GOOD PRACTICE FRAMEWORK FOR THE MANAGEMENT AND DEVELOPMENT OF SESSIONAL ACADEMIC TEACHING AT GRIFFITH

2010

Context
Sessional academic staff play an important role in learning and teaching at Griffith. Sessional positions provide the opportunity for valuable input into the curriculum from practitioners and industry professionals. They also create significant opportunities for the next generation of academics to gain experience in an academic role while they are completing their higher degrees by research.

As academic staff members, it is crucial that sessional academic staff receive appropriate professional development, management and support in order to enhance the quality of student learning, satisfaction and outcomes. Griffith University is committed to a sustainable and systematic whole-of-university approach to sessional academic staff and the implementation of effective practice at the University, Group and School levels.

Sessional academic staff at Griffith are those who are engaged and paid by the hour for activities as defined in Schedule 3 of the Collective Agreement, including teaching and/or teaching related duties such as lecturing, tutoring, demonstrating, marking, supervision of studio practice, work integrated learning (WIL) supervision or mentoring.

Purpose
The primary purpose of this document is to facilitate good practice in the management, support and development of sessional academic staff at Griffith. This document has two specific aims:
To provide guidelines for effective practice in academic elements,
To affirm the leadership roles and clarify the respective responsibilities of academic managers and academic staff in the management and development of sessional teaching,

The practice principles proposed in this document are the result of a process of consultation with Griffith sessional academic staff and academic managers and benchmarking with similar Australian universities. The activities listed should not be considered either exhaustive or prescriptive of additional activities that would be considered effective in a particular disciplinary context.

The University affirms that in order for this whole-of-institution strategy to be optimally effective it needs to be owned and embedded in the practices and cultures of Groups and Schools. The University is actively committed to supporting Groups and Schools in achieving this outcome.

The University recognizes the varying circumstances of Schools Faculties and Groups in relation to their sessional academic staff, and therefore endorses the implementation of these guidelines in accord with local disciplinary needs and expectations.

Articulating with Relevant Griffith Policies
Sessional academic staff are members of the Griffith community with associated rights and expectations. Thus their effective support, management and development is appropriately understood within the context of a number of relevant Griffith policies and institutional statements. Resources and forms for sessional academic staff are available on the Griffith portal at Griffith Portal > Employment > Pay, conditions and benefits > Payment and other forms > Casual staff information, forms and schedules.
1. School Management of Sessional Academic Staff

The University recognizes the key role of academic elements in the effective engagement and management of sessional academic staff. The contribution of sessional academic staff to student learning depends directly on the culture and practices of the schools, degree programs and courses within which they work.

1.1 School Practices and Procedures It is expected that, within the context of Group/Faculty practices, processes and budget settings, Schools will develop systematic and sustainable practices and procedures for the effective management of their sessional academic staff. Schools are encouraged to develop and embed ‘locally-owned and appropriate’ approaches to managing, supporting, developing their sessional academic staff. However, it is essential that university-wide policies relating to the employment of sessional academic staff are implemented by the Groups, and Schools, and any local policies and practices must be consistent with the relevant central policies. Academic elements should also play a role in ensuring that sessional staff are aware of the relevant policies.

1.2 Accountability The Head of School is responsible for the effective management of the sessional teaching staff function in their academic element (See Position Description Head of School). The Head of School may choose to either manage this function directly or delegate responsibility to a member of staff in a designated role with responsibility for all or part of the sessional academic staff function.

1.3 Transparent Documented Procedures Schools should document and disseminate information for sessional academic staff regarding their expected roles and practices and the procedures for their recruitment, employment, management, support and development. This may be in either written (e.g., a School Sessional Academic Staff Handbook) and/or electronic formats (e.g., a School Sessional Academic Staff Website). (See web link to exemplars). (See web link to University-wide policies and procedures).

1.4 Flexible Management Schools should consider the flexible application of these guidelines to sessional academic staff who are engaged for very restricted duties (e.g., single lecture, marking of assessment).

1.5 Budget School budgets should reflect appropriate level of resourcing to support the University’s standards for the induction, training and management of sessional academic staff.

1.6 Effective Supervision of Sessional academic staff The University is committed to the effective support and management of large class environments. The role of Head Tutor has been identified as one means to enhance the student learning experience in Schools in which there are large classes and multiple sessional academic staff working within the same courses. Where circumstance warrant, Schools may consider establishing a Head Tutor role to support Course Convenors with course administration responsibilities.

