



Benchmarking leadership and advancement
of standards for sessional teaching

The BLASST Guide

Benchmarking with the Sessional Staff
Standards Framework

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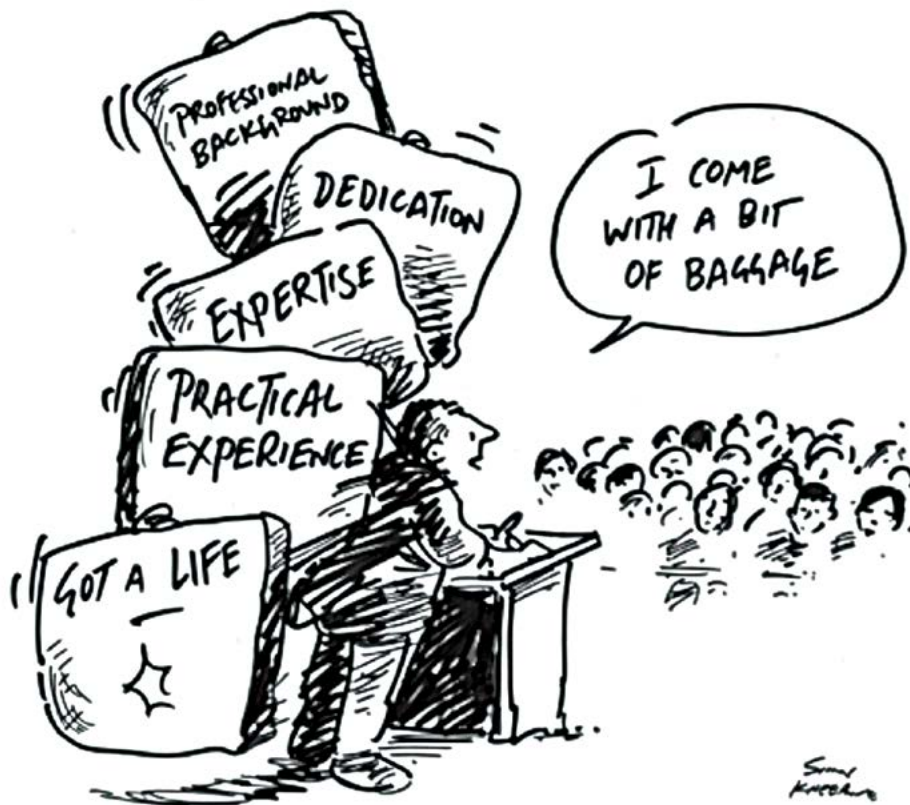
Welcome to Benchmarking Leadership and Standards for Sessional Teaching (BLASST)

Sessional Staff /sessional stæf/ noun.

Any teachers in higher education employed on a casual, short-term contract, or sessional basis. This may include lecturers, tutors, unit, program and subject convenors, demonstrators, and markers.

Welcome to BLASST – a project funded by the Australian Government Office for Learning and Teaching to support and enhance quality teaching by sessional teachers in higher education.

In acknowledgement of the diverse and extensive contribution made by sessional teachers, the BLASST project has established a national Sessional Staff Standards Framework to evaluate and support the learning and teaching, management and administrative policy, procedure, and practices affecting sessional and casual teachers in higher education.



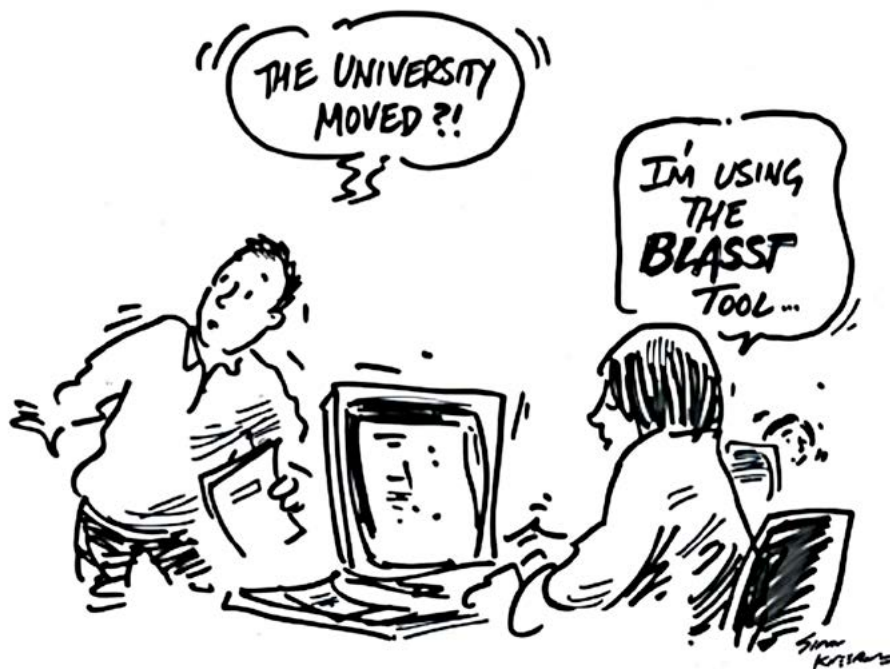
Introducing the BLASST Sessional Staff Standards Framework

The BLASST Sessional Staff Standards Framework establishes criteria and standards by which we may evaluate current practice in quality learning and teaching, and in management and administrative policy, procedures and systems affecting Sessional Staff.

