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Guidelines for Managing Sessionally Employed Teaching Staff

Acknowledgement

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This resource, originally developed in 2015, has been produced by Cassandra Hood, Centre for Innovation on Learning and Teaching, Flinders University. Any comments or enquiries on this publication should be directed to:

Centre for Innovation in Learning and Teaching

Educational Technology and FLO Support:

Ph. (+61 820) 15414

Learning and Teaching:

Ph. (+61 820) 12731

cilt@flinders.edu.au

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Introduction

Topic coordinators are frequently required to organise and manage sessional teaching staff within their topics. Some of these teachers may be very experienced and others teaching for the first time. The University expects that sessional staff will:

- (a) have access to appropriate professional development opportunities
- (b) be paid for attending any specific professional development sessions.

There are a variety of workshops available for both sessional teachers and supervisors and the list below indicates some (but not all) the workshops available for staff.

Supervisors:

- [Supervising sessional academic staff](#)
- [Starting out well: Setting up induction / probation for new staff](#)
- [Introduction to supervision: Parts 1-4](#)
- [Things that make you go hmm : Managing Performance](#)
- [Giving and receiving performance feedback](#)

Sessional Staff:

- [Introduction to Sessional Tutoring and Lecturing](#)
- [Sessional Staff: Introduction to Assessment](#)
- [Science and Engineering Demonstrator Training](#)
- [Sessional Staff: Supporting the Success of your First Year Students](#)

(Note: Sessionally employed teaching staff are expected to participate in training workshops facilitated by the Centre for Innovation in Learning and Teaching (CILT). [More information](#) about these sessions is available or you may wish to contact the [CILT](#) to arrange a specific session for the staff in your school.)

This booklet will give you some information to get you started in supervising your sessional teaching staff. Remember to check with the Course Coordinator and [Human Resources](#) to ensure you cover everything necessary.

Administration

It is important to ensure that the following forms are completed before the sessionally employed staff member begins their work:

- [employment forms](#)
- Tax Declaration Form (this form is usually available from your school office or the HR officer responsible for your school.

Reporting relationships

While casual academic staff (i.e. sessionally employed staff) are usually assigned to the Head of School who may allocate their responsibilities, direct day-to-day duties are usually assigned by the Topic Coordinator. [Human resources policy](#) indicates that you may be required to assess the overall performance of the staff member. Additionally, if they have been responsible for a semester long topic they will also be required to complete a [Student Evaluation of Teaching](#) (SET).

Pay and timesheets

You may also be required to ensure new staff are oriented and settle in appropriately. They may need to know:

- how to access and complete electronic time sheets
- who needs to sign their timesheets
- what they are being paid and what level of work is expected of them appropriate to the pay level that is assigned - [Casual Teaching - Estimated Work Schedule](#) (HR/EWS) is available to help determine what work may be required of the casual academic staff and their payment schedule.

Your school administration office should be able to help with these issues.

Definition of duties and salary payment codes

The description of duties able to be undertaken by casual academic staff is listed in the [Casual Employment Form](#) (Academic) (HR/CET). A list of associated [pay codes](#) is also available.

Other issues that may need to be addressed before the person starts work are:

- has time for assessment and consultation been built into payments for tutorials or paid separately?
- are staff required to attend meetings, and is payment for these included in their schedule (these would be paid at OD1 rate)?
- has time been assigned for attendance at professional development activities and is payment for these included in their schedule (these would be paid at OD1 rate)?

General organisational matters

It is important that you check that the sessionally employed teaching staff are aware of:

- times and locations of classes, student numbers in classes
- internal vs external students
- space availability
- how to get a library/staff card
- email lists
- where to find topic guides
- what e-readings and text books and are used

- how to access teaching resources
- how to complete attendance records
- how to use assessment sheets, mark sheets or student feedback forms
- who the other members of the department are
- consultative committee information
- meeting times
- how to access pigeonholes / message area / other communication avenues
- how to access buildings or labs outside normal hours
- how to access stationery
- [occupational health and safety information](#)
- [equal opportunity policies](#)
- [student with disabilities policies](#)
- information on what [services are available to students.](#)

Establishing teaching roles and responsibilities

Early teaching assignments allow time for academics and sessionally employed teachers to discuss the topic, its role within the course/s and their mutual responsibilities as well as to meet. This time is crucial for first-time sessionally employed teachers and for experienced teachers taking on new assignments. Establish firmly the roles that you and your sessional employed teaching staff will play.

Allocating responsibilities

If at all possible allocate responsibilities at a meeting of all sessional staff so that tasks are allocated equitably and efficiently (and the needs of all staff are met as fairly as possible).

Possible responsibilities may include:

- assisting in topic/course preparation
- preparing and/or instructing in laboratories
- leading discussions
- conducting or helping to conduct review sessions
- attending lectures
- giving guest lectures
- taking attendance
- assisting in assignment and test preparation
- being available during tests
- grading and calculating grades
- holding office hours.

