had a great deal of impact, apart from acculturating universities to the technologies of quality assurance. According to Don Aitkin, ‘one good result was that questions of quality and quality management became central throughout the system’.²⁵

The momentum for measuring and reporting on research performance quickly overtook any other aspect of university activity (such as teaching or community engagement). Outside the scope of the institutional quality audits, it was rapidly accepted that universities’ research should be measured and evaluated. While it took many years before a scheme for doing this was finally agreed and implemented (with much investment in both the proposed Research Quality Framework – RQF – and the finally adopted version, Excellence in Research in Australia – ERA), the knowledge that it was coming created intense interest in techniques for maximising an institution’s ranking. Some of the earliest moves to create ‘teaching-focused’ academic positions were clearly related to the objective of increasing the ratio of research-active staff to total teaching and research staff at the institutional and discipline level, thereby addressing what became quickly described as the ‘denominator problem’.

In parallel developments in the UK, it has been argued that the rapid growth in academics on teaching-only contracts between 2002–3 and 2003–4 reflects ‘the widely reported practice of institutions transferring under-performing teaching and research academics onto teaching-only contracts in the run-up to the 2008 Research Assessment Exercise’.²⁶ It has been argued that:

In its 22 years the RAE served a useful role in channelling money to some of the UK’s best academics and departments. But the system created losers as well as winners. Some 40 per cent of academics were not submitted to the 2001 RAE. For many academics, this amounted to being given research-inactive status.²⁷

At Newcastle University (UK) for example, the number of teaching-only contracts grew by 133 per cent between 2003 and 2006. The head of quality, learning and teaching explained that ‘some people are on teaching-only contracts because they have got to the point where their research career is not blossoming’.²⁸

In Australia the first proposed version of a research performance measurement framework for universities (the RQF) led to widespread thinking about how to ‘reduce the denominator’ – or in other words, how to remove academics who did not have good research track records from the total pool being audited in order to increase the average outputs per staff member.

25 Don Aitkin (1997) ‘Education in Australia: its structure, context and evolution’ in Sharpham and Harman, op. cit., p. 46.

26 AUT, op. cit., p. 2.

27 Esther Oxford (2008) ‘A lesser breed?’, *Times Higher Education*, 21 January.

28 Quoted in Oxford, *ibid.*

The pressure around research performance is partly a result of growing government insistence that public research funds should be directed to areas of proven quality rather than distributed evenly across an expanding sector. Until recently the focus has been on concentrating research scholarships and research infrastructure funding in the most research intensive universities. But with government plans for continued growth in student numbers, some are suggesting that Commonwealth Grant Scheme (CGS) student funding could be disaggregated into funds to support teaching and funds to support research.²⁹ In this scenario, universities or departments with little research activity might lose the research funding, and might be expected to effectively become 'teaching-focused'. Andrew Norton at the Grattan Institute is arguing in favour of this development on cost and efficiency grounds. Looking at estimates of the teaching costs at both universities and the largest private provider, the Navitas group, Norton concludes that 'it follows from these numbers that we could make undergraduate education cheaper if we offered it through teaching-only institutions that did not have to pay for academic time spent on research'.³⁰

The Threshold Standards for Australian higher education providers require that academic staff 'are active in scholarship that inform [sic] their teaching' (1.4), while a university must demonstrate 'sustained scholarship that informs teaching and learning in all fields in which courses of study are offered' (2.5).³¹ Many in the TAFE sector, and from the private providers, are pressing for access to CGS-funded higher education places, and trying to determine what scholarly activities their higher education teachers should undertake to meet these standards.³²

2.2 Rankings and the rise of research

While operating in a more indirect fashion, one could argue that the growing significance of international university rankings has had an even more powerful effect of the same kind. It is widely acknowledged that the institutional rankings are skewed towards research rather than other measures of quality such as the student experience, or even student learning.³³ One of the most widely respected and influential, the Shanghai Jiao Tong Academic Ranking of World Universities, focuses exclusively on research performance. Australian universities feel obliged to compete in these rankings not least because they are used in major international student markets to determine university selection. The experience of these international students may well be determined by the quality of teaching in a commerce degree staffed with many 'research-inactive' academics, but they see the value of this degree as dependent on the status of research at their university, even if in fact this status rests on research in the biomedical sciences. The idea that fee-paying students should be enrolled in large numbers in non research-active parts of the university in order to provide revenue to support five-star researchers in resource-strapped science disciplines is alive and well in many Australian universities.

29 DEEWR (2010) 'Consultation Paper for the Review of Higher Education Base Funding' December, p. 8.

30 Andrew Norton (2011) 'Paying for higher education is not popular', *The Age*, 28 June. See also Andrew Norton (2012), *Mapping Australian higher education*, Grattan Institute, Melbourne.

31 *Commonwealth of Australia, Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency Act 2011* (CTH) Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards).

32 Interview with Sandra Walls, Executive Director Learning and Academic Affairs, Box Hill TAFE, 16 October 2012.

33 Simon Marginson (2007) 'Global university rankings: implications in general and for Australia', *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*, 29(2), pp. 131-142.

The placing of research performance above any other kind of performance has since permeated all sorts of university decisions. For example, faculties finding themselves in financial difficulties requiring some kind of redundancy program are often relying on individual research performance as the grounds on which staff will be selected for redundancy. There have been significant numbers of media statements about some research-inactive staff being transferred to 'teaching-only' positions. The University of Sydney's 2011 announcement about how it would select academic staff for redundancy illustrates the point, but it is not an isolated case. The only criteria to be used were research outputs recognised by Excellence in Research for Australia (ERA). Academics opposing the process wrote: 'Rather than research *and* teaching constituting the measure by which staff not "pulling their weight" are to be identified, the DCP [Draft Change Proposal] makes it clear that academics will be assessed *purely* on the basis of their publications ("outputs") between 1 January 2009 and 4 November 2011... Academics with three or fewer publications will be eligible for punitive action – being reassigned to teaching-only roles (professionally disastrous in a research university), offered pre-retirement contracts or voluntary redundancies, or, as a last resort, being sacked'.³⁴

What the ERA exercise allowed, together with each university's own criteria for identifying research-active staff, was the 'objective' identification of a group who needed to be managed in new ways – either performance managed to improve research activity, or in many cases transferred to teaching-only roles. While there is little direct evidence about the impact of these transfers on the quality of teaching and learning there are two obvious downsides. First, it so clearly illustrates the dominant university culture in which more teaching can be seen as a punishment for poor performance in research. Second, at the individual level it is a process that is hardly likely to inspire devotion to teaching. The extent to which we all take for granted the primacy of research skills becomes apparent when the opposite is imagined: that those with poor teaching results should be targeted for redundancy or transferred to research-only positions where they can do little harm to students.

The transfer of teaching and research academic staff to a teaching-only classification for reporting purposes has also occurred without any necessary change in their duties. Between 2009 and 2010 a small number of universities reported to DIISRTE a sharp increase in the percentage of 'teaching-only' appointments – from less than five per cent to over 30 per cent in some cases.³⁵ In these cases there was no provision in the relevant Enterprise Agreements for teaching-focused appointments. What this illustrates is that formally reported data for the sector on 'teaching-only' numbers is probably a very unreliable guide to the underlying reality.

The importance of research in defining the standing of a university in the new unified national system also led to the genuine development of previously teaching-focused staff into creative and productive researchers. Most of the new universities created by the Dawkins reforms rightly seized the opportunity to develop the research capability of their academic staff both by providing research development opportunities and appointing new staff with research credentials.

34 Sydney University Academics, *New Matilda* <http://newmatilda.com/2011/12/05/sydney-university-academics-speak-out>

35 DIISRTE Higher Education Data <http://www.olt.gov.au/resource-teaching-focused-academic-appointments>

In the two decades since the creation of the national unified system, perhaps the majority of staff in the new universities have felt that research should be their priority. As Coates et al. conclude from a survey of Australian academics, 'it appears that the majority of academics aspire to a research career', even though most of them will, in all likelihood, spend most, if not all, of their time doing teaching.³⁶

The contradictory trends at work are nicely illustrated by the dramatic changes occurring at the University of Canberra (UC), a former College of Advanced Education where many staff did not hold PhDs. The latest five-year university plan (2007–2012) laid out a process of 'academic renewal' designed to lift UC into the top third in the sector on educational measures, and the top half in research measures. A central strategy for achieving this is development of a very different academic workforce profile, focused explicitly on research strength. As the Vice-Chancellor described it: 'UC's various reforms were introduced to boost our academic performance and make us more attractive to a certain kind of academic, who wants to rise to the top in a shorter time than has been normal for the last generation or two and who is willing to back their own talent, in return for material reward'.³⁷ In order to achieve this UC has adopted a distinctive academic career structure involving fast track promotion to Level D for academics who meet the research criteria. The core 'academic renewal strategy' includes: high pay, high performance, smoother early career progression, and Level D as the career grade. Academics are to be classified as assistant professor with only 6 increments (covering Levels B and C) or associate professor, using the US nomenclature.³⁸

In 2009 all academic staff were assessed as either T-R (teaching and research) or T-P (teaching-professionals), with the latter required to retain the old lecturer nomenclature. Agreement was reached that assistant professors will be employed on 'continuing contingent' contracts that were UC's version of the US seven year tenure track approach. Within seven years they would need to be promoted to associate professor in the normal way. The category of teaching-professional would cease to exist at the end of 2012, with those staff either successful in moving into the T-R stream (by becoming research-active) or being made redundant.³⁹

Underpinning this plan for UC was a vision of a relatively small university that would be part of larger 'system' that included a polytechnic and a pathways college, both with a teaching-only staff profile. This strategy failed within the ACT, but in October 2012 UC announced a partnership with Holmesglen Institute of TAFE in Melbourne and Brisbane's Metropolitan South Institute of TAFE. In 2013 UC will co-locate with Holmesglen forming a University of Canberra campus in Melbourne – what the Director of Holmesglen has described as a 'polytechnic university'.⁴⁰ The Government has not agreed to provide CSPs for this venture at this point, but requests for Commonwealth funding for this type of arrangement will undoubtedly continue to be made.