The Framework is designed to stimulate reflection and action, and to enable institutions, faculties, departments and individuals to work towards consistency in good practice with regard to Sessional Staff. It is an evidenced-based foundation for reflective decision-making, and can be used to inform practices and priorities, primarily through benchmarking.

The Framework is also available online as the BLASST Benchmarking Interactive Tool (B-BIT). B-BIT best supports benchmarking in a structured Benchmarking Workshop.

B-BIT is available at blasst.edu.au



Background to the BLASST Sessional Staff Standards Framework

The Sessional Staff Standards Framework was initially developed at one Australian university over two internally-funded research and development stages. The first stage (2005-2006) coincided with the institution's participation in the ALTC RED Report project¹ as a linked university, while the second stage (2009-2011) responded to an Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA) report that stated that while "good practice in quality assurance for casual staff certainly exists within the University; the challenge is to systematise it"². Systematising good practice is thus the focus of the Framework.

The ALTC *RED report* has also been influential in shaping the Framework's principles, criteria and standard descriptors, and many of the *RED report* recommendations are addressed by and through the Framework.

As such, the Framework can be used in many ways:

As an evaluative tool

The Framework and B-BIT can be used to (self-) evaluate practices across, or between, universities and at a number of organisational levels.

As a developmental tool

The Framework is designed to stimulate reflection, discussion and action.

As a flexible tool for working towards good practice

The Framework recognises that different institutions, faculties, departments and individuals have different needs and resources, and are at different stages in developing good practice.

As an educational tool

The Framework will prompt discussions and professional development about quality learning and teaching, and about supporting and sustaining good practice when working with sessional teachers in higher education.

In addition to existing policy and procedures

The BLASST Sessional Staff Standards Framework should be considered in conjunction with existing policies and procedures, including the current Enterprise Agreement.

Who can use the BLASST Framework?

Anyone working as a sessional teacher or *with* sessional teachers in higher education can use the Framework. People who support and manage Sessional Staff including departmental or faculty administrators, unit, program or subject convenors, heads of schools and disciplines, and Human Resources staff, may also find the Framework useful.



¹Australian Learning and Teaching Council (2008a) *the RED report. Recognition, Enhancement. Development. The contribution of sessional teachers to higher education*. Strawberry Hills: Author.

²Australian Universities Quality Agency (2003). *Report of an Audit of Macquarie University, July 2003*. AUQA Audit Report Number 14. Melbourne: Author.

The BLASST Sessional Staff Standards

The Sessional Staff Standards that make up the Framework are standards by which we may evaluate practice in quality learning and teaching, and in management and administrative policy, procedure and practices affecting Sessional Staff.

The BLASST Key Principles

Three key principles underpin the Sessional Staff Standards. In summary:

Principle One: Quality Learning and Teaching

This principle refers to those issues that affect the quality of teaching and learning with Sessional Staff. These issues include institutional and intra-institutional commitment to quality learning and teaching, to good practice learning and teaching approaches and values, principles and priorities, inclusivity and inclusion, and to professional development.

Principle Two: Support for Sessional Staff

This principle refers to the need for recruitment, employment, administration and academic systems that are consistent, appropriate and inclusive of Sessional Staff. It states the importance of support for Sessional Staff in the form of dedicated infrastructure and other resourcing in order for *all* staff to undertake their roles effectively and professionally.

Principle Three: Sustainability

This principle refers to the need for workforce planning that includes Sessional Staff, at all levels of the institution. The principle is associated with practices that enable retention of good sessional teachers, reduce turnover of Sessional Staff, and encourage Sessional Staff in the pursuit and development of quality teaching. It also acknowledges that this can be achieved by recognising and rewarding Sessional Staff for the contribution they make.

This principle also recognises the need for appropriate resources to underpin processes, and the minimisation of the administrative load on all staff (including academic, administrative and human resources).

Criteria, Standards, and Organisational Levels of Responsibility

The Framework sets in place **criteria** and **standards** at different **organisational levels of responsibility** by which we may measure the quality of performance and outcomes in learning and teaching, and in management and administrative policy, procedure and practices around Sessional Staff.

Criteria

These are statements that identify key elements of good practice. In the Framework, a number of different processes, activities and systems relating to Sessional Staff, have been converted into criteria for evaluating current practice.

Examples of criteria from the Framework:

- 1.2a *Sessional staff are provided with an induction to learning and teaching.*
- 2.1a *The Institution has a funding model that allocates resources for Sessional Staff professional development.*

Standards

These are stable, predetermined descriptions of the qualities of performance. The Standards reflect the level of achievement for the Criteria.

In the Framework, there are three different standards of achievement in relation to the Criteria:

Good practice

The criterion is being met to a national standard

Minimum standards

There has been an active attempt to meet the criterion and the basic standard has been achieved

Unsustainable

Current practice fails to address the criterion

Examples of Good Practice Standards:

Professional development of Sessional Staff is adequately resourced through the institutional funding model on an ongoing basis
(refer to criterion 1.2a)

There is a complete, accurate and updated list of Sessional Staff for regular communication
(refer to criterion 2.2a)

Organisational Levels of Responsibility

The BLASST Framework supports processes of evaluating and benchmarking practices against the Sessional Staff Standards at four organisational levels –

1. Individual
2. Department*
3. Faculty*
4. Institutional level

*Also known as ...