1.7 Recognition of Workload The workload of academic staff engaged in the organization and management of the sessional academic staff function should be appropriately recognized in School workload models.

1.8 Continuous Quality Improvement In order to ensure effectiveness and sustainability of local practices, Schools should conduct a self-review of the sessional academic staff processes in their academic element every three years. The self-review process will include the collection of systematic feedback from sessional academic staff, students, and academic and administrative staff working with sessional academic staff. Heads of School will report the outcomes of this review to their Group Dean (Academic).
2. School Recruitment and Employment of Sessional Academic Staff

The University recognizes that well-managed recruitment and employment practices are essential to attracting and engaging capable and motivated sessional academic staff. The recruitment, appointment and employment of sessional teaching staff will be systematically managed within each School.

2.1 Enterprise Agreement The recruitment and employment of sessional teachers must align with the current Griffith University Academic Staff Collective Agreement (the Agreement). Remuneration will be in accordance with the Casual Academic Salary Rates prescribed in the relevant schedule of the Agreement.

2.2 Recruitment and Appointment The recruitment process is a key means of ensuring that the University engages the best possible sessional academic staff. Schools should ensure that the processes used to recruit and appoint their sessional academic staff are timely, transparent, merit-based, fair and equitable:

- **Information access** The relevant policies are to be available and accessible to all applicants.

- **Appointment selection criteria** Sessional academic staff are to be appointed on the basis of merit and capacity to perform the duties of the position, and re-appointment is based upon demonstrated competence in the role and at the level required. The selection criteria should be explicit, and may vary according to the work to be performed by the staff member. Evidence of the capacity to perform the duties involved should be an essential selection criterion. Evidence for the capacity to teach effectively should include positive student evaluations of teaching. Applicants for sessional academic staff positions should also be asked to provide a CV as part of the selection process.

- **Timely appointment** Sessional academic staff will normally be appointed within a timeframe that enables their attendance at required orientation, induction and training prior to first teaching sessions or tasks. The appointment should also commence so that sufficient time is allowed for preparation of teaching materials. Wherever possible, sessional academic staff should receive written notice of their appointment prior to commencing employment.

- **Notification of applicants** The University will inform applicants for any advertised sessional 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.

2.3 Further Guidance regarding recruitment and selection of sessional academic staff is contained in the HR guidelines Engaging Casual Staff or by contacting Group HR Staff.

2.4 Employment Practices and Conditions Schools should ensure that employment practices and conditions are transparent, equitable and supportive of sessional academic staff efficiently and effectively undertaking their roles.

- **Academic casual schedule** On appointment, all sessional academic staff should agree a sessional employment schedule and formalise this with an Academic Casual Schedule, which specifies the terms of their appointment, their working conditions, the duties they are expected to perform and their rate(s) of pay. (See link to exemplar schedules)

- **Roles and responsibilities of sessional academic staff** The roles and responsibilities of sessional academic staff must align with their assigned work duties and work schedule. For clarity and understanding, a document outlining the relevant role(s) and expectations should accompany the work schedule. (See link to exemplar document outlining role expectations).

- **Resources** Sessional academic staff should be provided with the necessary resources to fulfill their employment role, effectively and efficiently, namely, access to an office with a hot-desk, computer, internet access, photocopying, phone, fax and access to library facilities. Bookable space should be available for student consultation work when sessional academic staff are required to discuss confidential items with privacy.
Reappointment / on-going appointment  For consecutive appointments, IT, Library and other relevant services should be made continuous from the first semester of appointment to the next.

2.5 Condition of Further Employment  Future employment as a sessional academic staff member in a School is generally dependent on satisfactory student evaluations and supervisor's recommendation. If performance is deemed less than satisfactory, the sessional academic staff member would not normally be provided with further employment in a School. Persons seeking re-employment as a sessional academic staff member at Griffith are required to provide copies of their previous Student Evaluations of Teaching (SET) with their application.

3. School Induction, Training and Management of Sessional Academic Staff

Sessional academic staff are recognized as members of the University. Thus, in order to optimize their job satisfaction and contribution to student learning they require, and are entitled to, systematic induction and orientation to the goals, policies, services and practices of the University and workplace training necessary for their effective and efficient functioning as teachers.

3.1 School-Based Induction  Given that sessional academic staff primarily perform their duties within the context of a School or degree program the majority of their support and management will necessarily take place in this context. Schools should therefore ensure the systematic induction, training and management of their sessional academic staff.