36 Hamish Coates et al. (2009) *The Attractiveness of the Australian Academic Profession: A Comparative Analysis*, ACER, Camberwell, p. 33.

37 Stephen Parker (2010) *Waiting for a crisis: universities and academic work*, paper presented to the Higher Education Workforce Forum, 1–2 December, Sydney.

38 Professor Stephen Parker, *Academic Renewal at the University of Canberra (so far)* www.aheia.edu.au/sd-images/6084444

39 *ibid.*

40 Emma Macdonald (2012) 'UC reinvents itself with partnership', *The Age*, 17 October.

3. The impact of teaching quality funding and accountability

While not wishing to suggest that major change in Australian universities only happens in response to clear policy and funding signals from the Commonwealth, there can be little doubt that it was the introduction of the Learning and Teaching Performance Fund (LTPF) which provoked the sector to focus on the quality of university teaching. Between 2006 and 2008 a total of almost \$220 million was allocated in a competitive process to reward those universities ranked highest on the results of the Graduate Destination Survey and Course Experience Questionnaire, and attrition and progression data for students. Across the country those academic staff responsible for the quality of teaching found their voices suddenly sounded louder within their universities, and the significant sums at stake added to the volume.

The highly contested and changeable criteria used for the allocation of these funds, together with the fact that only a minority of universities received funding in any year, meant that only the annual winners felt enthusiastic about the way in which good teaching was being defined and rewarded. Nonetheless, despite widespread criticism of the methodology, the LTPF turned the spotlight on the quality of teaching and learning in Australian universities.

3.1 Teaching-focused roles

One of the earliest and most serious responses to the new focus on the quality of teaching came from The University of Queensland, which in 2006 set up a working party to:

consider whether the teaching roles of academic staff were adequately recognised and rewarded, and whether there was scope to consider a role for teaching-focused appointments within the University.⁴¹

The University of Queensland (UQ) went on to introduce teaching-focused academic appointments, with the same terms of employment as teaching and research staff. The background discussion paper noted that this classification should not be used to deal with staff deemed to be underperforming in relation to the proposed Research Quality Framework (RQF). On the contrary, the demanding criteria for appointment to a teaching-focused position were defined very clearly:

It is not expected that there will be many existing staff in this category in each school who would meet the criteria sufficiently well to move to a teaching-focused appointment. It is expected that, in future, most teaching-focused appointments will be new positions, with the strict criteria made clear in the position descriptions.⁴²

In 2012, 14.6 per cent (239) of those teaching at UQ were classified as 'teaching-only'.⁴³

A similar process of thinking and policy development occurred at Monash University, leading to the creation of 'education-focused' roles in 2009. The term 'education' focused rather than 'teaching' focused was deliberately chosen to

41 The University of Queensland (2007) 'Report of the Working Party on Diversity of Academic Roles', March.

42 *ibid.* p. 12.

43 DIIRSTE Higher Education Data <http://www.olt.gov.au/resource-teaching-focused-academic-appointments>

signal that these are to be staff who are experts in education, as opposed to staff with high teaching loads. As at UQ the objective was to create positions of equal status with teaching and research staff, with emphasis on scholarly approaches to education being the key to promotion at the higher levels.

At Monash, academic staff must apply for an education-focused role as though they were applying for a new job. This in itself sends a strong signal that no 'under-performers' need apply, and makes very clear the criteria to be used at each level of appointment. Since the introduction of the classification there have been two rounds of appointment, with 106 staff successfully transferring.⁴⁴ In 2012 Monash reported a total of 320 teaching-only staff, almost 16 per cent of its teaching workforce.⁴⁵ Flinders University has now adopted a similar process of appointment and the Monash 'education-focused' terminology, and after the 2012 round of applications a total of 55 staff have been appointed to these roles. Notably, Flinders University has decided that education-focused staff should *not* be reported to DIIRSTE as teaching-only because they will all have some research in their workload.

These innovations were not confined to research intensive universities. Over the same period as UQ's policy changes, Southern Cross University (SCU) has been developing an academic staff work profile (and accompanying policies for performance review and promotion) based on the Boyer Scholarship framework. SCU now has a mix of Teaching and Research Scholars, Teaching Scholars and Research Scholars. Teaching Scholar positions have been advertised and recruited where a case is made for the role, with a total of 58 in 2012, or 20.7 per cent of all teaching staff. SCU emphasises that these roles are Teaching Scholar roles and not 'teaching-only' and some staff in these positions are publishing their curriculum and pedagogical work.⁴⁶

The details of how teaching-focused appointments are made in different universities are discussed more fully in a later section of this report. But their appearance does, in part at least, reflect a response to demands for increased accountability for the quality of teaching.

44 Interview with Professor Ed Byrne AO, Vice-Chancellor, Monash University, 25 September 2012.

45 DIIRSTE Higher Education Data <http://www.olt.gov.au/resource-teaching-focused-academic-appointments>

46 Personal correspondence from Bill McGillivray, Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Southern Cross University, 27 November 2012.

3.2 Promotions policies

Most universities have not – yet – adopted such a clearly elaborated approach to teaching-focused appointments, but there has been a sector-wide focus on revising promotions criteria to recognise high quality teaching, though many still believe that this is only appropriate for the lower levels of promotion. An Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee (AVCC) funded project to research promotions policy and practice in Australian universities published in 2006 found that 'the majority of universities do not allow promotion to Level D/D+ or E based on teaching attainment only'.⁴⁷ Yet the externally driven pressure for greater accountability about the quality of teaching and learning has led most Australian universities to review their academic promotions criteria to ensure a promotion route that recognises applications based on teaching excellence – even if relatively little progress has been made in determining plausible learning-focused measures of such excellence. In order to be eligible for each year of LTPF funding, Australian universities had to show evidence 'of probation and promotion practices which include effectiveness as a teacher'.⁴⁸ The most common change triggered by this government pressure was the adoption of a framework for promotion which acknowledged at least three areas of performance – research, teaching and administration or service – requiring applicants to nominate two in which they have evidence of performance at the level being sought. It is now theoretically possible, in nearly every university, to be promoted without a strong disciplinary research track record.

Nonetheless, the context in which these apparent changes are being made is one of widespread, historically formed scepticism about real change. In 1995 a major survey of Australian academics painted a stark picture:

Some 90% of staff said that research should be highly valued by their university; and 84% agreed that it was highly valued. By contrast, while 95% said that teaching should be highly valued, only 37% agreed that it was.⁴⁹

This is the case⁵⁰ even if evidence suggests that academics who apply for promotion on the basis of teaching excellence are not at in fact disadvantaged by this compared to those claiming research excellence.⁵¹

One key question raised by the creation of a separate teaching-focused classification is whether this will be more effective in creating genuine teaching-focused career paths than revisions to general academic promotions criteria, and more persuasive of real cultural change in the face of such continued scepticism.

47 Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee (2006) *The great barrier myth: an investigation of promotions policy and practice in Australian Universities*, The University of South Australia, Adelaide.

48 LTPF Participation Requirements.

49 Higher Education Academy (HEA) and GENIE Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning, University of Leicester (2009), *Reward and recognition of teaching in higher education Interim Report*, HEA, February, p. 5.

50 Bexley et al., op. cit.

51 This was a significant finding from a major national survey of academic careers undertaken in 1996. See Belinda Probert, Peter Ewer and Kim Whiting (1998) *Gender Pay Equity in Australian Higher Education*, NTEU, p. 59. See also Sandra Wills (2010) 'Teachers DO get promoted' <http://www.slideshare.net/Sandrawills/reward-recognition>

4. Any role for ‘consumer’ power?

In an analysis of the rise of teaching-only positions in the UK, it has been suggested that student concerns with the quality of their education have played a role. In 2005 the UK government introduced the National Student Survey, which allows students to name universities and departments where teaching falls short of their expectations.

Leading research-led universities were once felt to be largely immune to criticism of their teaching quality, thanks in large part to the tenacity of the “good research means good teaching” theory. But these institutions found themselves under fire amid claims that they were using postdoctoral students to run tutorials because the academics were too busy doing research.⁵²

Bristol University was one place where the disgruntled students got organised to protest about the poor quality of teaching. In 2009, 600 students signed a complaint pointing out that ‘revenue per student from tuition fees has increased and we simply ask that the quality of our education be improved accordingly’. Their concerns would be familiar in Australia – including the withdrawal of tutorials or their increase to groups of 30, lack of contact with academics, and essay marking by other students rather than academics.⁵³

It is important to acknowledge, however, that the student cultures in the UK and Australia are not the same. In a 2007 report for the UK Higher Education Academy (HEA), *Linking Teaching and Research in Disciplines and Departments*, the authors note that student survey data in the UK suggests that UK students see research-active staff as remote, with research interests unrelated to what they were teaching. By contrast they report that Australian students see research-active staff in their courses as evidence that their teachers are up to date in their disciplines and more engaged in what they are teaching.⁵⁴

Equally important, it has been argued very persuasively that students are unlikely to be a powerful pressure group for improved teaching because their focus is rarely on the key outcome – namely learning. The US experience of the power of markets in higher education shows that there ‘is no consumer movement that understands and makes educational values more of a factor in college choice’.⁵⁵ Nor is there any evidence that the quality of learning in an institution determines its success in the market place. The education market favours selectivity, brand names, visibility, and major research portfolios.⁵⁶ For example, in Australia the ATAR score (Australian Tertiary Admission Entrance Rank) required for entry into a particular course/program is commonly used as shorthand for the quality of that course when, in fact, it is determined by supply and demand of places in particular courses. As a result of this perception, universities go to great lengths to manipulate this score to keep it as high as possible.

