

Amongst you today there's enormous diversity. I know we have sessional staff members. We have people from HR. We have people who are also course or unit coordinators. We have members – senior members of the universities that are represented. And I think this colloquium too today is about all of us working together to advance what is technically good practice in the context of our own university. It was one thing could come out of this program is that what works in one university probably won't work in another.

So what I'd invite you to do though, because it is your colloquium, is to go into your pack and you'll find a sheet called My Reflections on Today's Colloquium. So it looks a little bit – it's got a staple on it and it's sort of pretty white.

What I'd ask you to do, when you've found it, it's called My Reflections on Today's Colloquium, and I just invite you to spend a couple of minutes thinking about your own context; your university. For those of you – most of you I know would be in the sector or if not, a university that you've worked in; but your university.

How far along is your university in the whole of the institution approach to the recruitment, induction, professional development support, recognition and valuing and the embedding of sessional staff within your whole teaching body.

So basically, if you could just jot down some thoughts from your own experience about what's a context for you? How far have you gone, and what do you see as sort of the strengths in the approach in your university?

Now you may in fact find say, well we don't have a whole-of-university approach but it actually works for us. It works to look at it, is it a school level or whatever, that's you know I'm not suggesting that necessarily a whole-of-university approach is a good one. I want to raise that issue.

But if you could just jot down a few thoughts on that and I'll ask you in a minute to introduce yourself to the person – a person sitting next to you or several people speaking next to you and just share for a couple of minutes what your thoughts are on that.

I can't help myself. I love large class teaching, so I'm sorry, I apologise but I think it's a wonderful opportunity to just get to know, at least a couple of other people here today. So if you wouldn't mind do that, great. We will build on that a little bit later.

But what I did want to share with you and I know Sandra's going to share with you as well, are some examples of whole-of-university approaches. And they're going to parts that just won't fit for you I know, hopefully there will be some ideas that do.

And I just, I will talk fairly briefly, but I wanted to give a little bit of a background to the approach we've taken at the University of New South Wales and it began back in, I was trying to remember, but I think it's about 2003 or 2004 with out Pro-Vice-Chancellor Adrian Lee as some of you may know, who's subsequently retired sadly.

But he enabled us to I guess talk a lot about learning and teaching and what approaches we take, particularly to building communities around the campus. And one day we were discussing how we – we felt there were a lot of communities operating to support – although

***Whole of university approach to changing culture: Policies and procedures for sessional staff***

Associate Professor Michelle Scoufis, University of New South Wales

the initiative is to operate and staff ongoing staff in the university who in one way or another were engaged in learning and teaching, including people for example from the library.

And I said to Adrian, well what about sessional staff? And Adrian just looked at me and said, why should – why is that an issue, why do we have to worry about sessional staff? And I thought that's a very strange response from Adrian because those of you who know Adrian, I mean there couldn't be a greater enthusiast for support of education, I think or one of the greatest enthusiasts.

And I sort of asked him and he said, I don't think it's an issue at the University of New South Wales. Interesting. And I sort of probed a bit further and discovered that before he'd moved on to the 'dark side' of management, in the university as he always called it, he actually lectured in microbiology and he had a team of sessional staff who worked with him. And each week they used to meet and they discussed issues and shared strategies that those sessional staff had used in teaching during that week.

He used to go through the assessment with them and they would identify issues in marking an assessment and at the end of the semester knowing Adrian, there was always wine and cheese for the sessional staff. So the sessional staff were very much part of the community.

And I said, I wonder whether that's true across the University of New South Wales and the wonderful university it is, like all of universities of course, and he said alright let's find out. So we actually employed a wonderful person Dr Tracey Barber to go and actually interview and survey right across the university from people in senior management positions to unit or course coordinators and program course coordinators, associate deans, heads of schools etcetera. What did she find out?

Well unfortunately Adrian's picture wasn't exactly common law across the university, far from it I would say. We certainly had and do still have, faculties where 60 per cent of the undergraduate teaching is done by sessional staff – 60 per cent.

We certainly cover that our sessional staff vary enormously in the nature of their roles and the sort of background that they come from. So we have wonderful professionals that come and teach, good staff who I know you have similarly. We have PhD students who are research students. We also have people who see sessional teaching as a career, as Sharon's already pointed out, the enormous diversity.

So we came to the view that what we should have at university were guidelines to support the recognition and enhancement of sessional staff.

And Tracey building on a wonderful project with Denise Chalmers had led in the University of Queensland, and frankly plagiarising quite a lot of it, developed the strategic plan, and there are copies outside, it probably won't work for you but it's a process that possibly won't but we've engaged in [unclear].

And basically the guidelines cover all aspects of support for sessional staff, from recruitment to induction to professional development to recognition and reward and so forth. So I can encourage you to look at it and hopefully it might be of some use.

But having a strategic action plan as I think I said universities are incredibly good - at least university is, I'm sure it's not true of yours, we're incredibly good at developing policies, and not quite so good at implementing them.

Transcript from the *National Colloquium on Sessional Teaching in Higher Education: Recognition, Development and Enhancement*, Australian National University, Canberra, 28<sup>th</sup> November 2007. Carrick Institute for Learning and Teaching in Higher Education.

