

THE UNIVERSITY OF
NEW SOUTH WALES



Sessional Teaching Staff Strategic Action Plan

*Incorporating policy and checklists to promote the
inclusion of sessional teachers into UNSW's
communities of practice*



Sessional Teaching Staff Strategic Action Plan

Rationale

Sessional teachers are defined as University instructors not in tenured or permanent positions, who teach over a whole session or on a regular basis. The definition encompasses tutors, casual lecturers, demonstrators, clinical tutors and people external to the University from the professions or industry¹.

Sessional teachers comprise a significant proportion of staff at UNSW, and the University values the vital role they play in the learning experiences of its students.² This Strategic Action Plan is intended to support Schools and Faculties in their development of systemic employment, management and professional development policy and processes for sessional teachers. There is a growing imperative to do so, driven by:

1. UNSW's mission of attaining excellence in learning and teaching within communities of learning and teaching practice that are inclusive of all staff and students.
2. An extensive process of consultation with a wide range of University staff, which has indicated that the quality of current processes of recruitment, management, development opportunities and recognition of sessional teachers is highly variable between Courses, Schools and Faculties.
3. Draft criteria for inclusion into the DEST Learning and Teaching Performance Fund which specifies that institutions must provide documentation of policies and practices that ensure systematic support for professional development in learning and teaching for sessional teachers (2004, p.46). The upcoming AUQA review is also likely to evaluate the University's support, development and management of sessional teaching staff.
4. Revisions under consideration to the UNSW Promotions Policy and Processes are likely to include reference to the demonstration of effective support for sessional staff.

¹This definition is adapted from that used in the AUTC-funded Sessional Teacher Project (see references). While the University adopts this definition as a useful way of categorising a diverse group of employees for organisational/policy formulation purposes, the term is used with caution given concerns raised about it by UNSW staff during the consultative process of the UNSW Sessional Teaching Staff Project. These concerns are reported in the support document 'UNSW Sessional Teaching Staff Development Project Progress Report' (November, 2004).

²Human Resources figures over two paydays in semester one of 2004 indicate that STS numbers, as a head count, may be as high as 62% of all teaching staff.

The DEST criteria reflect increasing expectations of institutions to 'work toward the enhancement of support mechanisms for sessional employees' (AUTC Sessional Teaching Project, 2003, p.1). These expectations are a response to an intensifying focus on support for sessional staff in various sectors, including employee representative bodies, as a consequence of the increasing casualisation of the Australian higher education system.

UNSW's current support of sessional staff needs to be evaluated within the context that other tertiary institutions have responded to these expectations by implementing systemic support and development practices for sessional teaching staff.³

Research at UNSW, consistent with the findings at other Universities, has identified the following needs of sessional staff:

- The development and implementation of consistent and equitable practices of recruitment, employment, management and development.
- Induction processes which inform sessional teachers of relevant administrative, organisational and employment processes, and familiarise them with policies fundamental to ensuring equitable and safe practices in the workplace such as the University's Code of Conduct and Equity and Diversity Policy Statement.
- Resources to support sessional teachers in their learning and teaching roles such as manuals and online support.
- Professional development activities that are School/Faculty specific and target the different teaching positions, contexts and needs of sessional academics.
- Access to adequate basic facilities and resources such as office space and comprehensive course materials.
- Processes to integrate sessional teachers into their academic communities.

The research also indicates that course coordinators need to be supported in the challenging role of managing sessional teaching staff.

In some Schools and Faculties, there are already established processes of support, development and integration of sessional teachers into their academic communities. In other Schools and Faculties, individual academics are mindful of the needs of sessional teachers and are working towards meeting these needs by providing guidance and development opportunities. The University community can benefit and learn from these already existing exemplars of best practise.

³ Of the Go8 for instance, the ANU and the Universities of Adelaide, Melbourne and especially Queensland offer comprehensive resources and support for sessional teaching staff in the form of manuals, online resources and workshops.

Schools and Faculties are therefore invited to share their existing strategies and processes for supporting sessional teachers, by contributing to upcoming publications of case studies of best practice.

The policy and checklists in this Strategic Action Plan aim to meet the needs of sessional teachers at UNSW as identified above. They are intended to frame and support the development of systematic, equitable and effective practices for the recruitment, integration, functioning and recognition of sessional teachers in their respective Schools and Faculties. In particular, they promote the implementation of initial and ongoing learning and teaching development opportunities for the University's sessional teachers. This is to ensure that sessional teaching staff understand quality learning and teaching practices so that they will have a positive impact on students' learning experiences.

