

The Five Domains

The five overlapping domains emerged from a thematic analysis of the interview data. They provide a focus for the quality enhancement of sessional teaching, but should not be seen as exclusive indicators in this area.



Domain 1: Systemic and Sustainable Policy and Practice

This domain is concerned with the existence and implementation of formalised policy and practice pertaining to the support, management and development of sessional teaching staff. Policy and practice are considered systemic and sustainable where they are relevant to the needs of sessional staff, are embedded and funded at the University and Faculty level, and are reflected in the culture of the institution.



Domain 2: Employment and Administrative Support

This domain is concerned with the conditions of employment, benefits and ongoing administrative support for sessional teachers. The major focus is on formalised policy with timely, equitable, thoughtful and flexible procedures and conditions.



Domain 3: Induction and Academic Management

This domain combines induction with academic management to emphasise the integrated nature of orientation and ongoing academic support within communities of practice. Induction refers to the way sessional staff are oriented to the goals, policies, services, practices and culture of the organisation, faculty and program within which they work. Academic management refers to their ongoing management at the Faculty, School and teaching team levels.



Domain 4: Professional and Career Development

This domain is concerned with the types of professional development provided to sessional teaching staff, and their accessibility, articulation into formal qualifications and relevance. Broader ties to performance management are also considered.



Domain 5: Rewards and Recognition

In addition to the national and institutional recognition of the overall contribution of sessional teachers to higher education outlined in the RED Report, this domain is concerned with the micro-level forms of recognition and reward universities might offer their sessional teachers.

Domain 1



Systemic and Sustainable Policy and Practice

Project Findings

Evidence of systemic and sustainable policy and practice is rare across the participating institutions. Of the 16 universities participating in this study:

- few universities have attempted a 'whole of university' approach to addressing the professional needs of sessional teachers;
- few have formalised policies and practices specifically for sessional teachers;
- several have informal policies and practices, usually at a faculty or school level;
- the majority rely on policies and practices for permanent staff which may or may not be relevant to sessional teachers;
- a few have developed some form of advocacy body, such as a university or school-based Sessional Teaching Working Party, to investigate and address employment issues and the quality enhancement of sessional teaching;

- only one has a formal mechanism for sessional teachers to provide feedback on their satisfaction with their engagement, support and experience of teaching with the university; and
- examples of good practice are often developed and delivered by a committed individual, a discipline with professional networks, or a university with strong leadership in a specific area.

Characteristics of Good Practice Drawn from the Interviews

Specific policy and procedure pertaining to sessional teachers

Integrated 'whole of institution' approach linked to University Strategic Planning

Centralised and decentralised policies and practices allowing for contextual diversity in the sector

Ownership and implementation at a faculty/school level

Resource allocation that supports faculty/school implementation

Collaboration between development units and faculties

Clearly articulated monitoring and reporting mechanisms

An auditing system to review and improve compliance

Mechanisms for collecting and disseminating feedback from sessionals on current institutional policy and practice

Key Challenges

Creative and appropriately resourced implementation

Awareness of and commitment to institutional policies

Strategic alignment and communication between policy and practice across departments (e.g. Human Resources, Learning & Teaching Units and Faculties)

Cultural change that recognises the important contribution that sessional teachers make to quality teaching and learning

Good Practice Examples

Case 1

Whole of University Approach - Policy and Practice
University of New South Wales

Case 2

Developing a Whole of University Approach
University of Wollongong

Case 3

Streamlining Human Resources and Induction Processes
University of South Australia

Domain 2



Employment and Administrative Support

Project Findings

There is a general lack of formal policy and procedure in relation to the employment and administrative support of sessional teachers. Of the 16 universities participating in this study:

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

Characteristics of Good Practice Drawn from the Interviews

Employment

- Formalised, transparent and timely processes relevant to the context and profile of sessional teachers
- Contracts that clearly define the roles and responsibilities of sessional teachers
- Processes that allow for a skills match in terms of identifying and selecting sessional teachers
- Opportunity to negotiate rates of pay within university-defined parameters
- Eligibility for salary sacrifice
- Continuing contracts linked to professional development and performance review
- Combining of multiple contracts into one formal agreement that takes into account workload and pay
- Central implementation of a sessional teachers employment register online (database of sessional teachers)
- Contracts which include paid time for induction, meetings, professional development, moderation and additional marking

Administrative Support

- Centralised/accessible support within Faculty or School
- Resource support for teaching
- Online support – FAQ's, policies and procedures
- Memory stick with relevant documents they may need
- Inclusion on faculty and school email lists

Key Challenges

- A lack of timely, merit-based and transparent employment processes
- Delays in administration of contracts and remuneration
- Workloads of administrative staff
- Inadequate communication channels between the school and the sessional teachers

Good Practice Examples

Case 3

Streamlining Human Resources and Induction Processes
University of South Australia

Case 6

A Departmental Approach to Employing, Developing and Supporting Sessional Staff
Macquarie University

Domain 3



Induction and Academic Management

Project Findings

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

Induction

Of the 16 universities participating in this study:

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

Academic Management

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

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

Characteristics of Good Practice Drawn from the Interviews

Induction

Mandatory paid induction into university policy and practice (Teaching and Learning, Health and Safety, Services and Facilities)