The Australian government’s commitment to the establishment of the *MyUniversity* website is intended to help students make informed choices

52 Oxford, op. cit.

53 Alastair Jamieson (2009) ‘Students stage rebellion over quality of teaching after tuition fee rise’, *The Telegraph*, 10 May.

54 Alan Jenkins, Mick Healey and Roger Zetter (2007) *Linking Teaching and Research in Disciplines and Departments*, HEA.

55 Zemsky, op. cit., p. 179.

56 *ibid.* No example of improving competitiveness by demonstrating that its students learned differently (except perhaps Brown in the 1950s), p. 179.

between different universities, but in the absence of respected and accepted measures of the quality of teaching and learning, it is not clear that this will assist in the development of informed consumer pressure.

From a student perspective this does not mean students do not know when they are being taught well or badly. Indeed, students report with great consistency the things they value which are in short supply – such as timely and useful feedback, small class sizes and opportunities to interact with academics.⁵⁷ But Australian student choice about where to study is primarily determined by a combination of perceived university status and the employment outcomes linked to particular courses. On the whole students do not understand the somewhat arcane language of teaching and learning quality, and they accept the importance of university rankings without fully understanding that these measure research quality not teaching quality.⁵⁸

5. Institutional variation

While the creation of the national unified system led to high levels of convergence in the self-characterisation and ambitions of Australian universities over the last 20 years, in reality our universities remain quite varied in their workforce profiles. Within many universities there are significant areas or disciplines where little research is carried out. For example, many faculties of business or commerce have struggled to find academics to teach professional skills such as accounting, and have been happy to employ those with professional experience but little in the way of research credentials or interests. The same is true of many parts of the health sciences where professional clinical experience has been far more important than a PhD until very recently. In this sense there is nothing new about the notion of teaching-focused academics in Australian higher education. Many of these staff will, however, have found their career trajectories fairly limited, and will have experienced the reality of rarely being seen as the stars of their institution.

When it became clear over the last five years that significant public funding for research was, in future, to be allocated on a performance basis rather than according to student load, research intensive universities did not hesitate to suggest that institutional differentiation did already exist, and that some universities were in effect research-inactive or teaching-only.⁵⁹

The Bradley Review, with its emphasis on expanding participation in higher education, naturally led to a further policy emphasis on the desirability of greater differentiation within the sector. The first implementation of individual university 'Compacts' in 2010 was designed to elicit clear, individual mission statements and goals that would not all announce that 'we aim to be an internationally excellent, globally competitive, research-led university'. The existence of specific equity funding encouraged some universities to focus on the objective of teaching less well-prepared students in their Compact mission statement.

The Bradley Review also stimulated attempts to define a more coherent tertiary education policy framework, with the creation of diverse 'pathways' into higher education. This has had a major impact, with growing numbers of students being given credit towards higher education qualifications for study undertaken at TAFE colleges, or at private pathway colleges such as those operated by Navitas.

57 National Union of Students (2012) Education Quality Survey Report.

58 Interview with Donherra Walmsley, President, National Union of Students, 10 October 2012.

59 Group of Eight (2010) *Backgrounder 15: Research*, Canberra, October.

In several states TAFE colleges now offer both bachelor degrees and masters degrees, taught by staff who are not required to have research degrees or to undertake research of any kind.

Universities enter arrangements with a broad range of what are sometimes called 'third-party providers' (such as private education providers, companies and industry bodies as well as TAFE institutions) to offer both undergraduate and postgraduate higher education. These third parties may offer only one or two subjects or an entire course of study, and may do this from a range of different locations, including campuses managed or owned by the third party.

The changing nature of the workforce now responsible for educating bachelor degree students is illustrated by Deakin University's 'Deakin at your Doorstep' program, clearly designed to meet the higher education equity and growth objectives of the Bradley reforms. Under this program, regional students can complete an associate degree at a partner TAFE campus such as Bairnsdale, Dandenong or Swan Hill, and receive credit for up to 18 months of a full degree to be completed at Deakin. In a similar vein, Southern Cross University has established a pathways college working closely with two TAFE colleges in the region, to offer generic associate degrees on all campuses (and by distance) with articulation into Southern Cross degree programs.⁶⁰

In Victoria, Box Hill Institute now offers 11 vocationally-focused degree programs quite apart from its sub-degree pathway programs. It has a small higher education teacher workforce, some of whom teach both in higher education and vocational education. The differentiation of the higher education workforce by type of institution is well illustrated by Box Hill's approach to preparing their higher education (HE) teachers. Initially, the Institute enrolled their HE teachers in the Graduate Certificate in Higher Education being run by a local university. However, they discovered that it was not well suited to the needs of their teachers. For example, the course's focus on strategies for teaching very large classes was irrelevant for Box Hill where small classes and very personalised learning are some of the defining characteristics of the student experience. As a result, Box Hill has worked with Melbourne University's LH Martin Centre to develop a Tertiary Teaching Certificate designed for the kind of teaching and learning that occurs in a TAFE based program.⁶¹

With their ambition to achieve polytechnic status and CGS funding for bachelor degrees, institutions like Box Hill are focused on developing policy for the career development of HE teachers. These teachers have lower teaching loads than their VET counterparts in recognition of the greater level of preparation required for HE teaching. It is generally assumed that those teaching in the first or second year of a degree can be 'teaching-only', but that those teaching in the third year need a 'scholarly discipline focus'. Many HE teachers value their TAFE location and have no desire to turn themselves into researchers in the university mold, but others will want to start doing disciplinary research and begin to identify strongly with their university counterparts.⁶²

60 William MacGillivray (2012) *Development of Southern Cross University College*, paper presented at OECD Institutional Management in Higher Education conference, Attaining and Sustaining Mass Higher Education, Paris, October.

61 Interview with Sandra Walls, Executive Director Learning and Academic Affairs and Dr Christine Hepperle, Higher Education and Learning Partnerships Manager, Box Hill Institute, 16 October 2012.

62 *ibid.*

The debates developing around the growth of higher education provision in TAFE provide an interesting perspective on the key elements of good teaching needed in teaching-focused appointees. A recent review asks 'how TAFE higher education teachers can be supported to engage in scholarship' and 'what this means in relation to research, and TAFE's role in research'. The report concludes that:

It is crucial that TAFE teachers who teach higher education also engage in scholarship and they need support to do so, otherwise students will be short-changed. This is an issue for government, tertiary education quality assurance and staff development agencies, mixed-sector TAFE institutes, and also teachers who...have very strong feelings about this issue.⁶³

As yet, relatively little has been written about what exactly this 'scholarship' involves, despite the central place the concept has in distinguishing higher education from other levels of education.

6. Disciplinary differentiation

The development of teaching-focused academic appointments has not simply been determined by institutional strategy. It also has distinctive disciplinary characteristics. As discussed above, there have always been professionally oriented disciplines where disciplinary research has been less important in the appointment of academic staff than industry or professional experience.

There is, nonetheless, a new form of disciplinary differentiation in the appointment of teaching-focused academics which is, paradoxically, most visible in the most research intensive universities. It is a development that bears particular scrutiny because it has been driven at the discipline level by a desire to sustain the highest international research rankings at the same time as improving the quality of undergraduate teaching by devoting more specialist resources to it.

Once again, this development is not confined to Australian higher education. A clear example can be found at University College London (UCL) in the Economics Department, an internationally top-ranking research department. Ten years ago UCL introduced a Teaching Fellow career pathway that allows academics to be promoted up to Grade 9 (Principal Teaching Fellow, the equivalent of Reader or Australian Associate Professor level). In the Economics Department the conclusion was reached that the achievement of their research objectives was compromised by the teaching requirements of the undergraduate program. The Department therefore agreed to employ two teaching fellows in 2011, and another in 2012, and plans to employ more. These appointments were made through an open process of advertisement no different from other academic appointments, but the significantly higher teaching loads are clearly specified. For teaching and research academics this is 140 hours per year, while the teaching fellows will undertake 240 hours per year.⁶⁴

63 Leesa Wheelahan, Gavin Moodie, Stephen Billett and Ann Kelly (2009) *Higher Education in TAFE*, NCVER Monograph Series, 01/2009, DEEWR, p. 38.

64 Personal correspondence with Professor Wendy Carlin, Department of Economics, University College London, 7 September 2012.

The key feature of this development is that research-inactive staff are not being transferred into these teaching-only roles, and that these are positions which involve significantly different kinds of workloads where expert teaching is the most valued component. In Australia there is little evidence yet of such clearly differentiated teaching loads,⁶⁵ though the current round of enterprise bargaining will surely bring this to the surface. While on the surface it might be suggested that this category reflects a return to the time of full time tutors and senior tutors as the first step in an academic career, the environment has changed so dramatically that the comparison is probably misleading.