References

Australian Universities Teaching Committee (AUTC) (March, 2003) Training, support and management of sessional teaching staff, viewed 16 November 2004, <http://tedi.uq.edu.au>

Australian Government Department of Education, Science and Training (2004) Learning and Teaching in Higher Education, Learning and Teaching Performance Fund, viewed 13 November 2004, http://www.dest.gov.au/highered/learning_teaching/documents/ltf_issues_paper.pdf



Policy and Checklists for the Employment, Management and Development of Sessional Teaching Staff

The policy and checklists below are intended to support Schools and Faculties in developing their own strategies for the recruitment, employment, integration, evaluation and recognition of their sessional teaching staff. The University is committed to working with and supporting Schools and Faculties in this process. The University recognises the varying circumstances of Schools and Faculties in relation to sessional teachers, and that the implementation of the policy and checklists will be responsive to local needs and resources.

Policy

1. Recruitment practices

- 1.1 When deciding upon staff appointments, Schools and Faculties are to consider whether it is in the best interests of staff and students for the appointment to be on a continuing, fixed-term or casual basis.
- 1.2 Within the constraints of the short term needs of Schools, sessional teachers are to be appointed on the basis of merit.
- 1.3 Advertisement and recruitment should as far as practicable reflect the procedures for fractional and full-time employees and may include advertisement in advance and preparation of an eligibility list to draw on as required. Such a list would be advertised with a specific lifetime. Even genuine “emergency” situations should comply where possible.
- 1.4 The University will inform applicants for a casual position that if they do not hear from the University within a specified time, they should conclude that they have not been successful in gaining a position.
- 1.5 The recruitment of sessional teachers is to align with the *UNSW (Academic Staff) Enterprise Agreement 2003* (the Enterprise Agreement). Remuneration is to be in accordance with the Casual Academic Salary Rates prescribed in Schedule 2 of the Enterprise Agreement.

2. Employment practices

- 2.1 On appointment, all sessional teachers who are to work for a continuous period of more than 4 weeks should receive a contract that specifies the terms of their appointment, their working conditions, the duties they are expected to perform, and their rate of pay.
- 2.2 The principles of UNSW's Equity and Diversity Policy Statement will apply to sessional teachers as they do to full-time staff members.
- 2.3 The roles and responsibilities of sessional teachers are to align with their level of appointment.
- 2.4 Sessional teachers should be provided with the resources necessary to fulfill their employment role, such as access to office, desk, computer, phone, fax and library facilities.

3. Integration and communication practices

- 3.1 All new sessional teachers are to be provided with the opportunity to participate in recognised and systematic induction and orientation processes, which will include being informed of relevant School/Faculty administrative and organisational procedures.
- 3.2 Sessional teachers are to be made aware of and given access to policies and processes that affect them, including Occupational Health and Safety, equity policies, appeals processes, assessment and plagiarism policies, grievance handling, and support services.
- 3.3 Systematic processes of communication should be established which keep sessional teachers fully informed of relevant Course/School/University activities and matters.
- 3.4 There is a need for systematic and supportive channels of communication between sessional teaching staff and their course coordinators.
- 3.5 Faculties and Schools need to provide opportunities for collegial interaction between sessional teachers and full-time teaching staff.

4. Opportunities for development in learning and teaching

- 4.1 All sessional teachers should have initial and ongoing opportunities to develop their learning and teaching knowledge and practices.
- 4.2 Sessional teachers are to be provided with training to use University, Faculty or School systems that are necessary to their effective functioning as teachers, such as training in online teaching.
- 4.3 Faculties are responsible for ensuring that there is an annual budget allocation to ensure all orientation, teaching, and professional development activities are appropriately and adequately funded. A commitment to funding development opportunities for sessional teachers will be a potential criterion for inclusion in the Learning and Teaching performance indicators in 2005.

5. Evaluation and recognition

- 5.1 Sessional teachers are to participate in standard University evaluation processes (Course and Teaching Evaluation and Improvement).
- 5.2 Sessional teachers should be encouraged and supported in reflecting upon their teaching performance.
- 5.3 There are to be systematic processes for recognising and rewarding the work of sessional teachers as there are for permanent academic staff, such as awards for teaching excellence.

Checklists for Implementation of Policy

Guidelines for using the checklists

The following checklists support the implementation of the UNSW Sessional Teaching Staff Policy. They provide detailed guidance in meeting performance indicators for the management of sessional teaching staff.

The checklists focus upon School and Course level as these are generally the administrative and managerial points of contact for sessional teachers.

Heads of Schools or their delegates will have responsibility for completing the School checklists, and for ensuring Course co-ordinators / administrators complete their specific Course checklists.

School level checklist

	Yes/No	Comment
1. Recruitment practices		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is there a school-based policy that ensures transparent and equitable processes for the recruitment of sessional teachers? 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Has consideration been given to whether alternative forms of employment (fixed term, fractional, continuing) would be more appropriate than a sessional teaching appointment? 		
2. Employment practices		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do sessional teachers receive payment according to their responsibilities and in accordance with the rates prescribed in Schedule 2 of the Enterprise Agreement? 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do sessional teachers employed for a continuous period of more than 4 weeks receive a written contract of employment, and have the terms of the contract been explained by someone responsible for this task within the school? 		