Institutions have different ways of referring to their organisational levels:

BLASST organisational level	also known as
<i>Department</i>	School, Discipline, Unit, Program,
<i>Faculty</i>	College, Division, School, Office,

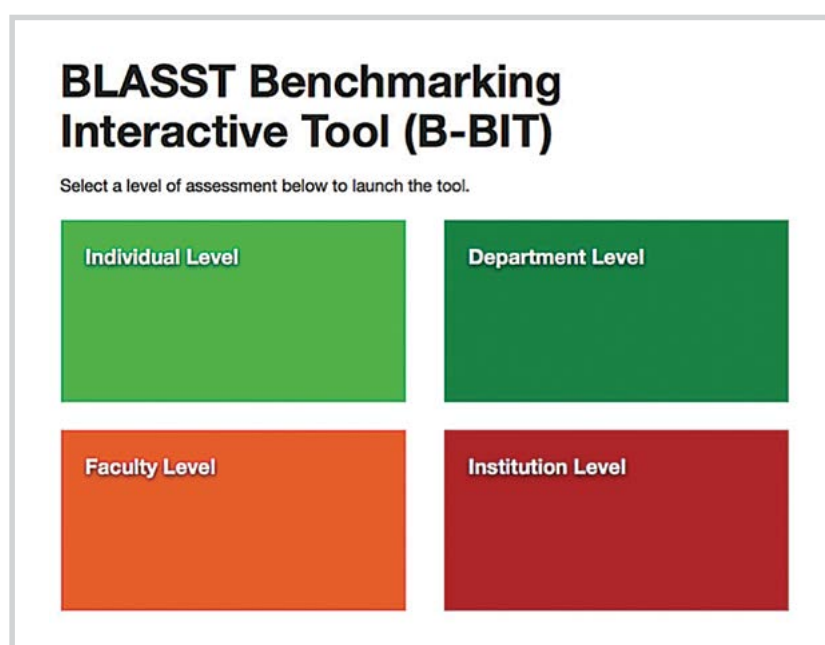
Refer to the section **Benchmarking using the BLASST Sessional Staff Standards Framework** for information on selecting an organisational level for benchmarking.

Benchmarking using the BLASST Sessional Staff Standards Framework

Benchmarking means making and using “well-chosen and well-structured comparisons with other relevant institutions and organisations”³ to identify areas that need improvement. It involves “questioning how processes are performed, seeking out best practices, and implementing new models of operation.”⁴

How do I benchmark with the BLASST Framework?

You can benchmark with the Framework using the BLASST Benchmarking Interactive Tool (B-BIT) available at www.blasst.edu.au.



Using B-BIT, institutions and individuals can:

- Select an organisational level of engagement with the Framework (from individual Sessional Staff member to whole-of-institution)
- Benchmark against the national evidenced-based Sessional Staff standards
- Automatically generate a colour-coded summary report which can be downloaded and saved to file or printed
- Develop an action plan with strategies to guide quality enhancement towards good practice
- Engage in repeat benchmarking cycles
- Learn about standards of Good Practice.

³ Stella, A., & Woodhouse, D. (2007). Benchmarking in Australian higher education: A thematic analysis of AUQA audit reports. Australian Universities Quality Agency, 5

⁴ ibid. 6.

Benchmarking with the BLASST Framework can be carried out:

- Independently - benchmarking by individuals as a (self-)evaluation process, and using any of the institutional, department, faculty and individual levels
- Collaboratively - benchmarking by and across groups within institutions, departments, faculties, and individual Sessional Staff to gather different perspectives
- Cross-institutionally – at an institutional level or between departments, faculties and Sessional Staff at different universities
- Externally – in collaboration with other individuals, departments, faculties and organisations.

Selecting a benchmarking level

You select which level of the Framework you wish to work through by thinking about what you want to achieve and at what organisational level:



You will want to work at the Institutional level if:

you want to benchmark at a whole-of-institution level and your focus includes the role and contribution of Sessional Staff to the University or institution

and/or

you wish to obtain benchmarking data on Sessional Staff standards in your university or institution.

Those working in Human Resources, University Executive, Senior Management or as professional and academic leaders and managers will find this level useful.

You will want to work at the Faculty level if:

you are working in or with a Faculty and have responsibility for the management, support, recruitment, administration or professional development of Sessional Staff within that faculty

and/or

you wish to obtain benchmarking data on Sessional Staff standards in your faculty.

This may also be referred to as School or Division or College level.

You will want to work at the Department level if:

you are working in or with a department and have responsibility for the management, support, recruitment, administration or professional development of Sessional Staff

and/or

you wish to obtain benchmarking data on Sessional Staff standards in your department.

This level may also be relevant to Unit Convenors, Subject Coordinators, Program Leaders or Directors, Research Centres.



You will want to work at the Individual Sessional Staff member level if:

you are a Sessional Staff member at a University or other higher education institution

and/or

you wish to self-evaluate against the Sessional Staff standards.

The BLASST Benchmarking Interactive Tool (B-BIT)

B-BIT is an online self-assessment and evaluative tool that is essentially an online, interactive version of the BLASST Sessional Staff Standards Framework.

B-BIT allows you to benchmark against the Sessional Staff Standards via any one of the four organisational levels.

Refer to the section on **How to use the Framework** to learn how to select an appropriate level.

BLASST Benchmarking Interactive Tool (B-BIT)

Select a level of assessment below to launch the tool.



Before you start benchmarking , please note :



You will not be able to save your work until a summary report is generated.

To protect and maintain individual and institutional privacy and confidentiality, BBIT DOES NOT retain the responses and information you enter **beyond the login screen.**

For this reason, we advise:

- minimal interruptions while you are working through BBIT
- leaving your browser window open on BBIT if you are interrupted
- saving your Summary Report, whether in html format or as a PDF

There is a **Save** button at the bottom of each B-BIT window which saves the current page.