While this is purely speculation at this point, it is possible that the appointment of teaching-focused academics in some instances is linked to the perceived difficulties of the undergraduate program. Economics is now an extremely technically-demanding discipline, very different from that of 20 or 30 years ago. Even the best-prepared students need excellent teaching to succeed.

In Australia an approach similar to economics at UCL can be seen in some science disciplines within the Group of Eight universities. In the School of Physics at The University of New South Wales (UNSW) the competing pressures of research ranking competition, growing class sizes, and a demanding curriculum has also led to the creation of a new role – First Year Physics Director. This is the School's response to managing the combined objectives of research excellence and teaching excellence.⁶⁶

Similar developments have occurred in Departments of Mathematics and Statistics in a number of Group of Eight (Go8) universities. The Universities of Melbourne, Sydney and Adelaide have all made formal appointments of first year mathematics coordinators, with the Science Faculty at Adelaide appointing first year directors for all four of its fundamental science disciplines.⁶⁷ Similarly, the Universities of Queensland and Wollongong have formally appointed directors of first year chemistry.⁶⁸

The concept of director of first year teaching is longstanding in several science faculties in the Go8, but such appointments have fallen in and out of favour. What appears to be different in their current incarnation is the belief that, in different ways, these appointments are being accorded greater status and career opportunities. These questions are pursued below in more detail, but here it is the fact that such approaches appear largely confined to the teaching of science in research intensive universities which is notable. The challenging nature of the curriculum appears to be a factor, and the largely compulsory nature of much first year science, together with the large component of service teaching on which the financial health of many disciplines relies. At the same time, there are increasing demands for online teaching, formal assessment of student satisfaction and other demands from an increasingly bureaucratic approach to quality management which make 'intuitive, just-in-time adaptive teaching' no longer sustainable.⁶⁹

65 This topic is taken up in Part 2 below.

66 The School of Physics at The University of New South Wales is one of the most well-researched in terms of the gender distribution of roles and duties thanks to the work over many years of Associate Professor Marion Stevens-Kalceff.

67 An important OLT funded project will help to shed light on these developments: *Building Leadership Capacity in University First Year Learning and Teaching in the Mathematical Sciences*, led by Deborah King, Director Mathematics and Statistics Learning Centre at The University of Melbourne.

68 I am most grateful to Professor John Rice, Executive Director, Australian Council of Deans of Science, for sharing information about the growth of teaching-focused positions in Mathematics and Statistics.

69 I am grateful to Sharon Bell, DVC, Charles Darwin University, for this point.

In other words, the stakes are sufficiently high in some discipline areas to provoke serious re-thinking about how to improve first year teaching and learning.

Alongside these interesting developments, it is also apparent from the data that a very significant proportion of all teaching-only appointments now being reported are in health sciences, and represent a simple re-categorisation of existing clinical appointments. Teaching-only staff in health made up 36 per cent of the total of teaching-only staff reported for 2012 by the 14 universities with significant numbers of such staff.⁷⁰ At Monash University 39 per cent of teaching-only staff are in health, while this rises to 59 per cent at UWA, and 63 per cent at UNSW.⁷¹ Teaching-only appointments in education make up another significant proportion in several universities. At The University of Melbourne, for example, where the number of reported teaching-only appointments has increased sharply since the introduction of the teaching specialist category in 2009, 16 per cent in 2012 were in education (a total of 53 staff compared to 143 in health). As in the case of health, this reflects in part the university's decision to make education a graduate program, and to establish the new MTeach as a 'clinical program'. The dean describes the approach in the following way:

There has been a paradigm shift in the last five years in our teacher education programs. They are focused on developing graduates who can meet the needs of individual learners. This is being achieved by linking thinking at the university with our core partnership schools. It comes back to the role of professionals in professional faculties when we are educating graduates for professions.⁷²

While Melbourne's four categories of academic appointment give the dean plenty of scope for the kind of workforce needed to implement this approach to professional education, this should not be seen as a simple plan to define clinical expertise as 'teaching-only' or 'teaching specialist'. On the contrary, the aim is to have teaching and research staff engaged in keeping up their professional skills, and most clinical specialists – including a planned 'clinical professor' – engaged in practice based research. 'Ideally a small number of "teaching specialist" appointments would develop their careers through 'evidence of curriculum development and pedagogical practice, and excellent teaching reports, and I would expect them to write about it'.⁷³

While for some universities teaching-only appointments have been concentrated in clinical and professional programs, others have adopted a strategic university-wide approach to their distribution across all programs. At Bond University for example they are evenly distributed between health, law, management and commerce and society and culture. Similarly, at SCU they are relatively evenly distributed between all disciplines.

70 These are the 14 universities reporting over 15 per cent of their total teaching and research and teaching-only staff as teaching-only in 2012. DIIRSTE Higher Education Data <http://www.olt.gov.au/resource-teaching-focused-academic-appointments>

71 At The University of Queensland a Clinical Academic category was introduced in 2011 to better accommodate staff whose major responsibilities were in clinical teaching.

72 Email correspondence with Professor Field Rickards, Dean of Education, The University of Melbourne, 9 and 13 November 2012.

73 *ibid.*

7. Resistance to teaching-focused appointments

The creation of teaching-focused positions has not been without opposition from within academia. Some of the strongest opposition has come from within the research intensive universities where most academics hold a deep, if not closely examined, belief in the chimerical teaching-research nexus as something that needs to be embodied in individual academics. This belief leads many academics to see the creation of teaching-focused colleagues as a serious undermining of their sense of what a university should be. In January this year (2013), enterprise bargaining at the University of New England (UNE) broke down over staff opposition to the introduction of teaching-only roles.

‘We take that view because it’s the role of an academic to be a scholar and teacher,’ Tim Battin, president of the UNE branch of the NTEU, said. ‘A role of an academic is to inform his or her work in teaching with scholarly activity’.⁷⁴

Opposition has also been mobilised in the newer universities that have positioned themselves as heirs to the traditional university with a shared rhetoric of ‘research-led teaching’. From the perspective of this latter group, the teaching-research nexus (interpreted in many different ways) is what distinguishes universities, new and old, from other higher education providers and TAFE institutions. The creation of large numbers of teaching-only positions is seen as a threat to the hard-won, ‘unified’ national system, likely to lead to its re-bifurcation along pre-Dawkins lines.

Disciplinary differences again play a part in opposing teaching-focused appointments. Language departments in many universities have bitterly resisted the introduction of teaching specialists with no research role, arguing that this makes a university indistinguishable from a Berlitz school of languages. There are notable examples where major universities have transformed the teaching of languages by setting up parallel centres or institutes that teach languages with a primary focus on language competency, allowing very large numbers of students from different disciplines to study them. But these are still relatively rare, and strongly resisted by most Arts faculties.

The third source of resistance has been industrial. Until very recently the NTEU has strongly opposed the idea of depriving any academics of the right to do research. A mixture of teaching and research (the 40:40:20 model) has become the well established base from which bargaining over workloads is undertaken across the sector. Being moved to a teaching-only position in this culture implied a form of punishment or loss of status, which the NTEU opposed.

Paradoxically, many academic staff have long felt that it would be a very good thing from an industrial point of view if dedication to and excellence in teaching were properly recognised and rewarded, but they have been sceptical about the possibility in a culture that privileges research to such a great extent. A major UK study into how universities recognise and reward good teaching concluded:

74 Kylar Loussikian ‘Dispute disrupts pay talks at University of New England’, *The Australian*, 23 January 2013.

teaching career paths within universities do not have the same status as their more research-oriented analogues...The interview data suggest that the lower status that is often accorded to teaching only posts (and teaching only career paths) persists even when pay, conditions, contracts etc. are brought into line with standard lecturer posts.⁷⁵

As more teaching-focused positions are created, and as revised promotions policies signal the possibility of teaching-focused career paths, Australian academics will be watching to see if the reality matches the rhetorical enthusiasm for teaching. The promotion of teaching-focused academics along with other tangible forms of respect has the potential to reduce the scepticism of teaching enthusiasts.

⁷⁵ Higher Education Academy (HEA) and GENIE Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning, University of Leicester, *op. cit.*, p. 32.



Part 2

Teaching-focused appointments and the quality of teaching and learning

This overview of the emergence of teaching-focused positions in Australian higher education has suggested that there are several different pressures and approaches at work. What kind of impact is each approach likely to have on the quality of teaching and learning within any particular institution, but also on the wider culture of academic esteem? The Base Funding Review Report (2011) concluded after its sector wide consultations that there is ongoing debate about ‘whether too much effort and importance have been placed on research activities at the expense of teaching’, and a noted a widespread perception that universities continue to undervalue teaching.⁷⁶ These are complex questions about workplace culture, formal policies and procedures, the professionalisation of university teaching, interpretations of the teaching-research nexus, and the changing nature of academic identities.

1.1 The position description and selection process

The best examples of current teaching or education-focused position descriptions reveal enormous improvements in the way some universities now define the qualities needed for excellent teaching, at all levels. La Trobe University, for example, developed a promotions matrix that identifies the kind of evidence that could support claims about teaching excellence at each level of appointment. The University of Queensland provides a policy on Criteria for Academic Performance that clearly specifies expectations from Level A to E for the four different types of appointment, including Teaching-Focused academic staff. Monash University’s guidelines for education-focused candidates Level B–E are accompanied by very useful advice on how to address the qualitative education performance standards. Southern Cross University provides clear guidance on the scholarly expectations for its teaching-focused appointees, including definitions of 4 different levels of achievement from satisfactory to distinguished.⁷⁷ These modest documents represent the embedding into mainstream academic life of what was only a decade ago considered to be specialist and marginalised knowledge about teaching and learning in higher education. These kinds of position descriptions and promotion criteria would lend strong support to the argument that having such academics on your staff should be seen as a positive indicator for the quality of student learning in any university ranking scheme.

