Managing, training and supporting sessional teachers at the University of Queensland

In 2003, the Australian Universities Teaching Committee (AUTC) commissioned a project to investigate stemmed from issues of appointment, management, training and support of sessional teaching staff. This project previous findings of a lack of uniformity and quality of services offered to these employees, relative to their permanent, full-time counterparts. The AUTC wished to encourage Australian universities to operate at whole of university approach, rather than only at a local organisational level. The aim of this project was to establish and encourage “take-up” of guidelines for best practice in establishing policy and support mechanisms within universities at the university level for policy development, with support and training for sessional teaching staff at the organisational unit level. The project was led by a team from the University of Queensland and the Queensland University of Technology.

A sessional staff working party was formed in 2004 to address in more detail these issues and to plan and implement a university response. Drawing on the AUTC project and guidelines as a starting point, the committee recognised the need to allow for local organisational units to respond to issues of training, managing and supporting sessional staff. However, they felt it was important that this took place within a wider university framework. That is, responsibility for these tasks will need to be delegated to the most appropriate level, but situated in a general structure of clear policies, processes and practices. It was decided that such a move could only be supported by an awareness of both staff and administrators' perspectives about the issues and implications surrounding the use of sessional teaching staff at all levels of responsibility: institutional, school, and course coordinator. More practically, resources will need to be allocated (and be specifically identified for this purpose) to ensure that sessional teaching staff are appropriately managed, supported and trained.

The working party developed the Casual Academic Staff Policy and Guidelines for supporting, managing and training sessional teachers. Collectively, these were developed in an attempt to encourage a more systematic and institutional approach, and as a way of prompting discussion at an organisational level. The Policy and Guidelines form part of the training strategy which is based on the following principles:

- Institutions need to adopt a systematic and systemic approach to ensure they appropriately manage, support and train their sessional teaching staff.
- Flexibility must be taken into account as rigid uniformity of practice may be administratively efficient, but may be educationally unsound.
- Local responses to issues of training, managing and supporting sessional staff will be developed within a wider university framework.
- Responsibility needs to be delegated to the most appropriate level, but to adhere to a general structure of clear policies, processes and practices.
- Resources need to be allocated (and be specifically identified for this purpose) to ensure that sessional teaching staff are appropriately managed, supported and trained.
The strategy for implementation of the policy and guidelines for 2005

Currently the University requires all staff, whether continuing, fixed term or casual, to undertake induction and this includes for example, information on Occupational, Health and Safety, Human Resources and Equity policy etc. The Casual Academic Staff policy strengthens the need for casual academic or sessional staff to undertake appropriate induction.

The purpose of this training strategy is to provide Teaching and Learning (T&L) training for casual or sessional academic staff in response to the Casual Academic Staff policy. This training is in addition to tutor training provided by Schools.

University Level

1 Position of training and information resources

The University through TEDI and Personnel Services will provide a set of resources that can be accessed directly by casual academic or sessional staff. They may be provided by the supervisor at the point of employment. This provides a centralised resource bringing together the various policies and resources through a single window. As this will be accessible to both the sessional staff and those involved in employing staff, it will ensure that information is available in a consistent and easily accessible manner. The resources will comprise a:

- **Website**: This includes an entry page from the UQ website for sessional staff and those involved with employing sessional staff - with links to induction for new staff, relevant UQ policy, documents, resources, downloadable documents (see below), the Sessional Teaching website etc (To be developed in 2005).

- **Teaching manual**: (Downloadable Word/PDF document). This includes a guide for sessional teachers and tutors to assist them with planning and teaching in their first few weeks. Schools will be encouraged to add their own section on school specific issues related to teaching and learning. This manual is completed and available from the TEDI website.

- **Induction Template**: This includes salary, conditions, policies, access to resources information in a downloadable Word file. An induction pack will include information and web links at the University level. A common set of information will be provided at the university level. For Faculty/School level information, a series of suggested headings will be provided to guide the staff member to the necessary information (To be developed in 2005).

**Reporting obligations**: The University through the DVC(A) and The Teaching and Learning Committee will seek reports from the schools and faculties on their sessional training programs. This will include keeping a record of attendance for accuracy of payment to staff and reporting purposes.
Faculty level

2 Introduction to teaching for part time and sessional teachers

A four hour session on teaching at the University of Queensland will be developed for all new part-time and sessional teachers. This will be organised through the faculties with three hours focused on teaching and learning issues and one hour on faculty/school administrative and organisational matters. This will be a compulsory and common program provided across all faculties with some variation where there is a particular emphasis required eg; laboratory, clinical, problem based teaching. This will be an entry level requirement for all sessional staff, developed by TEDI in consultation with each faculty. The program will provide staff with an opportunity to meet with senior staff in the faculty, others who are teaching related courses and enable them to share experiences, network, engage in professional development related to enhancing the quality of teaching.

Suggested frequency: There will be a minimum of one session for each faculty each year beginning in 2005. If a significant number of new casual academic staff are appointed in Semester two, then an additional session may be arranged. The program will be offered during week two or three of the semester.

Target Audience: Casual or sessional and part-time staff at lecturer A and above – particularly targeting industry based staff. It may include tutors with lecturers but this would depend on the numbers and mix of staff involved. Tutor training will continue to take place at the School level.

Faculty/School level

3 Organisational support for sessional teachers

All faculties/schools (Whether these are school or faculty based personnel would depend on the size of the school and number of sessional teaching staff employed) will have:

A designated officer who is responsible for the administrative issues and resource allocation for sessional teachers (this may be the same officer responsible for tutor issues);

A designated academic supervisor who is responsible for the oversight of advising, training and mentoring of sessional teachers. This could be a designated role for program directors in large programs or a single person across several programs depending on numbers of staff involved.

School level

Tutor training program

Tutor training continues to be the responsibility of the Schools. Schools must provide evidence that there is a designated Tutor Trainer and that training is provided for new tutors.

Whilst the School of Psychology Tutor training model is recommended, this is not a requirement.