Time is required to complete the benchmarking process. We suggest allowing at least two hours to complete individual benchmarking with B-BIT, and allowing a day for multi-level benchmarking with a group (refer to the section on Holding a BLASST Benchmarking Workshop).



Summary report: On completion of the exercise, a benchmarking Summary Report (PDF) will be generated to save, file or print for your reference.

We strongly recommend saving your Summary Report for your future reference in a secure location, whether online or in hard-copy form.

B-BIT DOES NOT retain information entered beyond the login screen.

Now, go to <http://blasst.edu.au/benchmarking.html> to begin benchmarking

Benchmarking with B-BIT

Please note: you can preview the Framework at any time by downloading it from the BLASST website

<http://blasst.edu.au/framework.html>

BLASST Benchmarking Interactive Tool (B-BIT)

Select a level of assessment below to launch the tool.

Individual Level

Department Level

Faculty Level

Institution Level

1. Click on a coloured box to start benchmarking at that level



To protect user privacy, all the information you enter after you log in is **not stored or saved in B-BIT**. At the end of the process, you will receive a summary report which collates all the data you have entered, which can be saved as a PDF file.

Remember You are responsible for downloading, saving and filing this report.

2. Read and tick the box if you agree to the B-BIT terms of use

Click **Submit** or **Exit**

B-BIT Privacy Statement and Terms of Use

Privacy
This statement sets out the BLASST Project policy relating to the collection and use of your personal information in addition to the Terms of Use. Your registration as a B-BIT user constitutes your agreement to terms of the Policy.

Please note: BLASST Project and may not be reproduced or distributed without permission. The information provided throughout B-BIT is intended for information and professional development purposes only. Any information provided about B-BIT should be directed to blasstproject@gmail.com

☐ I agree the above terms of use.

Please note: Any information provided about B-BIT should be directed to blasstproject@gmail.com

The Welcome page tells you:

- The selected organisational level
- The three Key Principles
- How to complete benchmarking

Welcome - Faculty-level Benchmarking

This Framework is designed to stimulate reflection and action, and to work towards consistency in good practice with regard to Sessional Staff. It can be used to inform practices and priorities.

Principles

Three guiding principles underpin the Framework:

- Quality Learning and Teaching
- Support for Sessional Staff
- Sustainability

How to Complete the Benchmarking Exercise

You have selected **Faculty level benchmarking**; that is, you will be responsible for your Faculty.

You haven't logged in

Getting Started - Department level

You have selected to answer **Department level** questions, please provide information related to the Department.


Department Name:	Coffee
Institution:	University of Australasia

[Submit](#)

Before you start to answer questions, you have to [Login](#)

Not have an account yet? [click to create one](#)

3. Before you begin benchmarking, you need to login OR create a new account.



Benchmarking leadership and advancement of standards for sessional teaching

You are here: [BLASST home](#) > [Build new account](#)

New account

Title:

First Name:

Last Name:

Your Position Type:

Your Faculty or Office:

Your Institution:



Remember to save as you go.

To protect user privacy, all the information you enter from this point is **not stored or saved until the summary report is generated**. You may then save the Summary Report as a PDF file.

[My Profile](#) [Logout](#)

Principle One: Quality of Learning and Teaching

The University is committed to consistently high quality learning and teaching for all of its students, regardless of the employment status of the staff member teaching them. It aims to ensure that the learning and teaching approaches adopted across the University match or exceed good practice; that learning and teaching values, principles and priorities are applied to sessional staff; and that sessional staff are included in University communities of practice.

In order to ensure sessional staff have the ability to attain Quality Teaching Standards, the University recognises that appropriate professional development must be provided for sessional staff.

Consider these criteria relating to Principle One

1. The institution articulates the employment and educational skills required from a sessional staff member.

Please click in the box below to select the set of statements which best applies to your Institution:

☐ I. A statement from the institution about skills required is included in the Enterprise Agreement. A generic position description is in place and available, which lists skills required, including teaching expertise, qualifications, and/or experience. Guidelines are provided for what should be included in job advertisements, including on the University website.

☐ II. Minimum qualifications are detailed; i.e. Bachelor's degree as minimum for teaching in undergraduate courses, Master's degree as minimum for teaching in postgraduate courses

☐ III. The institution does not articulate the minimum skills or qualifications required by sessional staff. The recruitment process does not consider qualifications of sessional staff. Sessional staff articulation of employment and educational skills proceeds on an ad-hoc, informal basis and is variable or inconsistent across the institution.

☐ IV. Not applicable

4. Once you have created a new account and/or logged in, you will see this box.

Each BBIT page consists of:

- One of three Key Principles
- Criteria
- Set of standard statements

[My Profile](#) [Logout](#)

Principle Two: Support for sessional staff

As an institution, the University is committed to achieving quality management standards in recruitment, employment, administration and academic support, in order to ensure consistent and appropriate support for sessional staff.

The University also recognises that sessional staff require basic infrastructure and provisions in order to undertake their roles effectively and professionally.

Consider these criteria relating to Principle Two

1. Institution has a funding model that allocates resources for sessional staff professional development

Please click in the box below to select the set of statements which best applies to your Institution:

☐ I. Professional development of sessional staff is adequately resourced through the funding model on an ongoing basis

☐ II. Funding and/or resourcing is available for the professional development of all sessional staff.