These explicit descriptions of what might constitute evidence of high quality teaching at different levels are essential for several reasons. They prevent academics arguing that there are no serious standards against which to make judgments about quality and performance. Many academics like to talk dismissively of teaching awards as being no better than popularity polls – with those who give high marks, set easy work and/or tell good jokes doing better than those with high standards. As Mark Israel warns, award winners should be prepared for ‘disappointment’:

⁷⁶ DEEWR (2011) *The Higher Education Base Funding Review: Final Report*.

⁷⁷ SCU Academic Promotions Policy <http://policies.scu.edu.au/view.current.php?id=00026>

Remarkably, some may think less of you as a result of the award, perhaps suggesting that recognising, rewarding and celebrating teaching is a misguided pursuit. Whatever the reasons, their silence or, even worse, their barbed comments can be hurtful.⁷⁸

Research into rewarding good teaching in the UK noted that 'Interviewees felt that a major obstacle to the reward and recognition of teaching in higher education was the lack of any clear and universal method for assessing teaching excellence'.⁷⁹

The definition of excellence in teaching and learning is a very important one, and an area that needs some debate and benchmarking if institutions are to consistently use teaching and learning criteria for promotion.⁸⁰

The development of position descriptions and promotions criteria is one way in which a deeper understanding of teaching and learning is shared and embedded in the culture of universities, together with an understanding of the kind of professional development that can best prepare academics for tertiary teaching.⁸¹

The recent growth of teaching-focused appointments has probably been, in general, more opportunistic than strategic thus far. The need for a more strategic approach will be discussed in the final section of this report, but current appointments are occurring in very different institutional contexts. In some the overall structure of the preferred academic workforce is clearly articulated. For example, in those universities seeking to retain or improve their existing research rankings, it is explicitly noted as at Flinders University, that 'the majority of academic staff will engage in balanced teaching and research roles'.⁸² Similarly, Monash University allowed for the possibility of 10 per cent of staff to be appointed as 'education-focused', though only 5 per cent have been transferred as of 2012.⁸³

At the other end of the spectrum, those regional universities that are focused on raising participation rates by establishing pathway colleges or entering into formal partnerships with TAFEs to provide diplomas and associate degrees, may adopt a workforce profile in which possibly the majority of staff teaching their undergraduates will be teaching-focused. In these cases, much of the work to be done by these teachers will focus on providing extra study support for students who are less well prepared for higher education. Victoria University has announced the introduction of low-ATAR entry Career Start bachelor degrees from 2014. The 'transitions pedagogy' that will characterise these degrees will 'include extra support for the larger numbers of less well prepared first year students to be sourced from both TAFE and university staff'.⁸⁴ To evaluate the impact on the quality of undergraduate teaching and learning of the increasing

78 Mark Israel (2011) *The key to the door? Teaching awards in Australian higher education*, Australian Learning and Teaching Council Fellowship Final Report, p. 4.

79 Higher Education Academy (HEA) and GENIE Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning, University of Leicester, op. cit., p. 48.

80 Higher Education Academy (HEA) and GENIE Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning, University of Leicester (2009) *Reward and recognition in HE Policies and Implementation*, HEA, p. 13.

81 In this context the Higher Education Academy funded project *International inter-university benchmarking of policies, processes and perceptions of promotion (IIB-AP)* led by two UK and two Australian universities should make an important contribution.

82 Flinders University (2011) 'Flexibility in Academic Work Policy', 28 July; see also University of Canberra discussion above.

83 Interview with Professor Ed Byrne AO, Vice-Chancellor, Monash University, 25 September 2012.

84 Andrew Trounson (2012) 'VU opts for 'seamless qualifications'', *The Australian*, 22 November.

involvement of TAFE staff we again need to look at the selection criteria used in the appointment of those who will teach in higher education programs, the method of appointment, and the nature of their specialist skills in learning support, as well as the culture of longer term professional development.

Workload measurement and allocation is a hot topic in most universities as they gear up for the current round of enterprise bargaining. The creation of teaching-focused positions raises many questions about workload. Should teaching-focused academics do more teaching than their colleagues, or should they be given an equivalent notional research time allocation for scholarly work in education? Might teaching-focused academics be expected to teach in all three semesters of a new three semester system? At UCL the expectations about higher teaching loads in economics are explicit and significant, amounting to almost 60 per cent higher teaching hours. There is little such clarity in Australian agreements at this point. At Flinders University, an education-focused staff member 'will undertake *additional* teaching responsibilities and have a greater concentration on teaching-related activities and on the scholarship of teaching, compared to academic staff in *standard* teaching and research positions' (emphasis added).⁸⁵ Similarly in the Go8 the policy emphasis on a scholarly approach to teaching is evident rather than any focus on increased teaching hours, even though Deans are known to be keen to see the teaching hours increased.⁸⁶ Meanwhile at Charles Darwin University teaching-focused academic staff members 'are expected predominantly to teach and engage in the scholarly advancement of teaching', compared to research-active academic staff members, whose 'workload allocation will nominally be based upon 40% of allocated time spent on teaching and 60% of allocated time spent on non-teaching activities'.⁸⁷

For the growing number of higher education providers outside the university system similar debates are occurring. How much time is needed for the more scholarly approach to teaching expected of higher education teachers in TAFE?

The adoption of a sophisticated policy framework for defining teaching-focused appointments, where this has happened, is a positive development. However, it is equally important to look at how staff are appointed to these positions in order to judge the real effect on teaching standards. For example, if staff who are research-inactive are simply converted into teaching-focused roles in order to 'improve' research rankings, this may well reduce the quality of teaching overall.

In some universities appointment to a teaching-focused role occurs through a process that is as demanding as any other application for an academic position, or promotion. At Flinders University, where such positions are generally fixed term transfers, there is an annual round in which academics can submit expressions of interest. The process is rigorous, requiring staff to make a case about their past achievements; their past and future 'professional development as an educator'; and how they (in an education-focused role) would contribute to their school's key objectives. Decisions about the quality of these expressions of interest are made by a Specialised Academic Appointments Committee, chaired by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic). The committee includes at least one further DVC, the four Executive Deans as well as an external expert. In the 2012 round the external expert was the DVC (A) from ANU. Following the 2012 round, a total

85 Flinders University (2011) 'Flexibility in Academic Work Policy', 2.2.1.

86 Interview with Professor Marnie Hughes-Warrington, Deputy Vice-Chancellor Academic, The Australian National University, 26 October 2012

87 Charles Darwin University (2012) 'Teaching standards and academic requirements'.

of approximately 55 appointments to education-focused roles had been made.⁸⁸ Unusually, Flinders reports these education-focused staff to DIISRTE as teaching and research staff since they are clearly expected to be active in research.

A process like this suggests that such appointments will have a positive impact on the quality of teaching and learning. It stands in stark contrast to the simple reclassification of staff on the basis of their comparative research performance. It is also very different to the approach adopted by the NTEU branch at the University of Western Sydney which campaigned for the transfer of existing casual employees to teaching-focused roles even where such staff did not have PhDs or evidence of student satisfaction.⁸⁹ The industrial basis for such a campaign (improved employment conditions for existing casual employees) makes perfect sense, but it does not contribute greatly to raising the status of teaching or the quality of learning. Similarly, the University of Sydney's enterprise agreement suggests the local NTEU branch successfully campaigned for casual employees performing at least 60 per cent of a full time teaching load to be 'offered a fixed term position in a teaching-focused role'.⁹⁰

An approach that involves the 'conversion' of teaching and research academics, or sessional academics into teaching-focused roles for either research ranking or industrial purposes is unlikely to have any positive cultural impact on the status of university teaching (indeed the impact might be negative), or lead to improvements in teaching quality. However, there are a number of other variations in the employment conditions of teaching-focused academics that are of potential significance, particularly opportunities for career development.

88 Correspondence from Jane Bromley, Director of HR, Flinders University, 31 August 2012.

89 UWS NTEU newsletter (2012) 'UWS lets down its casual staff once again', 17 July.

90 The University of Sydney Enterprise Agreement 2009-2012, clause 217.

1.2 Real careers?

It is too early to draw any conclusions about the development of teaching-focused careers in Australian universities, compared to the still dominant researcher-teacher career. Indeed, given the increasing differentiation of the expanding sector, it may well prove difficult to generalise across all universities, let alone all 'higher education providers'. Rhetorically at least most universities reject the term 'teaching-only' on the grounds that teaching in higher education is a scholarly activity. Some universities have defined clearly what they mean by 'scholarly', and TAFE higher education teachers are wrestling with it. As yet, however, there is little clarity in most institutions about the relative importance of a scholarly approach to teaching as opposed to a scholarly engagement with the discipline being taught. While a scholarly approach to teaching has been given a far more explicit focus, there is much less focus as yet on what a scholarly approach to teaching a discipline involves – despite the fact that it is this that defines higher education teaching in Australia. There is unlikely to be agreement across all higher education providers. What will be needed at the institutional level is clarity and plausibility. Nonetheless, there are some criteria that can be identified against which to judge these emerging roles, and questions to be asked about the impact of the broader academic culture within which teaching-focused academics will work.

