

A snapshot of the Colloquium

On November 28, 2007, the National Colloquium on Sessional Teaching in Higher Education was held at the Australian National University. The Colloquium was the main dissemination event for the project, presenting the findings to date and stimulating further discussion. The following quotes provide a snapshot of the various themes that emerged during the presentations. The program, presentations and transcripts can be found on the RED Website.



Rob Castle
Deputy Vice Chancellor
Academic and International
University of Wollongong

'Teaching in a university, in my view, has to be made more professional. Working out where sessional staff fit into that is a real challenge. These things have obvious budget implications and university budgets are not a magic pudding. But if we are to provide a quality education for our students, we are compelled to look at all of the people who teach in universities, not just the permanent teaching and research elite.'



Sharon Parry
Project Leader
Director, Teaching & Learning Centre
Southern Cross University

'[sessional teachers] are the mainstream deliverers of our undergraduate education in higher education... I still believe that these are the people who are carrying most of the weight for delivering all the forms of learning support that make up teaching in higher education.'



Michele Scoufis
Project Leader
Director of Learning and Teaching
University of New South Wales

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



Lynn Sheridan
Project Manager
University of New South Wales

'We found some brilliant examples, but they were ad hoc, a lot of them were really done on the basis of individuals' passion and energy in terms of supporting sessional staff. The ones that we tried to label as good practice were the ones that we felt were a bit more sustainable...'



Alisa Percy
Coordinator of the UOW Sessional
Teaching Project
University of Wollongong

'Something that emerged in our project was the leadership role of the subject coordinators, which isn't talked about very often, but in fact the subject coordinators often have full responsibility for recruitment, employment, management, evaluation, feedback and recognition. The subject coordinator's role is an important leadership role and they are not very well supported at all.'



Margaret Hicks
Associate Director,
Flexible Learning Centre -
Teaching and Learning
University of South Australia

'In terms of very specific HR practices, people were pointing to the need for centralised and timely practices - contracts should include paid time for all associated activities, and contracts should begin before the teaching actually starts.'



Shard Lorenzo
Human resources Director
University of South Australia

We're very fortunate that every time we've run our staff attitude survey a high proportion of our sessional staff in particular respond. They tell us and they give us a lot of valuable information. But the other people that generate very valuable information are the deans of teaching and learning across our four academic divisions and the HR managers across the four academic divisions. Both of those roles play a very pivotal part in the things that I'm about to talk about.'



Ian Macdonald
Director, Teaching & Learning Centre
University of New England

'We found that the sessional teachers were quite outstanding - when they were supported properly... they were quite terrible when they weren't supported properly. The difference was quite significant. We have these things called teaching communities.'



Sandra Wills
Director, Centre for Educational
Development & Interactive Resources
University of Wollongong

'It isn't just a problem with the satellite campuses. It's not just a matter of physical distance... It's a matter of cultural distance and emotional distance for all sessional tutors no matter what campus they're on. The problem is not an individual issue... It is an institutional issue and it is a cultural issue.'

The National Colloquium Program with presentations and transcripts is available on the RED Website.

References

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A full list of references can be found in the Literature Review on the RED Website.