

# Setting the standards for sessional staff: quality learning and teaching

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22<sup>nd</sup> February, 2013



Supported by the  
Australian  
Government Office  
for Learning and  
Teaching.

**Sess-ion-al Staff** /sessional stæf/ **noun.**

*Any academic staff members who are not on permanent or continuing contracts. This includes lecturers, tutors, online course facilitators and moderators, markers and demonstrators.*

Between 40 and 50 per cent of teaching in Australian higher education is currently done by sessional staff.”

*the RED Report (2008)*



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# The need for sessional staff standards

Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) has affirmed a commitment to “...ensuring that growth in the higher education system will be underpinned by a robust quality assurance and regulatory framework” (Evans, 2010).

TEQSA

Review of Australian Higher Education

Final Report



December 2008

Resources to Assist Discipline Communities to Define Threshold Learning Outcomes (TLOs)

National Teaching Quality Indicators Project

An outcome of the ALTC's Learning and Teaching Academic Standards (LTAS) Project

September 2011



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# The need for standards

a need to introduce and “systematise” support for sessional staff

- “...the needs of sessional staff will have to be incorporated better into the planning of teaching and the initiatives offered to support staff in improving their teaching.... AUQA recommends that the University develop a strategy to better support sessional teaching staff and monitor the effectiveness of this strategy in order to improve the overall student learning experience.” (Australian Universities Quality Agency, 2006b, p.10).
- “...the University will require a comprehensive plan to address the needs of sessional staff including retention, contract management and professional development.” (Australian Universities Quality Agency, 2008a, p.10).



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## The need for standards

- “There is a need to strengthen staff development activities and mechanisms that would allow sessional staff with excellent teaching reputations to share best practice. Given the positive contribution so many sessional staff are making, this should include the embracing of the sessional staff as an integral part of the...teaching community” (Australian Universities Quality Agency, 2008b, p.18).
- “Sessional staff...did not seem to be part of the rigorous performance management and development scheme which is of benefit both to individuals in terms of career development and to the institution in order to secure the best possible outcomes in teaching and learning.” (Australian Universities Quality Agency, 2009, p.26).

# Building on the research



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the RED report  
Recognition • Enhancement • Development

 CLASS

# Introducing the Sessional Staff Standards Framework

This framework establishes **standards**, and criteria, by which we measure the quality of performance and outcomes in learning and teaching, in management and administrative policy, procedures and practices affecting sessional staff.

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

# 3 Principles

1. Quality Learning and Teaching

2. Support for Sessional Staff

3. Sustainability




# Purpose of the framework

Supports the process of evaluating and benchmarking practices around supporting quality in learning and teaching for sessional staff at either:

- individual,
- department,
- faculty or
- organisational level.



# Online interactive to facilitate the self-assessment process with the capability of generating a customised report



**The Sessional Staff Standards Framework**  
Benchmarking Interactive  
Faculty level

## 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, professional, and Human Resources staff).

## Please answer the two questions in this section

### 3.2a

Sessional Staff are included in academic communities of practice

i. Sessional Staff are invited to and attend academic seminars and other events. Sessional Staff are encouraged to contribute to faculty events. Sessional Staff participate in research on learning and teaching.

ii. Sessional Staff are invited to attend seminars and other academic events.

iii. Sessional Staff are not included in academic activities and events.

Use the drop down menu below to select the statement which best applies to your

iii. Sessional Staff are not included in academic activities and events.

Please provide reasons for your answer:

bbb



## Benchmarking Report - Faculty Level

Completed by: test academic LTC  
Date: 27/03/2012

## Principle One: Assuring the Quality of Learning and Teaching

Question 1.2a	Sessional Staff receive an induction related to Learning and Teaching	
Your Faculty's current level of practice:	<b>Unsustainable</b>	<i>Current practice fails to address the criterion; refers to practices that cannot be sustained in the long-term.</i>
Reason:	iii. Induction is not provided. Induction is not part of Faculties' strategic plans.	
	<i>why should we?</i>	
Evidence:	Have none	
Question 1.2b	Sessional Staff are informed and updated about standards, procedures and policies affecting	
Your Faculty's current level of practice:	<b>Good Practice</b>	<i>Indicates that the criterion is being met or exceeded. Refers to practices that systematically enhance quality learning and teaching for students and retention of quality staff</i>
Reason:	i. Sessional Staff are regularly informed of changes that may impact their work e.g. standards, procedures and policies affecting learning and teaching. Faculty distributes policies with	