Even where teaching-focused appointments are being made through an open competitive process, this occurs on a continuum from fixed term, internally advertised to continuing, externally advertised contracts. In a minority of universities teaching-focused positions have the same employment conditions as any other academic staff. That is, teaching-focused academics can be appointed as continuing, fixed term, full time or part time, and at Level A to E, with opportunities for promotion through the ranks through the same process available to all other academic staff. A very small number of universities believe that such teaching-focused positions should be advertised externally – the usual method of ensuring that the best possible candidate is appointed to academic positions.⁹¹ Most universities, if not all, now have academic promotions criteria that provide much better opportunities for staff who have focused more on excellence in teaching and the scholarship of teaching rather than disciplinary research.

More widespread at this point is an approach which allows only for fixed term appointments to teaching-focused positions, and which confines applications to existing teaching and research staff.⁹² One assumption behind this more restricted approach seems to be that no one should start their academic career focusing on being a teaching specialist as this will mean they are not properly prepared as disciplinary scholars.⁹³ Australia is not looking to develop younger, teaching-focused academics. As the Flinders University policy puts it:

Appointment to a specialized role will not normally apply to early career academics [Level A and B]... These staff, in the interests of their professional development as academics, will generally be expected to fulfil a balanced teaching and research role.⁹⁴

91 For example Southern Cross University, The University of Queensland.

92 For example Flinders University, The University of Sydney, Monash University.

93 Interview with Dr Deborah King, Director of First Year Mathematics, The University of Melbourne, 31 October 2012. She believes that the appointee must have had a proper research training in order to understand the importance and role of disciplinary research – even if the appointee ceases to be able to do disciplinary research him-or-herself.

94 Flinders University (2011), 'Flexibility in Academic Work Policy,' 28 July.

A danger with this approach is that it again may suggest that teaching-focused roles are for those who have failed to maintain their research trajectory.

There is also a general preference for fixed term appointments, of between three and five years—sometimes with provision for re-appointment. This raises obvious questions about what kind of ‘career’ is then possible. The fixed term, teaching-focused appointment has, in some instances, been used for research-inactive academics as a step on the way to their ‘retirement’, leading the NTEU to insist that ‘some universities need to stop using teaching-focused roles as a transition to retrenchment’, or as ‘the end of an academic’s career progression’.⁹⁵ Nonetheless there is a lot of policy about moving from teaching and research to teaching-focused roles, and almost none on moving from a teaching-focused role to a teaching and research position.⁹⁶ The assumption seems to be that this is going to be a one-way street.⁹⁷ This is perhaps one of the downsides of adopting distinct classifications rather than implementing much greater flexibility of work allocation within a more generic academic role.

While no one has said as much, it is hard not to conclude that at this point there is a widespread feeling that it is risky to provide continuing employment in a teaching-focused position. Might they not cease to be a serious discipline scholar, capable of providing ‘research-led teaching’? Is there a danger that teaching-focused positions constitute a ‘backwater’ that could easily become stagnant? Are we not yet confident of our capacity to provide appropriate performance management of these emerging roles?⁹⁸

The most powerful signal about the career potential of a teaching-focused role is undoubtedly promotion. Within a university the accepted marker of experience, expertise and performance is level and ultimately title, and no amount of prizes or awards can compensate for the absence of promotion. Promotion is particularly important given the relatively junior levels at which most reported teaching-only positions are being created. For the 14 universities with significant numbers of teaching-only staff (over 15 per cent of all teaching staff), 44 per cent are at Level B; 27 per cent at Level A, and 22 per cent at Level C. Interestingly, these staff are just as likely to be male as female (almost exactly 50 per cent each of the total). Examined more closely, however, the women are significantly more likely to be at Level A or B, while at Levels C, D and E there are many more men than women.⁹⁹ In this, the gender distribution of teaching-focused academics by level mirrors the wider gender distribution in the academic workforce as a whole. As yet, there is little evidence of the feminisation of university teaching roles, however several interviewees involved in teaching-only appointment processes have suggested that women whose careers have been interrupted by child care responsibilities may be attracted to these positions. What matters here, however, is whether these positions represent careers with opportunities that are comparable with the teaching and research route.

95 Personal correspondence with Ken McAlpine, Senior Industrial Officer (Strategy and Policy), NTEU, 16 November 2012.

96 Bristol University has made quite explicit its view that the traffic will be one way into the teaching pathway, while movement between teaching and research and research pathways ‘are not to be regarded as in any way exceptional and may be part of the way a particular career progresses.’ Academic staff career pathways <http://www.bristol.ac.uk/hr/grading/academic/pathways/pathway-movement.html>

97 Both Southern Cross and Charles Darwin Universities are developing policy and procedures to allow staff to move from teaching to teaching and research positions.

98 By contrast the University of Warwick now requires all academics to prepare a teaching portfolio as part of their probationary evaluation, allowing well-informed decisions to be made about teaching career paths at an early stage.

99 DIIRSTE Higher Education Data ‘Number of teaching only staff in selected universities by discipline, level and sex, 2012’ <http://www.olt.gov.au/resource-teaching-focused-academic-appointments>

It is not possible at this early stage to generalise about the promotion prospects of staff on teaching-focused contracts, but it seems reasonable to suggest that these prospects will depend greatly on the level of senior support for and clarity about the place of teaching-focused roles in that university's workforce strategy. The same could be said for the real impact of revised academic promotions policies that allow for teaching-focused applications. A recent UQ discussion paper about developments since the creation of a teaching-focused classification notes that their AUQA review panel found 'considerable uncertainty whether such positions will continue to 'teaching-focused' or may evolve to be seen as 'teaching-only'.¹⁰⁰ It also noted that 'avenues for demonstrating scholarship of teaching are not well understood by staff and can lead to applicants underselling themselves'.¹⁰¹ The relatively small numbers of academic staff promoted each year since the scheme was introduced support these comments, with only one promotion (to Level D) in 2012.¹⁰²

At The University of Melbourne, a director of first year teaching applied for a Teaching Specialist position on the understanding that promotion from within this stream would allow her to make a case based on teaching rather than disciplinary research – something that would not have been possible from within the teaching and research stream. A grant from the Office for Learning and Teaching became evidence of performance in the way an ARC grant is evidence of research performance. Equally importantly, the creation of the Teaching Specialist positions 'took the weight off' expectations for particular kinds of research performance. Promotion followed swiftly.¹⁰³ At Monash University there have now been two rounds of promotion applications for which the new education-focused appointees were eligible. Many have been successful, including one promotion to Level D.

Where universities have focused on revising their promotions policies generally to accommodate applications based on teaching excellence, there are similar stories of real change. The University of Wollongong provides a case study of good practice in this respect.¹⁰⁴ La Trobe University's new academic promotions policy, introduced in 2010, opened the way for teaching-focused applications from teaching and research staff, and enough successful applications have been submitted to remove residual scepticism.¹⁰⁵ Staff with major teaching roles at The University of Adelaide have welcomed the new promotions policy (2012), but acknowledge that the policy needs to be backed up by visible success for excellent teachers before everyone will believe change has really occurred.¹⁰⁶

The development of clear position descriptions, unambiguous expectations about appropriate types of training and staff development for university teaching, multi-dimensional expectations for achievement at different levels of appointment, and explicit promotions criteria which do not simply rely on measures of student satisfaction – all these are essential to ensuring that respected career paths are available to teaching-focused academics. In themselves, however, they do not guarantee the parity of esteem between teaching and research that most academics say they wish to see.

100 Quoted in UQ Discussion Paper for the Central Confirmation and Promotions Committee (nd).

101 *ibid.* p. 3.

102 Email correspondence with Professor Mick McManus, Deputy Vice-Chancellor Academic, The University of Queensland, 7 December 2012. The annual promotions were 0 in 2007; 5 in 2008 (4 to B, 1 to D); 1 (to B) in 2009; 4 in 2010 (1 to B, 3 to D); 5 in 2011 (2 to B, 3 to C); 1 (to D) in 2012.

103 Interview with Dr Deborah King 31 October 2012.

104 Sandra Wills, *op. cit.*

105 Personal correspondence from successful applicants making a case based on teaching excellence.

106 Interview with Dr Simon Pyke, Associate Dean (Learning and Quality), Faculty of Science, The University of Adelaide, 15 November 2012.

2. The future of teaching-focused positions

The growth of higher education and the increasing engagement of universities with the wider knowledge society are widely seen as driving a reconfiguration of the academic workforce. A major US study asks whether:

the model of academic work that crystallized in the second half of the twentieth century – featuring the prototypical “regular” faculty member who is concomitantly engaged in teaching, research and service – is perhaps yielding to a kind of re-specialization of academic work, this time not so much by academic subfield as by academic function.¹⁰⁷

This reconfiguration includes the appearance of a new category of staff who work across professional/support and academic roles – sometimes called ‘third space’ professionals.¹⁰⁸ In Australia it has also been argued that ‘we need to reconceptualise’ the future academic workforce, recognising that academic work will become more differentiated. Coates and Goedegebuure insist that ‘the role of “the” academic has simply become far too large and complicated to be framed as a uniform whole that necessarily comprises research, teaching and community engagement in a 40-40-20 ratio’.¹⁰⁹

For both these analyses the canary in the mine was the explosive growth in both the US and Australia of the insecure (variously casual, part time, fixed term, non tenure track) academic workforce, whose roles are teaching-focused; a cohort of new entrants who are not the ‘typical research scholar’.