☐ III. No targeted resourcing for the professional development of sessional staff. Resources and/or funding are inadequate for development of sessional staff. Funding and/or resourcing is uncertain or not sustained.

☐ IV. Not applicable

Under each Principle there are criteria for that organisational level.

For each individual criterion there are a range of standards ranging from good practice to unsustainable.

5. Select the statement which **best matches your current context** as you see it. You need to enter something in the box unless you have selected *non-applicable*.

Please explain your selection

In this box you are asked to enter why you have chosen this particular set of statements as *most applicable* to your context.

You may be as detailed or as brief as you wish.

Note: Here is where you may also enter how well the statement set fits or doesn't fit your institutional context.



This text will appear in the Summary Report.

Consider these criteria relating to Principle One

1. The institution articulates the employment and educational skills required for teaching.

Please click in the box below to select the set of statements which best applies to your institution:

- ☐ i. A statement from the institution about skills required is included in the Employment and Educational Skills Required (EESR) statement, which lists skills required, including teaching expertise, qualifications, and what should be included in job advertisements, including on the University website.
- ☐ ii. Minimum qualifications are detailed; i.e. Bachelor's degree as minimum for teaching in postgraduate courses.
- ☐ iii. The institution does not articulate the minimum skills or qualifications required for teaching. Sessional staff articulation of employment and educational skills is informal basis and is variable or inconsistent across the institution.
- ☐ iv. Not applicable.

Please explain your selection:
Compulsory field unless 'not applicable' is selected

What evidence could you provide to support your selection:
Compulsory field unless 'not applicable' is selected

What evidence could you use to support this explanation?

In this box you are asked to enter what evidence you could use to support the explanation you have given in the box above.

Some examples of evidence: Learning and teaching committee meeting minutes, student support policy documents, workshop attendance sheets, pay slips, employment contracts, professional development programs, staff survey results, cross-institutional surveys.

Note: You cannot upload evidence to BBIT.



This text will appear in the Summary Report.

6. At the bottom of each page, you need to **Save** to move on or **Save and go back to the Previous page**.

Save & Previous step

7. Repeat for criteria relating to Principle 2 and Principle 3.

8. At the bottom of **Principle Three** page, click on **Save & Get Report**.

Save & Get report

Principle Three: Sustainability

The nature of casual employment means there are limits on the level to which the University can plan for, provide for and develop sessional staff as permanent staff. The University recognises that long-term sustainability of quality learning and teaching requires retaining good quality sessional staff, reducing turnover of sessional staff, and encouraging them in the pursuit and development of academic teaching careers. This can be achieved in part by recognising and rewarding sessional staff for the contribution they make to the university.

The University also recognises that sustainability in the achievement of standards depends on the provision of appropriate resources to underpin processes, and the minimisation of the administrative load on all staff (including academic, professional, and Human Resources staff).

Consider these criteria relating to Principle Three

1. Teaching excellence by sessional staff is recognised and rewarded.

Please click in the box below to select the set of statements which best applies to your institution:

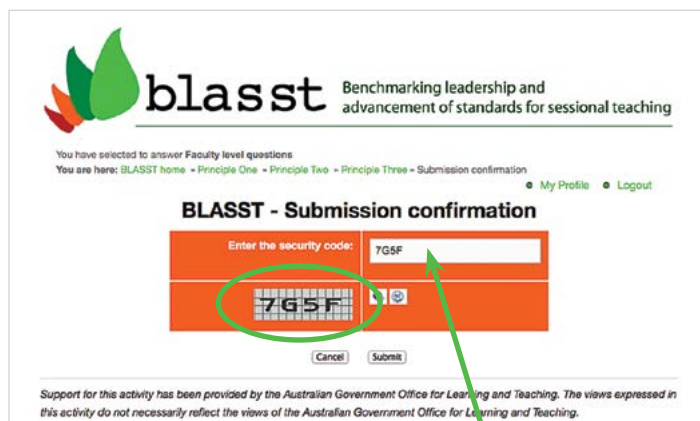
- ☐ i. Sessional staff are encouraged to apply for University teaching awards. Special categories of awards exist for sessional staff.
- ☐ ii. Sessional staff are able to apply for University teaching awards. Sessional staff are given guidance on how to document teaching experience.
- ☒ iii. Teaching excellence by sessional staff is not recognised or rewarded.
- ☐ iv. Not applicable.

Please explain your selection:
Compulsory field unless 'not applicable' is selected

Sessional staff are not eligible to apply for internal teaching and learning grants, therefore their contribution is not recognised or acknowledged.

What evidence could you provide to support your selection:
Compulsory field unless 'not applicable' is selected

The grant guidelines state that all applicants must be permanent or ongoing academic roles. It also states elsewhere (policies on internal funding opportunities) that sessional and casual staff are not eligible to apply for any teaching and learning grants.




blasst Benchmarking leadership and advancement of standards for sessional teaching

You have selected to answer Faculty level questions
You are here: [BLASST home](#) - [Principle One](#) - [Principle Two](#) - [Principle Three](#) - Submission confirmation [My Profile](#) [Logout](#)