# Case Studies

# 1. Macquarie University

Twenty participants – four levels – two Faculties + University Executive

## Benefits

- Time efficiencies
- Generation of cross disciplinary and cross-level discussions
- Honesty and openness of executive for the talking aloud role modelling

## 2. University of Canberra

### Sixteen participants - two levels - one Faculty

#### Benefits

##### Strategic opportunity

- Complemented Faculty Dean/ADE 2012 initiatives
- Helped keep momentum created by initiatives going
- Sense of community emerged

##### Opportunity for conversations

- Safety within one faculty
- Generated cross-level discussions
- Sharing areas of concern and good practice



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# 3. University of Technology, Sydney

Thirty-four participants – four levels - eight Faculties and University Executive

## Benefits:

- Opportunities: 'space' & structure for conversations
- Discussions: across faculties, roles and subjects
- Differences: in experiences & perspectives highlighted

# 4. University of Tasmania

Two campuses - nineteen participants – four levels

## Benefits

- Generation of cross-faculty and cross-level discussions
- High level involvement of sessional staff
- Identification of areas of great practice within the institution
- Sharing of areas of concern, particularly those raised by sessionals themselves
- Demonstrated that this type of workshop can occur through video conferencing

# Piloting demonstrated that the BLASST Framework

- recognises and incorporates the contribution of sessional staff
- is useful in a range of contexts and levels
- provides opportunities for review, reflection, (self-) evaluation as well as conversations and network building
- demonstrates efficacy of these national standards for sessional staff



# BLASST streams

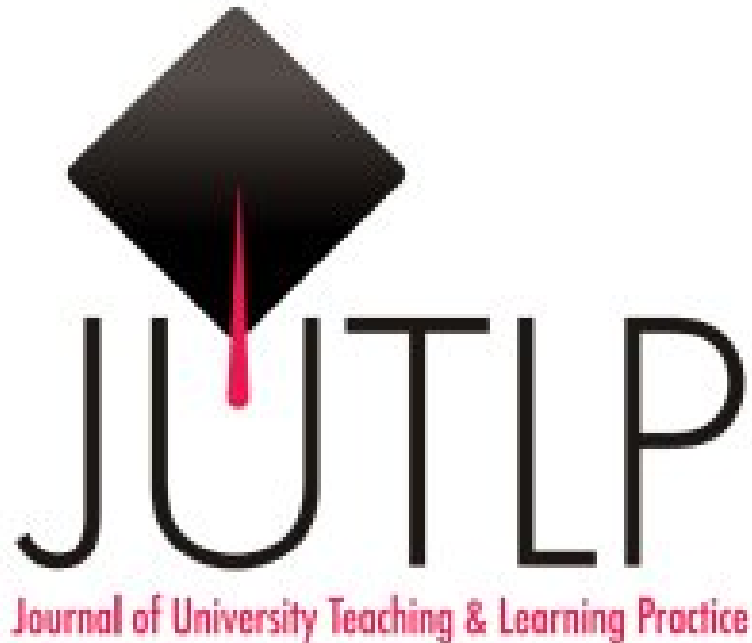
	Stream A	Stream B	Stream C
1.15 – 1.45 PM	BLASST online (Room002)	Pecha Kucha Good practice case studies (Room211)	Papers (Room212)
1.50 – 2.20 PM	Papers (Room212)	BLASST online (Room002)	Pecha Kucha Good practice case studies (Room211)
2.25 – 2.55 PM	Pecha Kucha Good practice case studies (Room211)	Papers (Room212)	BLASST online (Room002)



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# Full BLASST summit papers: October, 2013



# Q & A Panel

How do we sustain good practice for sessional staff?

Steve Cassidy, *Dept of Computing, MQ*

Suzi Hewlett, *General Manager, OLT*

Suzi Vaughan, *DVC L&T, QUT*

Laurence Wainwright, *Casual Academic, UTS*

# BLASST National Good Practice Awards

Announcing the finalists...

# Celebrating good practice

Drinks in the foyer