School level checklist (continued)

	Yes/No	Comment
2. Employment practices (continued)		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is there an induction session and/or manual for sessional teachers that inform them of policies and processes that affect them? 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Are sessional teachers informed about workplace health and safety responsibilities and procedures? 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do sessional teachers receive access to office space, necessary supplies, phone, fax and computer facilities, email, library rights and support services? 		
3. Professional development		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is the Career Development Scheme utilised to provide professional development opportunities for sessional teachers whenever possible? 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do appointees participate in a formal induction process (including teaching and learning issues, completing administrative tasks, location of facilities, etc)? 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does your School have a resource such as a manual or web site that informs sessional teachers of relevant policies and procedures such as assessment policies, plagiarism policies, equity policies, teaching philosophy etc? 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do sessional teachers receive guidance in marking students' work and other matters of assessment? 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Are sessional staff informed about staff development opportunities available to all staff? 		

School level checklist (continued)

	Yes/No	Comment
3. Professional development (continued)		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Are learning and teaching development opportunities provided for sessional teachers? 		
4. Integration and communication		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is there an administrative system which allows staff and supervisors to contact sessional teachers (eg via email lists, etc)? 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is there a staff member assigned to act as a contact person for sessional teachers with regards to professional development, employment and pay issues? 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do co-ordinators have regular team meetings with sessional staff to discuss, review, outline and/or implement course requirements? 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do opportunities or forums exist for collegial interaction between sessional teachers and full-time academics? 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Are sessional teachers able, or encouraged, to make contributions to the development of learning and teaching practices and curricula? 		
5. Evaluation and recognition		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Are inexperienced / newly appointed sessional teachers provided with mentoring or coaching? 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Are sessional teachers utilising CATEI evaluation procedures? 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Are sessional teachers encouraged to reflect on their own performance and to develop their teaching skills? 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Are the supervision practices of sessional teachers regularly evaluated? 		

Course level checklist

	Yes/No	Comment
1. Recruitment practices		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If responsible for recruiting sessional teachers, have you read the relevant institutional or School policies? 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you consistently follow existing policies concerning equitable and fair recruitment practices in terms of gender, race, etc? 		
2. Employment practices		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If responsible for monitoring payment of sessional teachers, have you ensured that they all receive payment according to their level of responsibility and in line with the Enterprise Agreement? 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do your sessional teachers have a document of agreement or statement of duties that outline the tasks, roles and responsibilities expected of them? 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you ensure that the workload and responsibilities of your sessional staff align with their level of appointment? 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do your sessional teachers have access to office space, necessary supplies, phone, fax and computer facilities, email, library rights and support services? 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are sessional teachers provided with all necessary materials, including accurate and detailed course outlines and assessment materials such as marking guidelines and answer sheets, which they need to fulfil their teaching responsibilities? 		

Course level checklist (continued)

	Yes/No	Comment
3. Professional development		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do you provide sessional teachers with written guidelines which will assist them in their teaching role? 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do you ensure that sessional teachers receive guidance in marking students' work to ensure consistency in assessment procedures? 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do you keep your sessional teachers informed about formal professional development courses, including those that lead to certification? 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do you make opportunities for sessional teachers to meet and liaise with one another? 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do you use the Career Development Scheme as a source of professional development for yourself in managing sessional staff? 		
4. Integration and communication		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is there an administrative system which allows you to contact sessional teachers (eg via email lists, etc)? 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Are sessional teachers informed of procedures to follow if students have concerns or needs external to their course or program of study? 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is there a staff member assigned to act as a contact person for sessional staff with regards to training, employment and pay issues? 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do you have regular team meetings with sessional staff and full-time academics to discuss, review and/or implement course requirements? 		

Course level checklist (continued)

	Yes/No	Comment
4. Integration and communication (continued)		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do you instigate or encourage opportunities for collegial interaction between sessional teachers and full-time academics? 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Are sessional teachers able, or encouraged, to make contributions to the development of teaching and learning practices and curricula? 		
5. Evaluation and recognition		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Are inexperienced/newly appointed sessional teachers provided with mentoring or coaching? 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Are sessional teachers utilising CATEI evaluation procedures? 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Are sessional teachers encouraged to reflect on their own performance and to develop their teaching skills? 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Are sessional staff subject to performance review? Does training or other support follow if performance problems are identified? 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Are the supervision practices of sessional teachers regularly evaluated? 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do you reflect upon your own supervision practices by way of feedback, discussion forums, etc. with sessional staff? 		

For support in implementing the Sessional Teaching Staff Strategic Action Plan

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The Sessional Teaching Staff Strategic Action Plan can be downloaded from the Learning and Teaching Unit website (http://www.ltu.unsw.edu.au/ref3-2_sessional_staff.cfm)