BLASST - Submission confirmation

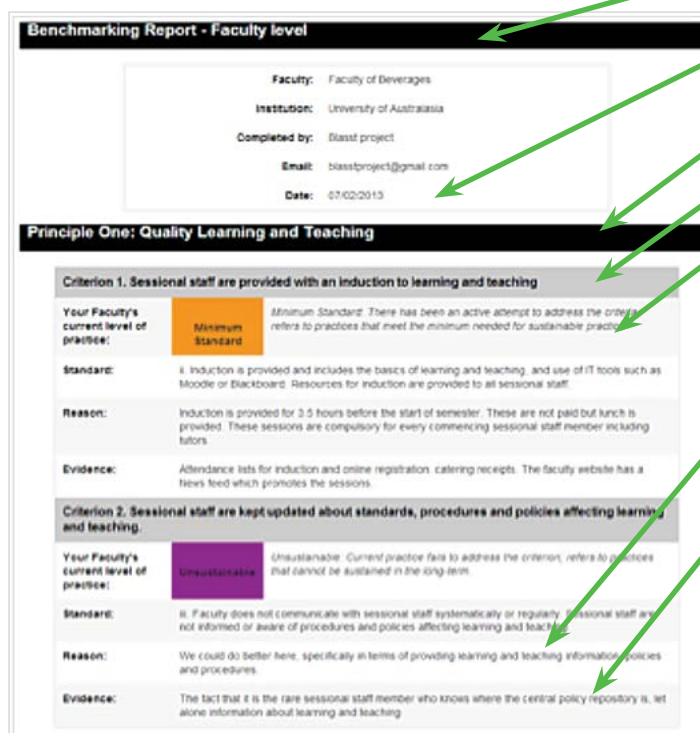
Enter the security code:



Support for this activity has been provided by the Australian Government Office for Learning and Teaching. The views expressed in this activity do not necessarily reflect the views of the Australian Government Office for Learning and Teaching.

9. Before obtaining the summary report you will need to prove you're human by entering the security code.

A Summary Report is automatically generated at the end of the benchmarking process for saving to file as a PDF or for printing.



Benchmarking Report - Faculty level

Faculty: Faculty of Deverages
Institution: University of Australasia
Completed by: Blasst project
Email: blasstproject@gmail.com
Date: 07/02/2013

Principle One: Quality Learning and Teaching

Criterion 1: Sessional staff are provided with an induction to learning and teaching

Your Faculty's current level of practice: **Minimum Standard** Minimum Standard: There has been an active attempt to address the criterion, refers to practices that meet the minimum needed for sustainable practice.

Standard: ii. Induction is provided and includes the basics of learning and teaching, and use of IT tools such as Moodle or Blackboard. Resources for induction are provided to all sessional staff.

Reason: Induction is provided for 3.5 hours before the start of semester. These are not paid but lunch is provided. These sessions are compulsory for every commencing sessional staff member including tutors.

Evidence: Attendance lists for induction and online registration, catering receipts. The faculty website has a news feed which promotes the sessions.

Criterion 2: Sessional staff are kept updated about standards, procedures and policies affecting learning and teaching.

Your Faculty's current level of practice: **Unsustainable** Unsustainable: Current practice fails to address the criterion, refers to practices that cannot be sustained in the long term.

Standard: ii. Faculty does not communicate with sessional staff systematically or regularly. Sessional staff are not informed or aware of procedures and policies affecting learning and teaching.

Reason: We could do better here, specifically in terms of providing learning and teaching information, policies and procedures.

Evidence: The fact that it is the rare sessional staff member who knows where the central policy repository is, let alone information about learning and teaching.

The BLASST Benchmarking Summary Report includes:

- The organisational level
- Date completed
- Key Principles
- Criteria
- Standard and current level of practice (colour-coded)
- Your explanation for the standard selected
- Notes on the evidence that can be used to support this explanation

The BLASST Summary Report and Action Plan

The BLASST Summary Report presents your results using a traffic light colour coded scheme. Green represents achieving good practice against a criterion, orange indicates an attainment of a minimum standard and red indicates unsustainable practice.

Good practice

refers to practices that systematically enhance quality learning and teaching and retain and support Sessional Staff.

Minimum standards

refers to practice that meets the minimum need for sustainable practice.

Unsustainable

refers to practice that cannot be sustained in the long-term.

Benchmarking Report - Faculty level		
Faculty:	busyness	
Institution:	busiest	
Completed by:	Blasst project	
Email:	blasstproject@gmail.com	
Date:	14/06/2013	
Principle One: Quality Learning and Teaching		
Criterion 1. Sessional staff are provided with an induction to learning and teaching		
Your Faculty's current level of practice:	Minimum Standard	Minimum Standard: There has been an active attempt to address the criteria; refers to practices that meet the minimum needed for sustainable practice
Standard:	ii. Induction is provided and includes the basics of learning and teaching, and use of IT tools such as Moodle or Blackboard. Resources for induction are provided to all sessional staff.	

Reflect on your summary report.

The report can be used to inform and guide the ongoing development of good practice. You can use this report in many ways: for self-reflection; as a basis for discussion with colleagues or a mentor across the department or faculty, or as part of an institutional leadership project.

Your summary report is a confidential document.

An individual using the B-BIT retains

the right to keep the report confidential and the option to share with others, for example, with their colleagues, supervisor, department or faculty. Likewise, departments, faculties and institutions have the right to keep their reports confidential.

Developing an Action Plan

Develop a series of actions resulting from this reflective and benchmarking exercise.

The summary report has a blank field for each criterion. Write your strategies for your action plan here.

Criteria coded as green identify strengths and good practice and you may note that "we will work towards maintaining this standard by... [insert your action plan strategy]". Good practice can be shared with colleagues and the sector. Criteria coded as minimum or unsustainable needs to be addressed with action plan strategies that will develop current practice into good practice. A strategy for achieving this should be included in your action plan.