In order to be effective in their roles, sessional academic staff need to be inducted at a number of levels. In addition to receiving general information about University polices and processes, sessional academic staff also need to be systematically inducted into the administrative and organizational procedures of their School/Program and, in particular, the culture and practices of the courses/teaching teams within which they will work.

3.2 Role Relevant Information  The School has a responsibility to ensure that sessional academic staff are made aware of, and given access to all relevant policies and processes that affect them in their role, both those that are university-wide and those that are specific to the Group/School. This will include Workplace / Occupational Health and Safety, equity policies, appeals processes, assessment and plagiarism policies, grievance and disputes protocols, and support services, evaluation and performance management policies, and copyright and intellectual property policies. Sessional academic staff should also be made aware of specific referral contacts within the School or Group/Faculty, relevant to their role.

3.3 Workplace Training of Sessional Academic Staff  Sessional academic staff will be provided with, and appropriately remunerated to attend, specific workplace training to use University, Faculty or School systems that are necessary to their effective and efficient functioning as teachers. Specific needs for workplace training will vary in accord with teaching responsibilities and should also include Workplace / Occupational Health and Safety and equity content. Training needs will be determined in discussion with the sessional academic staff member’s academic supervisor. Some workplace training may be provided informally by the sessional academic staff member’s academic supervisor (viz., Course Convenor) as part of the ongoing management of their teaching team.

3.4 Entry-Level Training  All sessional academic staff are required at their first appointment to participate in a standard Introduction to University Teaching and Learning Induction workshop (offered centrally through the Griffith Institute for Higher Education) or a Group/School-level equivalent training process (See Policy on Casual Academic Staff Professional Development Teaching and Learning Program). Schools have a responsibility to monitor completion of central and group/school-level induction by sessional academic staff and ensure that the required participation has occurred.

3.5 Paid Attendance  All new sessional academic staff will be paid for their attendance at required induction, orientation and training processes. Payment for attendance at required workplace training will be in line with the time required to be spent at training at the relevant casual pay rate.

3.6 Ongoing Support and Training for Sessional Academic Staff  Sessional academic staff have a need for ongoing information, support and problem solving. It is expected that their academic supervisor (e.g., Course Convenor) or Head Tutor would appropriately be expected to function as ‘first contact’ for their questions and issues. If circumstances warrant, Schools may also allocate a
designated role/officer (e.g., Sessional academic staff Coordinator and/or Tutor Development Coordinator) as a central and consistent point of contact for sessional academic staff. (See exemplar role descriptions). Schools should also consider refresher training sessions for reappointed sessional staff and encourage their participation in relevant GIHE workshops.

3.7 Role of the Group in Monitoring Implementation of Support for Sessional Academic Staff
Groups need to monitor the implementation of policies and practices relating to the employment of sessional academic staff, and report back to the University regarding the quality of implementation.

4. Course Leadership and Management of Sessional Academic Staff

The effectiveness of sessional academic staff depends in significant part on the leadership and management of the teaching teams of which they are members, and the consistency and quality of communication with their Course Convenor or academic supervisor. Sessional academic staff should not normally be convening a course themselves, although may assist a non-sessional academic staff member in doing so.

4.1 Course Convenor Responsibility for Sessional Academic Staff
Consistent with expected University practice (See Griffith University statement Role of the Course Convenor) Course Convenors should seek to function as leaders of their sessional teaching teams with responsibility for:

- Organising sessional academic staff arrangements and ensuring their attendance at appropriate entry-level training and induction
- Clarifying the roles and responsibilities of sessional teaching staff within the course
- Establishing strategies for maintaining contact with sessional academic staff and integrating them into the teaching team
- Leading, and coordinating the teaching activities of all members (including sessional academic staff) of their teaching team
- Arranging initial meetings of the teaching team to discuss the purpose of the course in the context of the program
- Conducting regular meetings of the teaching team to review curriculum issues, teaching practices and learning activities within the course
- Assessing any health and safety risks associated with the course and determine appropriate control and educational measures for sessional academic staff
- Overseeing the process of teaching evaluations for all members (including sessional staff) of the teaching team.

4.2 Delegated Course Convenor Responsibilities
In large class contexts Schools may formally appoint and fund a Head Tutor role. In this situation Course Convenors may allocate some course or sessional academic staff administration responsibilities to a Head Tutor. In this case role clarification will be conducted to ensure that all staff are clear as to the respective responsibilities of Course Convenor and Head Tutor. Course Convenors would still be expected to maintain management and oversight of the teaching team.