Consideration of the context for induction – centralised (Learning & Teaching unit and/or Human Resource units) or de-centralised (school/faculty)

Induction information provided in different ways e.g. website, kit, on-line, face to face and made available for off-shore and off-site campuses, remote campuses and late employment

Audit of induction compliance

Domain 3

Academic Management

Development of a 'teaching team' approach to managing sessional teachers at a course or subject level

Regular paid meetings and/or communication with the teaching team

Guidelines for tutorials

Guidance in the moderation of assessment

Systems for debrief, feedback, evaluation

Mentoring model or buddy system for new sessional teachers

Peer observation and peer review opportunities

Head tutor in large units

Academic contact in remote or off-shore campuses

Systems to encourage social contact and networking among peers

A Faculty/School /subject website dedicated to sessional teachers

Support and professional development for subject /course coordinators

Key Challenges

Limited school/faculty funds for induction

Timing of induction sessions may not align with recruitment

Finding a time when all sessional teachers are available for induction

Disproportionate numbers of sessional teachers to permanent staff

Inadequate workload allocation for permanent staff supervising sessionals

Organisational complications managing off-shore, distance or distributed staff

Good Practice Examples

Case 3

Streamlining Human Resources and Induction Processes
University of South Australia

Case 4

A Multi-layered Approach to a University Tutor Training Program
University of New South Wales

Case 5

A Systems Approach to Supporting Sessional Staff at the School Level
Griffith University

Case 6

A Departmental Approach to Employing, Developing and Supporting Sessional Staff
Macquarie University

Case 7

Tutor Training & Orientation CD Rom
University of Wollongong

Case 9

Academic Management of a Multi-location Teaching Team
University of Wollongong

Case 10

Developing Teaching Communities at the Program Level
Swinburne University of Technology

Domain 4



Professional and Career Development

Project Findings

Paid participation in compulsory professional development for sessional teachers is atypical. Of the 16 universities participating in this study:

- in most cases, there is no clear distinction between induction, professional and career development;
- examples of good practice are often developed and delivered by a committed individual, a discipline with professional networks, or a university with strong leadership in a specific area.
- only two universities in the study mandate and pay for professional development that is linked to articulation and career development for sessional teachers, and in one case, this was restricted to a single school;
- professional development at a school or subject level is largely unpaid and, where it is present, is developed and supported by individuals at that level;
- the logistics of providing relevant and accessible professional development for diverse and dispersed communities of teachers is a complex challenge for most universities; and
- some universities are trialling alternative modes of delivery.

Characteristics of Good Practice Drawn from the Interviews

Distinction between induction and development
Programs designed for the needs of sessional staff

Types

Short courses and online modules
Development of professional portfolios
Mentoring and peer observation/review opportunities
Performance evaluation and review
Opportunity to extend themselves; for example, paid to lecture or contribute to curriculum design
Research opportunities and access to conference funding
Opportunities to network with peers
Programs articulating into more formal qualifications, e.g. Graduate Certificate of Higher Education
Professional development linked to repeat contracts

Access

Opportunities to access the same professional development as permanent staff
Mandatory and paid professional development for those sessional staff teaching more than five hours per week
Flexible modes of professional development

Key Challenges

Limited institutional infrastructure to cater for their needs
Limited funding and resources
Limited formalised career paths for sessional teachers

Good Practice Examples

Case 3

Streamlining Human Resources and Induction Processes
University of South Australia

Case 4

A Multi-layered Approach to a University Tutor Training Program
University of New South Wales

Case 5

A Systems Approach to Supporting Sessional Staff at the School Level
Griffith University

Case 8

Online Professional Development for Clinical Educators
The University of Queensland

Case 9

Academic Management of a Multi-location Teaching Team
University of Wollongong

Case 10

Developing Teaching Communities at the Program level
Swinburne University of Technology

Domain 5



Rewards and Recognition

Project Findings

Many sessional teachers continue to feel their contribution is undervalued, despite various national and institutional recognition and reward initiatives. Of the 16 universities participating in this study:

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

Characteristics of Good Practice Drawn from the Interviews

Reward

Dedicated Sessional Staff Excellence in Teaching Awards - awards linked to a financial prize, eg. money for conferences and resources

Recognition of the importance of their contribution

Appropriate access to physical and professional facilities – computer access, access to an office space, parking, email, library card before and after contract period

Invitation to be involved in decision making within a school

Invitations to contribute to working groups or professional networks

Opportunity to contribute to the ongoing enhancement of teaching in courses

Opportunity for performance management from supervisor

Personal acknowledgement or formal letters of appreciation from university

Opportunity to engage in research (paid)

Opportunity to access conference funding

Opportunity to access certificate course at the university (paid)

Key Challenges

Limited or no support in applying for awards

Lead-up time in submitting for awards too long; for example, only employed 12 weeks, need to work for 12 months

Award system not always transparent

Uneven capacity of sessionals staff to do own evaluation of teaching

Limited link to promotion or career path

Unable to apply for grants as a casual staff member

Good Practice Examples

Case 1

Whole of University Approach - Policy and Practice
University of New South Wales

Case 3

Streamlining Human Resources and Induction Processes
University of South Australia