Action cycles

Working towards enhancing quality is best undertaken as part of a regular quality cycle. It is recommended that you engage with the Framework on a regular basis. This enables you to monitor your outcomes and change over time.

BLASST Benchmarking Workshops

Benchmarking can be a time-consuming process.

One advantage to benchmarking with the Framework and B-BIT is that the entire process from initiating benchmarking to reporting can be achieved in a day through holding a workshop and engaging with the Sessional Staff Standards as a group.

A **BLASST Benchmarking Workshop** is where an institution, faculty, department or centre hosts a structured day workshop for participants to work through the Framework using the online interactive tool B-BIT to generate a series of Benchmarking Summary Reports and Action Plans.

Why a 'Benchmarking Workshop'?

Benchmarking through a workshop can support you to:

- collaboratively benchmark against the Sessional Staff Standards;
- produce colour-coded summary reports in bulk which can be individually downloaded and saved;
- produce a series of action plans with a range of strategies to guide quality enhancement towards good practice;
- engage in repeat benchmarking cycles;
- learn about Good Practice with Sessional Staff.



How long is a BLASST Benchmarking Workshop? We suggest allowing at least one day for a structured workshop that incorporates multi-level benchmarking and group discussions.



Who attends the Workshop? The host centre or department, with invited participants including Sessional Staff, and at least one independent workshop facilitator.



What will participants gain from a BLASST Benchmarking Workshop? On completion of the workshop, all participants will have generated a benchmarking Summary Report (PDF) to save or print for their own reference. They will also take part in collaborative and critical discussions, gaining additional perspectives on sessional staff issues. Interacting with the tool collectively will also introduce participants to standards of good practice at various organisational levels.

Holding a BLASST Benchmarking Workshop

Before the Workshop – a checklist:

- ☐ Adapt the Workshop Program (see template below) as appropriate
- ☐ Send invitations (see sample invitation below) to potential participants, including Sessional Staff, at the organisational level/s (Institutional, Faculty/School, Department, Program, Unit) you wish to benchmark.
- ☐ Ask a senior level participant to lead the group on the day in a *Think Aloud* exercise (see next page)

Book:

- ☐ A venue large enough to hold the group
- ☐ Computers
- ☐ Audio-visual equipment
- ☐ Catering
- ☐ An independent facilitator to guide participants through the benchmarking process

Sample invitation to a Benchmarking Workshop



*You are invited to take part in a one-day Workshop
on Benchmarking with the Sessional Staff Standards Framework
at [insert institution details] on [insert date / time]*

**Welcome to BLASST – an OLT-funded project to establish national
standards to support and enhance quality teaching
by Sessional Staff in higher education.**

[institution name] is holding a BLASST Benchmarking Workshop with the Sessional Staff Standards Framework to evaluate the quality of performance and outcomes in learning and teaching; and in management and administrative policy, procedure and practices affecting sessional teaching staff.

As a sessional teacher OR as a staff member who is involved in managing, administering, or convening Sessional Staff in [Department/ Faculty / School / Institution] you are invited to this Workshop to use an online interactive tool to evaluate Sessional Staff standards for quality learning and teaching at your institution.

The Workshop

This one-day workshop will be facilitated by [host department or centre] (your institutional contact is [name & email]). Your fellow workshop participants will include sessional teachers from your institution as well as academic and professional staff. At the end of the Workshop, each participant will be presented with a customised summary report.

Sample BLASST Benchmarking Workshop Program

	DAY PROGRAM	
10.00	Welcome Introduction to the BLASST Sessional Staff Standards Framework (SSSF) Introduction to the BLASST Benchmarking Interactive Tool (B-BIT) Benchmarking using the SSSF and B-BIT	Host centre representative + Facilitator
10.10	Starting off with the <i>Institutional standards</i> • Think Aloud exercise	Invited senior level participants + Facilitator
10.40	Group activity: Attendees work in groups at the SSSF <i>Institutional, Faculty, Department</i> , and/or <i>Individual</i> levels work through the SSSF and B-BIT	Whole group
12.00	Lunch	
12.30	<i>continue Group activity</i>	<i>Whole group</i>
2.00	Afternoon tea	
2.15	Whole-of-group discussion: What areas of strength and areas for further development around Sessional Staff issues have been identified for this institution?	Whole group + facilitator
3.15	Whole-of-group discussion: Where to from here? Developing action plans and timeframes	Whole group + facilitator
4.00	Close	

On the day of the Workshop:

- ☐ Welcome and introduction to the Framework, to B-BIT, and (if appropriate) to benchmarking for quality learning and teaching.
- ☐ State the confidential nature of the summary reports at the opening of the workshop.
- ☐ **Think Aloud** exercise:
Support the senior-level participant as they lead the group in a **Think Aloud** activity where they work through a section of the B-BIT that is projected in front of the whole group, and verbalise their thoughts and actions as they do so.
- ☐ Be prepared to have some lively discussions! Some prompts:
What areas of strength around Sessional Staff issues have been identified for this institution?
What areas are in need of development?
Where to from here? (useful for developing Action Plans).
- ☐ Foster a context of trust and respect where each participant assumes a leadership role for Sessional Staff issues within their institution.

The Think Aloud exercise

We recommend that you include a structured **Think Aloud** exercise in your own Benchmarking Workshop.