And I always love the way when you have an AUQA review, because when they interview the staff member who's actually doing it they find the staff members are often totally unaware of university policies. I'm sure that doesn't happen at your university. But it's the same problem that we would have had, so we were very aware of that.

So the strategic action plan was passed throughout the community on education and it could have just sat there and nothing happened, but, first of all we had Tracey Barber who is a dynamo, who has been replaced with similar committed people.

But we also had to drive some important drivers. So we had faculty performance indicators, which has actually been a way in which the university has rewarded faculties for actually engaging in support for the sessional staff, amongst other aspects of backwards in learning and teaching performance. So that was a really big carrot that Adrian and I developed.

We also had a central university coordinator for sessional staff to help drive the project and a reporting process. But even so, I hope you're sitting there thinking well this all very nice but how does it actually impact on faculties, how does it impact on unit coordinators and so forth?

Well, and I know there are many of the UNSW community here today who can correct me please. I think it's important to try and reflect the reality with you.

So we were of course aware of is that every faculty, every discipline is different and that has to be acknowledged. So that we needed to work at a faculty at a school level. Tracey really picked up the big issues in terms of HR. I doubt this happens in your university but it certainly was the case in New South Wales that there were sessional staff who didn't get a contract until about the third or fourth week of their teaching. If they were lucky they got paid by week eight etcetera, it was really bad, I mean the sort of picture that Denise, your project found was pretty true at New South Wales Uni.

So we felt the first thing to attack were the HR issues. And so Tracey worked actually with the – we have faculty HR people. And she worked with them to ensure that we could come to some agreements around early contracts, making sure that all sessional staff have email accounts, that they could get access to the library. All these really basic things that actually mean you are part of the university community.

And I think it's just so centrally important. So the faculty HR people were critical and I really want to emphasise and I know that Margaret will talk and Sharon will talk later about that in particular as well.

Then the professional development programs again, Tracey and then more subsequently Georgia and now Colina who I want to acknowledge the wonderful work that Colina's doing with sessional staff now. Colina was based in learning and teaching within the centre but works very, very closely with the faculties or schools in developing professional development program based on their needs. It's run by the school of faculties, not run by us.

Where Colina is the catalyst. She helps facilitate the process but the school or faculty has to identify what are the key issues and what and who's going to be involved. We encourage them to bring in the unit coordinators and course coordinators or program - whatever words you use, into the professional development program.

**Whole of university approach to changing culture: Policies and procedures for sessional staff**

Associate Professor Michelle Scoufis, University of New South Wales

So they're often quite different. But usually there's a series of three workshops over a semester covering areas such as developing a learning and a teaching environment. Issues around assessment and how do you [unclear] around an assessment and issues just in general facing the sessional staff.

So that is now – the actual support, it's interesting I was talking to Michael Walpole who's the Associate Dean in Law earlier, and he said professional development, I've got that under control. And I think in general that's true that we actually do have reasonably good professional development programs for sessional staff now, largely because of the carrot I have to say. [unclear] carrot and support centrally. I think having Colina's support has been critical.

And what we're hoping that will be another support process for us are a new initiative this year which is a faculty learning and teaching academic fellows and we've fortunately got two of those here today Hank and Tom, I don't think there are any others.

And one of the key roles we're hoping that Hank and Tom will play in their faculties is a sort of a link with sessional staff needs so that we make sure that we're constantly relevant and addressing those needs. So even I don't believe that's enough either. So another key element has been recognition of award processes.

Tracey actually managed to convince Adrian and then the Vice Chancellor at the time that we should actually have two Vice Chancellor's awards for sessional staff. And one is for staff who deal more in laboratory context and one as a general sessional staff award. And we have been reasonably successful, not as successful as I'd like, in getting nominations for those awards. But the interest is picking up. So I think that's really important. But that's a bit out there, that's only one or two staff.

And sadly, the people who get those awards tend to be people who really should be ongoing permanent staff and that's very distressing to me. I remember a couple of years ago the person who got it was actually responsible for a whole program of causing some people's language, look you know who won it.

But one other initiative that a number of the faculties have taken on board now is to have awards as well at a faculty level for sessional staff. And that's I think pretty much across the board now that faculties have got their own sessional staff awards.

Recognition and valuing is critical in every aspect. So that's sort of come thought as being really important. But that leads to loads of questions and I think I'm not suggesting in any sense that we've come up with all the answers because we haven't and today I'm hoping to learn a lot from you in ways to sort of explore further the approach that we've undertaken.

It has been very contextual; the focus has been ownership at the school and faculty level. But we really don't know how effective our evaluation is really, it's only really good for the professional development side. We really don't know how much we're impacting on the students experience, whether – how effective this initiative has been.

And yes we should have built a evaluation in right up front but no we didn't. so I think one of the things we've got to start looking at now is where are the gaps and where the strengths in what we've already put in place.

So that's I guess our story.

Transcript from the *National Colloquium on Sessional Teaching in Higher Education: Recognition, Development and Enhancement*, Australian National University, Canberra, 28<sup>th</sup> November 2007. Carrick Institute for Learning and Teaching in Higher Education.