As well as dealing with the administration and general organisational matters your academic responsibilities will include:

- ensuring the sessionally employed teaching staff have whatever supplies they need

- scheduling and directing meetings specifically aimed at sessionally employed teaching staff
- providing advice, support and feedback as required (e.g. on presentation, teaching skills, teaching effectiveness and marking methods)
- advising sessionally employed teaching staff on curriculum content
- supervising and participating in the construction of assessment pieces.

Learning and Teaching issues

It is important that sessionally employed teaching staff are clear about how you wish them to work in your topic. Outline your expectations with regard to the learning outcomes of the topic and tutorials. Give sessionally employed teachers some ideas for the workshops, such as:

- meeting with students
- icebreakers
- time and resource organisation.

Clarify the role of tutorials with regard to lectures, for example, establish:

- how the lectures fit into the course
- whether the tutorials act as preparation or follow up from the lectures
- the links between lectures and tutorials.

Tutor/Student interaction

The sessionally employed tutor may have little or no experience in their role. It may be the first time they have had to supervise others and therefore may require advice regarding the rules of conduct. You may need to let them know:

- expectations in terms of consultation times for sessionally employed teachers and students
- about respecting confidentiality by refraining from discussing private matters of students with other sessionally employed teaching staff
- how to refer students to support resources such as Student Counselling or Study Skills. (Note: these can be found in the Sessionally Employed Teacher's booklet)
- to treat students with respect and to treat them fairly and equally, despite personal feelings about particular individuals
- to be careful about touching a student or closing an office door when only you and the student are present in the office
- to refrain from conducting close personal relationships with members of the class
- to refrain from criticizing you when talking to students.

A range of resources on teaching methods are available for download from [Learning and Teaching](#) web pages.

Assessment

Assessment is a critical aspect of the teaching and learning process. It is complex and is an area that often causes anxiety for both students and academic staff. Ensure that sessionally employed teaching staff:

- know how to discuss required assessments with students
- understand the assessment guidelines as they are intended
- interpret the models of assessment tasks
- understand the written marking guidelines for sessionally employed teachers
- have access to a range of worked examples (e.g. the good and not so good submissions)
- understand what the average student needs to achieve to get through the required material
- understand the importance of feedback, feeding forward and know how to provide this in a usable manner to students
- understand the department's process regarding due dates and late submissions
- know the time frame and method of handing back work (e.g. electronic submission and return)
- understand if electronic marking is required and ensure they are upskilled to undertake this
- know what is expected about assessment records, where they are kept, and what format is expected when recording grades.

Tips on mentoring sessionally employed teaching staff

Your role with your sessionally employed teaching staff will differ according to the amount of experience they have at teaching. Those newer to the role may require more support, however even those with more experience may be accustomed to having regular contact with a supervisor. Both parties may benefit from a frank discussion about expectations in relation to the amount of support that is available and the form it will take.

Some considerations include:

- Be aware that sessionally employed teachers may be unfamiliar with various university and department regulations, office procedures, routine deadlines, and other professional protocols that you do not normally think about. It is important that this information is passed on in detail.
- Pace the information that you provide and be prepared to give the same information in different ways and in different contexts.
- Give fair, encouraging feedback on the sessionally employed teacher's job performance on a regular basis. Ensure that comments are given in ways that support improvement and future success.
- Maintain regular, weekly meetings with sessionally employed teaching staff. It is useful to hold them so that staff have opportunities to raise and discuss issues as they arise. These meetings demonstrate your commitment to teaching excellence and staff morale.

- Cultivate an environment where temporary lapses, setbacks and concerns are openly discussed so they can be learned from.
- Allow sessionally employed teachers to explore their own potential.
- Review your relationship occasionally. The relationship is designed to self-destruct as the sessionally employed teacher moves on to becoming a colleague rather than an assistant. (Talking about emerging stresses informally can resolve them).

Employing international sessionally employed teachers

Sessionally employed teaching staff from other cultures brings different perspectives and backgrounds which contribute a great deal to a course. However, the benefits may include some drawbacks that require addressing. These might include:

- communication difficulties and possible misunderstandings in the roles of students and teacher
- assumptions about students, teachers and the classroom environment in general.

It is important to ensure that any misunderstandings are discussed and addressed early in the semester. Raising awareness of different approaches to teaching, discussing various teaching methods and adapting methods so that all staff are comfortable with the outcomes usually resolves issues.

Some common misconceptions include:

- The educational background of the student body will be standardised: this is particularly true of people who come from a standard national curriculum background who may not be prepared for the wide range of abilities and levels of motivation characteristic of our classes (especially undergraduate classes).
- The instructor is an absolute authority figure who should not be questioned – there may be a lack of familiarity with the process of actively involving students in the learning process and in providing specific and frequent feedback. They may initially perceive the right of an undergraduate to question that process as disrespectful, if unprepared for it to happen.
- The learning environment is a formal setting: many sessionally employed teachers might not be familiar with the informality of the Australian classroom. They may not be prepared for students who arrive late for class, wear inappropriate dress, talk or eat in class.

Further information

If you have any questions about this guide or about supervising sessional staff, you are welcome to contact the [Centre for Innovation in Learning and Teaching](#).