In our pilot BLASST workshops, we asked senior-level participants to 'think aloud' or verbalise their thoughts, plans and actions in front of the entire group as they worked through a section of B-BIT (for example, Principle One at the Institutional level). This provided a model for working through B-BIT, and also established a collaborative and constructive workshop atmosphere that was critical to group engagement with the Framework and B-BIT and with fostering discussion around the Sessional Staff Standards¹.

¹ Luzia, K; Harvey, M; Parker, N; Brown, N; McCormack, C. & McKenzie, J. (2013). Benchmarking with the BLASST Sessional Staff Standards Framework. *Journal of University Teaching and Learning Practice*.

After the Workshop:

- ☐ Develop an Action Plan
(refer to the section on
The BLASST Summary Report and Action Plan)
- ☐ Put Plan into Action



BLASST OFF!

BLASST - the glossary

Action research the fundamental aim of action research is to link “action” and “research”, that is, practice and theory. This assumes partnerships (between participants and researcher), reflection, some qualitative investigation and some cyclic structure (that is, it is not a linear process). Although there are multiple models of action research, most share the four basic steps of plan, act, observe and reflect.

Benchmarking means making and using “well-chosen and well-structured comparisons with other relevant institutions and organisations” to identify areas that need improvement. It involves “questioning how processes are performed, seeking out best practices, and implementing new models of operation” (Stella & Woodhouse, 2007, p.5).

Benchmarking Workshop where an institution, faculty, department or centre hosts a structured day workshop for participants to work through the Framework using the online interactive tool B-BIT to generate a series of Benchmarking Summary Reports and Action Plans.

Casual academics – SEE **Sessional Staff**

Course Co-ordinator synonymous with Unit Convenor, Subject Co-ordinator.

Criteria/ Criterion statements that identify key elements of good practice.

Department (level) an organisational level of the Framework referring to the systems, activities and practices that are generally located at the department level of a higher education institution also *Program, School, Unit, Discipline, Centre- level*.

Evidence a thing or things helpful in forming a conclusion or judgment.

<http://www.thefreedictionary.com/evidence>

Examples of evidence relevant to the BLASST Framework: *Learning and teaching committee meeting minutes, student support policy documents, workshop attendance sheets, pay slips, employment contracts, professional development programs, staff survey results*.

Faculty (level) an organisational level of the Framework referring to the systems, activities and practices that are *generally* located at the faculty level of an institution; also *College, Division, School*.

Individual (level) an organisational level of the Framework referring to the systems, activities and practices that are *generally* located at the level of the individual staff member.

Induction: Learning and Teaching induction provided at commencement period of employment.

Institutional (level) an organisational level of the Framework referring to the systems, activities and practices that are *generally* located at the whole-of-institutional or all-of university level; also *University, Organisation, Higher Education Provider, College*.

Key Principles Guiding principles of the BLASST Sessional Staff Standards Framework:

BLASST Key Principle One: Quality Learning and Teaching

The University is committed to consistently high quality learning and teaching for all students, regardless of the employment status of the staff member teaching them. It aims to ensure that the learning and teaching approaches adopted across the University match or exceed good practice; that learning and teaching values, principles and priorities are applied to sessional staff; and that sessional staff are included in University communities of

practice.

In order to ensure sessional staff have the ability to attain Quality Teaching Standards, the University also recognises that appropriate professional development must be provided for sessional staff.

BLASST Key Principle Two: Support for Sessional Staff

The University is committed to achieving quality management standards in recruitment, employment, administration and academic support, in order to ensure consistent and appropriate support for sessional staff.

The University also recognises that sessional staff require basic infrastructure and provisions in order to undertake their roles effectively and professionally.

BLASST Key Principle Three: Sustainability

The nature of casual employment means there are limits on the level to which the University can plan for, provide for and develop sessional staff as individuals. However, the University recognises that long-term sustainability of quality learning and teaching requires retaining good quality sessional staff, reducing turnover of sessional staff, and encouraging them in the pursuit and development of academic teaching careers. This can be achieved in part by recognising and rewarding sessional staff for the contribution they make to the university.

The University also recognises that sustainability in the achievement of standards depends on the provision of appropriate resources to underpin processes, and the minimisation of the administrative load on all staff (including academic, administrative staff, and Human Resources).

Orientation introduction of new staff to workplace including systems, e.g., Administrative, OH&S, HR.

Policies and procedures principles, rules, and guidelines formulated or adopted by an organisation to reach its long-term goals and typically published in a booklet or other form that is widely accessible.

<http://www.businessdictionary.com/definition/policies-and-procedures.html#ixzz2WvhVLtJE>

Professional Development ongoing professional learning opportunities.

Professional staff non-teaching staff in higher education.

Sessional Staff can be defined as any teachers in higher education who are employed on a casual, sessional or contract basis. Also known as adjuncts, sessionals, casual academics, tutors, part-time, contract teachers.

Standards stable, predetermined descriptions of the qualities of performance that describe to what level the criterion has been achieved.

Subject analogous to unit of study.

Teaching teams: all teaching staff on one unit of study (or subject), and may include tutors, lab assistants and support staff, lecturers, unit convenor.

TEQSA Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency.

Think Aloud exercise an activity involving a person verbalising their thoughts, plans and actions while working through a task.

Unit convenor synonymous with Course Convenor, Subject Co-ordinator.

Unit of study analogous to subject.

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George Brown, Director of Learning and Teaching, Australian Institute of Business

Project Evaluator: Dominique Parrish, University of Wollongong

Cartoonist: Simon Kneebone

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Authors: Karina Luzia and Marina Harvey

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