

Supporting sessional staff: A cyclical and responsive approach

Introduction. A recently established, discipline-focussed learning and teaching group in a large Australian university has been tasked with effectively engaging large cohorts of sessional teaching staff to improve teaching quality. This showcase presentation will present a model developed by the group to engage with, learn from and respond to the changing needs, and changing membership, of this essential cohort.

Aims. This model responds to calls for systematic and sustained approaches to supporting quality in teaching and the student experience in the context of an increasing proportion of sessional staff (Harvey, 2017; Knott et al., 2015). Casual staff consistently identify challenges related to job security/satisfaction, lack of support and a sense of isolation (Bodak et al., 2018). The model offers a means to identify and respond to these challenges in a faculty setting.

Methods. A longitudinal survey was developed by the authors to explore sessional staff experiences and inform resources and support. The survey was administered three times per semester across five semesters. Participants were invited to describe memorable experiences of academic support, engagement and development, and to include Likert-scale ratings for each. Thematic analysis of the results after each survey round, and at the conclusion of five semesters, has informed subsequent work of the group.

Results. Analysis of 650 responses identified key themes and informed development of “just in time” support for administrative challenges, as well as tailored teaching resources delivered through workshops and online. Changes in staff survey responses indicate improvement in several critical areas over time. Exploring how this process and its outcomes compare to other disciplinary contexts is a next step for the project.

Discussion. A cyclical and responsive approach to supporting sessional staff offers a mechanism to engage with the evolving needs of this increasingly important cohort.

Bodak M, Harrison H, Lindsay D, Holmes C (2018) The experiences of sessional staff teaching into undergraduate nursing programmes in Australia: A literature review, *Collegian* 26: 212-221

Harvey M (2017) Quality learning and teaching with sessional staff: Systematising good practice for academic development, *International Journal for Academic Development*, 22(1): 1-6

Knott G, Crane L, Heslop I, Glass BD (2015) Training and support of sessional staff to improve quality of teaching and learning at universities, *American Journal of Pharmaceutical Education* 79(5): Article 72