

## Teaching and Learning Training for Sessional Teaching Staff at the University of Queensland

### Background

The recent Australian Universities Teaching Committee (AUTC) project (2003) carried out by teams at the University of Queensland and the Queensland University of Technology examined issues surrounding the appointment, management and training of sessional teaching staff in Australian universities. The project was concerned with encouraging universities to move towards a more principled employment, training and support regime as historically, the sector has dealt with the employment of casual and sessional teaching staff quite poorly. Reasons why this has occurred can be attributed, at least in part, to the employment and management of short-term contract and casual staff employed as lecturers, tutors, demonstrators or lab assistants at the local organisational level. The many different types of contracts and types of staff employed has often resulted in confusion and ignorance of the different legislative and university policies that apply, with the result that there are widespread inconsistencies in employment practice, terms of contracts, expectations and conditions within a single organisation. Indeed, in many universities, while there are comprehensive policies on the management, training and support of fulltime, continuing staff, there is a policy vacuum on these matters for sessional teachers. This vacuum is demonstrated by the project team's inability to find no examples of a 'whole university' approach to the management, support and training of sessional teachers.

While there is a strong case recognised for the need to allow for local organisational unit responses to issues of training, managing and supporting sessional staff, it is important that this takes place within a wider university framework (see below). That is, responsibility for these tasks needs to be delegated to the most appropriate level, but it needs to be situated in a general structure of clear policies, processes and practices. Clearly, such a move can only be supported by an awareness of both staff and administrators of the issues and implications surrounding the use of sessional teaching staff at all levels of responsibility: institutional, school, and course coordinator. More practically, resources need to be allocated (and be specifically identified for this purpose, at least in the early stages of implementation) to ensure that sessional teaching staff are appropriately managed, supported and trained.

In light of the Nelson reforms that have led to the introduction of 25% HECS top up fees from 2005 and the proposed Teaching Performance fund (2006) which will almost certainly require that universities demonstrate systematic training of sessional teaching staff to access these funds, it is imperative that UQ has an established program of training for 2005.

The sessional staff working party was established in 2004 to examine these issues and plan and implement a University response. The following training strategy has been recommended by the working party and guidelines will follow in line with best practice principles. The training strategy is based on the following principles drawn from the AUTC project:

- Institutions need to adopt a systematic and systemic approach to ensure they appropriately manage, support and train their sessional teaching staff.
- Flexibility must be taken into account as rigid uniformity of practice may be administratively efficient, but may be educationally unsound.
- Local responses to issues of training, managing and supporting sessional staff should be developed within a wider university framework.

- Responsibility needs to be delegated to the most appropriate level, but to adhere to a general structure of clear policies, processes and practices.
- Resources need to be allocated (and be specifically identified for this purpose) to ensure that sessional teaching staff are appropriately managed, supported and trained.

## Training strategy

Currently the University requires all staff, whether continuing, fixed term or casual, to undertake induction and this includes for example, information on Occupational, Health and Safety, Human Resources and Equity policy etc. The Casual Academic Staff policy strengthens the need for casual academic or sessional staff to undertake appropriate induction.

The purpose of this training strategy is to provide Teaching and Learning (T&L) training for casual or sessional academic staff in response to the Casual Academic Staff policy. This training is in addition to tutor training provided by Schools.

## University level

### 1 Provision of training and information resources

The University through TEDI and the Human Resources Division will provide a set of resources that can be accessed directly by casual academic or sessional staff. They may be provided by the supervisor at the point of employment. This provides a centralised resource bringing together the various policies and resources through a single window. As this will be accessible to both the sessional staff and those involved in employing staff, it will ensure that information is available in a consistent and easily accessible manner. The resources will comprise of:

- **Website:** This will be developed in 2005. The site will include an entry page from the UQ website for sessional staff and those involved with employing sessional staff - with links to induction for new staff, relevant UQ policy, documents, resources, downloadable documents (see below), the Sessional Teaching website etc.
- **Teaching manual:** (Available from <http://www.tedi.uq.edu.au/teaching/tutor/about.html>). This includes a guide for sessional teachers and tutors to assist them with planning and teaching in their first few weeks. Schools will be encouraged to add their own section on school specific issues related to teaching and learning.
- **Induction Template:** This will be developed in 2005. The template will include salary, conditions, policies, access to resources information in a downloadable Word file. An induction pack will include information and web links at the University level. A common set of information will be provided at the university level. For Faculty/School level information, a series of suggested headings will be provided to guide the staff member to the necessary information.

### Reporting obligations:

The University through the DVC(A) and The Teaching and Learning Committee should seek reports from the schools and faculties on their sessional training programs. This would include keeping a record of attendance for accuracy of payment to staff and reporting purposes. This type of reporting would be necessary for responding to the Teaching and Learning Performance Fund.

## Faculty level

### 2 Introduction to teaching for part time and sessional teachers

A four hour session on teaching at the University of Queensland be developed for all new part-time and sessional teachers. This will be organised through the faculties with three hours focused on teaching and learning issues and one hour on faculty/school administrative and organisational matters. This will be a compulsory and common program provided across all faculties with some variation where there is a particular emphasis required eg; laboratory, clinical, problem based teaching. This will be an entry level requirement for all sessional staff, developed by TEDI in consultation with the each faculty. The program will provide staff with an opportunity to meet with senior staff in the faculty, others who are teaching related courses and enable them to share experiences, network, and engage in professional development related to enhancing the quality of teaching.

**Suggested frequency:** There will be a minimum of one session for each faculty each year beginning in 2005. If a significant number of new casual academic staff are appointed in Semester two, then an additional session may be arranged. The program will be offered during week two or three of the semester.

**Target Audience:** Casual or sessional and part-time staff at lecturer A and above – particularly targeting industry based staff. It may include tutors with lecturers but this would depend on the numbers and mix of staff involved. Tutor training should continue to take place at the School level.

#### Resource Implications:

- Faculty staff to organise, eg: schedule the venue and event, identify and invite the staff to attend
- Faculty staff to participate and present in the program on the faculty/school administrative and organisational matters and teaching program.
- Funding for the 4 x hours wages of sessional staff who attend
- Costs for catering, printing of materials etc
- TEDI staff to coordinate and present the 3 hour T & L program with experienced faculty staff and developed in consultation with the faculties.

## Faculty/School level

### 3 Organisational support for sessional teachers

All faculties/schools (Whether these are school or faculty based personnel would depend on the size of the school and number of sessional teaching staff employed) should have:

1. A designated officer who is responsible for the administrative issues and resource allocation for sessional teachers (this may be the same officer responsible for tutor issues);
2. A designated academic supervisor who is responsible for the oversight of advising, training and mentoring of sessional teachers. This could be a designated role for program directors in large programs or a single person across several programs depending on numbers of staff involved.

## **School level**

### **4 Tutor training program**

Tutor training continues to be the responsibility of the Schools. Schools must provide evidence that there is a designated Tutor Trainer and that training is provided for new tutors.

Whilst the School of Psychology Tutor training model is recommended, this is not a requirement.