4.3 Systematic Communication
Course Convenors should establish and maintain systematic communication processes to enable the sessional academic staff on their teaching team to:

- be fully informed of relevant Course/School/University activities and matters
- be fully engaged in the teaching process
- provide consistent and accurate information to students.

In order to effectively carry out their duties sessional academic staff would generally require, as a minimum, fortnightly contact (either face-to-face team meetings or email briefings) with their designated supervisor (e.g., Course Convenor), or a Head Tutor, across the teaching period. Course Convenors should also provide the sessional academic staff on their teaching team with the following minimum level and frequency of structure and contact:

- an initial course-specific orientation, curriculum overview and teaching team-building meeting prior to teaching/tutoring sessions beginning in week 2 of each semester
- a briefing on assessment criteria and marking practices for each assessment item in advance of marking
- a moderation meeting/process following marking of each assignment to ensure consistency and reliability of grades
4.4 Adequate Preparation  Sessional academic staff require adequate lead-time to prepare for teaching sessions. Course Convenors should provide teaching materials and resources a minimum of two weeks prior to the relevant teaching sessions.

4.5 Course Improvement  Course Convenors should provide the sessional academic staff of their teaching teams with the opportunity to make a systematic contribution to course improvement. Convenors should invite feedback from sessional academic staff on all aspects of the teaching, management and the student experience in their courses.

4.6. Performance Management  Sessional academic staff are expected to perform to an appropriate standard in relation to their teaching, administrative, assessment and student consultation responsibilities. Course Convenors should supervise and support the effective performance of the sessional academic staff in their teaching teams.

4.7 Evaluation of Teaching  Sessional academic staff are to be encouraged and supported to reflect upon their teaching performance through their participation in standard University evaluation processes. A sessional academic staff member is required to undertake a student evaluation of teaching (SET) whenever he/she is responsible for teaching into a semester long class.

Course Convenors should where possible seek to undertake a mentoring and leadership role in supporting the development of sessional academic staff engaged in their courses.

Course Convenors will coordinate the student evaluations of members of their teaching teams using the standard University system. Convenors will discuss the student evaluation process (viz., timing of survey, types of questions to be used, procedures for accessing results, processes for debriefing) with teaching team members prior to the survey administration.

The results of student evaluations will be made available to the sessional academic staff member’s supervisor (e.g., Course Convenor). Sessional academic staff should be provided with the opportunity to discuss their student evaluations with their supervisor. Supervisors should provide guidance, support and advice on improving teaching and learning outcomes.

5. Professional and Career Development of Sessional Academic Staff

The University recognizes that the continuing professional development of its sessional academic staff enhances their capabilities and the quality of student learning and outcomes. The University offers a number of professional development opportunities for its sessional academic staff to develop their learning and teaching knowledge and practices:

Sessional academic staff may attend developmental workshops offered by the GIHE. Sessional academic staff can access role-relevant resources on the University Learning and Teaching website and the GIHE website (See Policy on Casual Academic Staff Professional Development Teaching and Learning Program).

5.1 School-Based Professional Development  Sessional academic staff particularly value focused professional development within their disciplinary contexts. Schools should therefore establish locally appropriate mechanisms for the ongoing professional development of their sessional academic staff. The specific nature and extent of such activities will depend on the needs of the School, the roles and aspirations of sessional academic staff and the availability of resources. Examples of School-level professional development include providing opportunities for extension or development (e.g., paid guest lectures, teaching across different courses), contributing to course review or development, peer review of teaching, advanced training, and course-based mentoring or buddy systems).

5.2 Collegial Interaction  Sessional academic staff may wish to engage with the wider academic community of their host School. Schools should seek, where appropriate, to provide formal and informal opportunities to support the increased participation of sessional academic staff in the academic life of the School.
6. Rewarding and Recognising Sessional Academic Staff

The University recognizes the significant contribution of its sessional academic staff to the quality of teaching and learning and the student experience and seeks to appropriately reward excellence in teaching. The University has specific systematic processes for recognizing and rewarding the work of sessional academic staff, such as awards for teaching excellence including providing an annual University level award for sessional teaching staff in the Griffith Awards for Excellence in Teaching (Casual Staff). Schools should consider nominating their outstanding sessional teachers for this award.

Sessional academic staff generally value the inclusion, recognition and appreciation of the members of their academic community of practice. Schools should therefore seek to establish, where appropriate, locally suitable mechanisms (both formal and informal) to recognize and reward excellence in their sessional academic staff. Examples of School-level recognition and reward include school commendations and awards for excellent sessional teaching, letters of appreciation from Head of School and celebratory functions for sessional teachers.