For Schuster and Finkelstein the story is one of loss: a call to arms to defend the ‘teacher-scholar’ against a ‘redefinition – albeit largely silent – of faculty work roles and the associated “stratification” of the faculty into more and more specialized groups based on the increasing popularity of non-traditional academic appointments’.¹¹⁰ For Coates and Goedegebuure the challenge is to accept diversity and define it constructively. They ‘foresee the need for greater definition of capability and competence that will help understand and promote diversity’. It is not possible to do justice here to the competing values and perspectives behind these approaches. Nevertheless, what is common to both is a focus on the forces that are ‘unbundling’ academic roles and in particular on the separation out of teaching-focused work.

A distinctive aspect of Schuster and Finkelstein’s analysis is the weight they assign to information technology in the ‘unbundling’ of academic work roles, and the creation of part time and even full time teaching-only (or research-only) appointments. They argue that:

IT makes possible a second-order “unbundling” of the teaching role itself...[into] material preparation, presentation or delivery of the material, assessment of student learning, and interaction with students about course content.¹¹¹

107 Schuster and Finkelstein, *op. cit.*, p. 76.

108 Celia Whitchurch (2008) ‘Shifting identities and blurring boundaries: the emergence of *Third Space* Professionals in UK higher education’, *Higher Education Quarterly*, 62 (4), pp. 377-396.

109 Coates and Goedegebuure, *op. cit.*, p. 21.

110 Schuster and Finkelstein, *op. cit.*, p. 124.

111 *ibid.* p. 108.

This case for the radically transformative nature of IT in higher education is also persuasively argued by Martin Trow, who sees it as the most disruptive or transforming development in higher education.

The development of IT requires that we rethink the nature of “universal access”, the third of the major reforms of development which higher education continues to undergo in all advanced societies.¹¹²

This idea is taken up in the recently released (and quite apocalyptic) review by Ernst and Young of the ‘University of the Future’. The Ernst and Young report believes digital technologies will transform the way value is created within higher education.

For example, new technologies will enable public and private providers to specialise in parts of the value chain – content generation, content aggregation, mass distribution, certification, commercialization and so on.

New technologies will enable media companies to enter the university sector, either in partnership with incumbents, or potentially in their own right. The so-called Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) are an early stage example of the search for new models. Some of these models will decline and fail, others will create very substantial economic value. Winners are likely to be a mix of new, pure play online businesses and traditional businesses with powerful online models and capability.¹¹³

In Australia, there has been much discussion over the last decade about the impact of global competition and global markets in higher education, and about the transformative potential of digital education in this context. This debate has focused primarily on the impact of globalisation on student markets (and to a lesser extent on academic labour markets) rather than its impact on academic work as such. Many grandiose predictions about global universities and the rise of online learning were premature. However, there is a growing perception that the appearance of Massive Online Open Courses (MOOCS) may be a genuinely transformative moment, and one that will lead to the creation of quite different kinds of teachers who work with local students but global content.¹¹⁴ The debate about MOOCS is, in any case, a salutary reminder that whatever can be said about teaching-focused positions in 2012, there is likely to be more major change around the corner.

112 Martin Trow (2000) *From mass higher education to universal access; the American advantage*, Centre for Studies in Higher Education, University of California Berkeley, Research and Occasional Paper Series CSHE 1.00, p. 3.

113 Ernst and Young (2011) *University of the Future: a thousand year old industry on the cusp of profound change*, Ernst and Young, p. 9.

114 See Kevin Charles Redmon (2012) ‘Professors without borders’, *Prospect*, 28 June; Daphne Koller’s description of the origins and purpose of Coursera http://www.ted.com/talks/daphne_koller_what_we_re_learning_from_online_education.html ; for a discussion of the potential impact of MOOCs in Australia see <http://theconversation.edu.au/live-stream-future-of-higher-education-symposium-10196>

Much more salient in Australia has been recent research highlighting the extraordinary growth of the other kind of ‘teaching-focused’ workforce, namely casual or sessional employees. Many in the sector have been shocked to discover that over half of all the teaching of undergraduates in Australian universities is done by casual teaching staff.¹¹⁵ (If third party providers were included the proportion would be considerably higher.) This research has been primarily concerned with highlighting the employment conditions of this workforce, but a debate has also begun in earnest about the impact of this on the quality of teaching and learning. Ironically many of these sessional staff are not ‘teaching-focused’ in anything but a contractual sense. Many are undertaking PhD research, or have recently completed PhDs and have ambitions to become teaching and research academics. They may not be paid to do research, but they are as likely to be contributing to research-led teaching or the teaching-research nexus as many other staff members. More significantly for the debate about the quality of teaching, it is widely recognised that these sessional staff often receive little preparation or professional development for teaching, are generally less available to students, and may have a marginal status as employees within their departments because of the fragmented and discontinuous nature of their employment.¹¹⁶

The rapid growth of this contingent workforce is now the trigger for a probable expansion in the numbers of teaching-focused full time academics. In the current round of enterprise bargaining the NTEU has adopted the position that it will support the appointment of teaching-focused academics as a trade off against a reduction in sessional employment. Specifically the NTEU is proposing the creation of 2000 new entry level teaching-focused positions across the sector, to be known as Scholarly Teaching Fellows (STFs). The NTEU is careful to point out that this proposal does not come from any enthusiasm for teaching-only positions, but rather from the need to reduce the unacceptable levels of casual employment by aggregating this work into properly paid positions – ‘even if this work is to be teaching-focused’. Their aim is that ‘over time, proper career structures for these employees, including opportunities to develop a focus on research, would need to be developed for these STFs’. In this sense, these STFs bear a striking resemblance to the old senior tutor positions. The union remains committed to the principle that each academic should have an entitlement to undertake research as well as assigned teaching.¹¹⁷

From the NTEU’s point of view this strategy makes perfect sense as it is designed to improve the employment conditions of a significant component of the existing academic workforce, namely those employed on a casual basis. Whether it will lead to an improvement in the quality and status of teaching remains to be seen. For their part, many university managers have expressed enthusiasm for introducing some kind of teaching or education-focused classification into their next enterprise agreements. Their motives are likely to include maximising research ranking through working on the denominator problem, reducing costs by increasing teaching loads, as well as the desire to raise the status of teaching by creating a career path for teaching specialists.

115 Robyn May, Glenda Strachan, Kaye Broadbent and David Peetz (2011) ‘The casual approach to university teaching; time for a re-think?’, *Research and Development in Higher Education: Higher Education on the Edge*, Vol. 34, HERDSA.

116 AUQA audits were one of the main sources of pressure on universities to improve the preparation and training of casual teachers, alongside the initial LTPF participation requirements. These pressures no longer exist.

117 Personal correspondence with Ken McAlpine, Senior Industrial Officer (Strategy and Policy), NTEU, 14 November 2012.



Conclusions

Many wise observers of higher education see unprecedented challenges as inevitable in the US, Europe and Australia as a result of the demand for greater levels of participation, the pressure for lifelong learning opportunities, increased competition from private providers, and the radical potential of IT. There is widespread agreement that the academic profession will undergo major change, particularly in relation to the differentiation of the academic workforce and the growth of a various kinds of 'teaching-focused' roles. There is considerable anxiety among those responsible for the quality of teaching and learning at the institutional level about the potentially negative consequences of increasing reliance on teaching-focused appointments.

Nevertheless, at this point the changes that have occurred in Australian universities are relatively modest apart from the scale of the increase in the sessional labour force. Teaching-focused fixed term or continuing appointments have been made for mostly conservative reasons - more as attempts by some individual universities from each of the major groupings to introduce adaptations of traditional academic work roles rather than to transform academic work. This is perhaps not surprising if one accepts the view, well argued in the US context, that universities are profoundly conservative institutions capable of great inertia. This is also the view of Australian universities taken by the Ernst and Young report.

The empirical evidence about the growth of teaching-focused appointments does not tell a coherent story as yet, though it is undoubtedly connected to the big picture changes predicted in the literature. For now, however, it can at best be conceptualised in the form of a typology of motives and intentions.

a. Reclassification to improve research rankings

This has probably been the most powerful driver behind increased reporting of 'teaching-only' academic employment until now. It has been used in different ways by different universities. By far the largest numbers of teaching-only academics in the sector are those clinical appointees in the health sciences who are now being reported as teaching-only. This helps explain why the Group of Eight appears to be leading the way in changing the nature of its academic workforce. For the most part this change is largely illusory, with teaching and research remaining by far the most important category of employment.

b. Responding to financial crises

Over the last few years individual faculties have been hit hard financially by factors such as declining international enrolments, funding challenges, and now the new demand driven and highly uncertain 'market' in student places. Rounds of voluntary and involuntary redundancies have become common, particularly in less professionally or vocationally oriented disciplines and faculties. The criteria used in many of these redundancy rounds have been primarily related to research performance, with a subsidiary clause allowing for the transfer of a valuable teacher to a teaching-only role, generally as a fixed term transition option. In the larger scheme these account for very small numbers.

c. Improving career opportunities for excellent teachers

A small number of universities have engaged in a serious internal discussion about the value of formally acknowledging different types of academic roles, including

teaching or education-focused roles, in a way that improves the status and recognition of teaching excellence. Within these universities the most common outcome has been the transfer of relatively small numbers of staff to fixed term teaching-focused appointments, through a rigorous selection process. Very few universities have taken the more radical step of advertising teaching-focused positions and offering continuing employment in them.

d. Flexible workload allocation

In many universities there is discussion at senior levels about the need to be able to allocate various kinds of academic duties in much more flexible ways than 40:40:20 to meet the needs of the new higher education environment. This might include having some staff at any particular time devoting most of their time to teaching (in the broadest sense) either through the adoption of a teaching-focused classification or through genuinely flexible work-planning with individual staff.

e. Industrial relations benefits for employer

In some universities and campuses the creation of teaching-focused roles creates flexibility in workload allocation which has significant cost benefits, but this is constrained at present by the Threshold Standard requirements about research and scholarship.

f. Discipline specific appointments for first year teaching

In some particular disciplines, particularly the sciences, teaching-focused appointments have been made to lead and manage first year teaching as a way of improving the learning experience of students at the same time as relieving other staff of onerous teaching duties so they can devote more time to research. The numbers are likely to remain small, but there is potential (if as yet unrealised) for career development.

g. TAFE and private provider offering of higher education programs

This constitutes a major source of growth in the teaching-focused workforce in higher education.

The fact that thus far the expansion in teaching-focused appointments in Australian universities has been relatively modest should not detract attention from the amount of new thinking that is occurring in response to the massification, digitisation and marketisation of the higher education sector. For those whose primary interest lies in the quality of teaching and learning in higher education in an uncertain future there are some conclusions to be learned from these early moves to differentiate teaching roles from the teaching and research norm.

Perhaps the most important point to begin with is that teaching is perceived, overwhelmingly, as being awarded lower status than research. The reasons for this are complex, but similar conclusions have been drawn in the US, the UK and Australia. Understanding academic cultures and how they work is essential. A major UK research project on how teaching is rewarded found evidence suggesting that:

The lower status often accorded university teachers is the product of deeper factors rooted in academic culture and not simply caused by monetary rewards and types of contractual agreement – although these things may contribute to the problem. Even though ‘university teachers’ are paid along the same lines as lecturers and have the same kind of contracts and can expect similar career progression, the perception still remains that teaching careers are for those who cannot quite make the grade as research-active lecturers.¹¹⁸

In the US Arum and Roksa have written persuasively about the way undergraduate instruction has been downgraded in importance in the face of other faculty pressures. They argue that ‘one of the few remaining moral bases for academic life is a quasi-religious commitment to embracing research as a “vocational calling”’.¹¹⁹ In Australia, Coates et al. believe that re-thinking the reward structures for teaching and research to put them on an equal footing ‘is not possible as long as the pretence of a teaching/research nexus remains a fundamental symbolic aspect of Australian higher education’.¹²⁰ This stands in the way of what they see as inescapable pressure for future differentiation between universities along the lines of being teaching or research intensive.

There has been relatively little Australian study of the status of teaching and research in the formation of academic identities, but many of the forces identified in the UK and the US are present here. In this context the impact of introducing teaching-focused appointments is always at risk of encouraging the stratification rather than differentiation of roles. It is tempting to speculate that the language used to describe this differentiation in itself illustrates this hierarchy of prestige, despite universal rejection of the term ‘teaching-only’. Even the term ‘teaching scholar’ or the use of the adjective ‘scholarly’ to distinguish the superior nature of the teaching role in a university (as opposed to other tertiary teachers) smacks of defensiveness. The adoption of the term ‘education-focused’ has the merit of drawing attention to the discipline of education and its importance to the work of excellent teachers, but it is hard to see it catching on across the sector. If the label is to work as a weapon in the cultural struggle for parity of esteem then words like ‘teaching specialist’ or words invoking leadership would seem preferable. Above all, the language needs to insist on selectivity, if only to combat the deep-seated belief that teaching is what you do more of if you are not good enough at research.

In their review of UK universities’ institutional policies for rewarding and recognising teaching, the Higher Education Academy notes that part of an institution’s culture is ‘the way in which it defines excellence in teaching and learning’.¹²¹ Central to changing the culture in positive ways are the need to put in place definitions of good teaching, rigorous processes for assessing teaching quality, and the development of robust promotion criteria. In other words, higher education teaching must be professionalised. Coates and Goedegebuure take this argument even further by proposing a structure to support the development of differentiated roles, which they see as inevitable. Their goal is a shared

118 Higher Education Academy (HEA) and GENIE Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning, University of Leicester *Reward and Recognition of Teaching Interim Report*, p. 35.

119 Arum and Roksa, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

120 Coates et al., *op. cit.*, p. 34.

121 Higher Education Academy (HEA) and GENIE Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning, University of Leicester (2009) *Reward and recognition in HE Policies and Implementation*, p. 21.

understanding in the sector of good teaching, and the professionalisation of university teaching.

This structure should take the form of a set of calibrated industry-wide professional standards for university teaching, document a series of methods of assessing performance against these standards (most notably, evidence on the quality of student engagement and achievement), and provide a harmonized approach to professional learning (very likely by aligning university-specific certificates).¹²²

Along these lines, the Office for Learning and Teaching has funded a project entitled 'Academic workforce 2020: framing a national agenda for professionalising university teaching'.¹²³ It remains to be seen whether projects emanating from the discipline of higher education engage successfully with the highly devolved and highly professionalised discipline bases of academic identity formation. Credentialism is one possible unintended outcome, no better able to transform higher education teaching than primary or secondary teacher training can transform school education. The major change has to come from institutional and sectoral leadership. Of this there is not a great deal of evidence as yet.

The introduction of the well-resourced LTPF in 2006, and the pressure on universities to show how their teaching leads to better learning which developed as a result of the Bradley reforms both helped destabilise the dominance of research in the sector. However, budgetary pressures led to the removal of the proposed performance funding for teaching and learning that was to have been introduced along with individual Compact agreements, and no agreement could be reached within the sector about how student learning might be measured. Meanwhile the competition for research funding and the pressure of research based university rankings has increased.

For the sector as a whole attention is now focused on TEQSA and the work being done by the Higher Education Standards Panel. In 2012 the panel focused its attention on reviewing the Threshold Standards, and is currently assessing whether those elements relating to teaching and learning in the Threshold Standards are covered adequately to 'codify the minimum standards required for the provision of higher education in Australia'.¹²⁴

While TEQSA may keep teaching and learning standards in the public eye, it is not clear that the regulatory approach is as effective in creating cultural change as financial incentives, or institutional leadership. It may have the unintended consequence of encouraging bureaucratisation and an overwhelming preoccupation with minimum standards. In the absence of specific financial incentives for the sector as a whole (apart from the obvious financial benefits to be derived from retaining students and graduating them successfully), the role of institutional leadership is critical. Already it is clear that the introduction of teaching-focused positions can be the result of radically different motives, with the likelihood of very different implications for the quality of teaching and learning.

The provision of teaching-focused career paths does not hinge on the creation of a separate classification. At Deakin University, the Vice-Chancellor sees no place

¹²² *ibid.*

¹²³ OLT Project SP12-2330: *Academic workforce 2020: framing a national agenda for professionalising university teaching.*

¹²⁴ Higher Education Standards Panel *Communiqué Number 6 – December 2012*, p. 2,

<http://www.hestandards.gov.au/sites/default/files/CommuniqueNumber6-HEStandardsFinal.pdf>

for teaching-only appointments, expressing concern about the segmentation of the academic workforce, increasingly managerialist HR policies, and declining respect for the rounded academic. In her view, there is a need for considerable flexibility in the allocation of teaching and research tasks within the academic workforce, but this workforce remains unified by its scholarly capacities and commitment.¹²⁵ As in the UK, teaching-focused appointments can raise the status of teaching or continue its marginalisation. What matters is the strategic focus and values of senior management, and the extent to which this is reflected in the things that deans and heads of department or heads of school do and say.

The increasing differentiation of academic roles in higher education is expected by most knowledgeable observers, as is increasing institutional differentiation. Individual institutions have a great deal of control over how teaching-focused roles are introduced, and their relationship (equal or otherwise) to other kinds of academic roles. The key determinant will be strategic intent: a focus on improving teaching and learning (as opposed to improving research rankings); explicit and demanding position descriptions; selectivity in appointment; and opportunities for career development and promotion based on robust criteria.

The development of policy and procedures to support the appointment of teaching-focused or education-focused academics has, in some Australian universities, been undertaken in a way that exemplifies good practice. In these instances, the practice has been aligned with the key recommendations of the UK review of institutional policies on reward and recognition and their implementation, namely to:

- use rewards for teaching that academics understand and value- promotions and confirmation of appointment are the most important aspects of work
- put in place definitions of good teaching
- recognise university teaching as a profession in its own right- make a university teaching qualification, or appropriate experience, a prerequisite for tenure and promotion.

In a very small number of cases universities have worked collaboratively to share knowledge, experience and good practice, but this appears to happen only through the accident of personal movements and connections. The search for better ways to ensure system-wide debate about the impact of more differentiated academic roles in general, and teaching-focused appointments in particular, must go on.

On the basis of this initial review of the growth of teaching-focused academic appointments in Australian universities, it is possible to identify some further work which would assist the sector in clarifying how such appointments are likely to affect the quality of teaching and learning, including:

- specific engagement with the Higher Education Standards Panel about what is meant by the requirement that higher education providers' academic staff 'are active in scholarship that inform [sic] their teaching', and the requirement that Australian universities demonstrate that 'sustained scholarship' informs teaching and learning in all fields

¹²⁵ Interview with Professor Jane den Hollander, Vice-Chancellor, Deakin University, 1 December 2012.

- support for projects such as the HEA funded benchmarking of promotions policies and processes which contribute to the development of accepted and robust indicators of teaching quality
- further research at the institutional level on innovative and strategic approaches to the use of teaching-focused appointments to improve teaching and learning
- the sharing of this knowledge throughout the sector through national conferences and workshops which are not confined to those responsible for institutional level teaching and learning
- monitoring of the growth of teaching-focused appointments across the sector, including data on level, discipline and gender.



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