How do we assess the impact sessional staff have on the student experience?

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Overview of Session

- Summary of Research

- The VU Context

- Sessional Project – Stage 1 (2008/9)

- Sessional Project – Stage 2 (2011/12)

- Research Design and Method

- Research Findings

- Recommendations

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Summary of Research

The qualitative research undertaken at VU in 2012 primarily explored:

- whether the level of support provided to sessional staff has an impact on the quality of the teaching they deliver and, in turn, the student experience

- how managers/coordinators and sessional staff compare in their evaluation of the quality of their teaching practice and impact on the student experience

- challenges associated with good practice when managing sessional teachers

- challenges when dealing with a diverse range of sessional staff and student expectations

The VU Context

- Multi-sector – HE/VE/FE

- No. of sessional staff (headcount) increased by 28% between 2009 and 2011

- % of HE sessional staff that are female increased from 59% to 61% between 2009 and 2011

- Increasing diversification of sessional population

- West of Melbourne and multi-campus

- Up to 60% teaching in some courses by sessional staff (First Year dominance)

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VU Learning and Teaching Context

The VU Agenda:

- A new distinctive curriculum framework

- Move to an integrated College structure

- Focus on learning and teaching quality assurance

- Strong focus to enhance the student experience

- Commitment to building staff teaching and learning capability

- Best teaching practice - reflective practitioners, peer networks, communities of practice

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Support, Recognition and Enhancement of VU's Sessional Staff – Stage 1

Project objectives:

- Collect information about our sessional staff (survey/focus groups)

- Drive changes to VU's sessional staff processes and practices at both the institutional and local level

- Develop and implement processes to integrate sessional staff into their educational communities

- Support coordinators/managers in managing sessional staff

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Stage 1 – Intended Outcomes

- High quality learning and teaching to VU students through sessional staff – enhanced student experience

- Improved communication with sessional staff – their own level of engagement with VU is enhanced

- VU recognised as an employer of choice for sessional staff

- Risk minimised because of appropriate and good practice induction processes

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The Priorities that Emerged....

- Induction processes at both institutional and local levels

- Online resources

- Graduate Certificate in Tertiary Education – eligibility and payment

- Standard generic duty/role statements

- Evaluation of teaching practice

- Day to day support/communication

- Access to development opportunities

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SESSIONAL STAFFING PRACTICES AT VICTORIA UNIVERSITY

"CREATING A CULTURE AT VU IN WHICH SESSIONAL STAFF ARE TRULY CONSIDERED AND NURTURED AS VALUED STAFF MEMBERS"

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BACKGROUND

SESSIONAL STAFFING PROJECT 2008/2009
Influenced by:
- Red Report and Resources
- Sessional Staff Forum as part of Learning Matters, December 2007
- Sessional Staffing Discussion Paper 2007
- Commitment by Vice-Chancellor to Improvements –
"Embracing the third of our teaching staff engaged as casual/sessional staff"

INTENDED OUTCOMES

- A culture which genuinely and thoroughly considers, nurtures and values sessional staff
- VU's students receive the highest quality teaching
- A best practice Sessional Staffing Framework

SESSIONAL STAFFING PROJECT

HUMAN RESOURCES

Workforce Policy and Projects Unit

SESSIONAL STAFFING STEERING COMMITTEE

Includes Sessional Staff Members

PROJECT PLAN

IMPROVEMENTS

Improved communication with Sessional Staff
Increased engagement
Improved employment practices

SESSIONAL STAFF SURVEY 2008

Collaboration between Human Resources and Centre for Innovation in Learning and Teaching (CILT)
- Know the context
- Know the cohort
- Know the issues

IDENTIFY AND PROMOTE GOOD PRACTICE

- Consultation with Heads of Schools
- VU Diamond Database – 100 Innovations in Teaching and Learning
- Other universities
- Published research

ACHIEVEMENTS

SS PROJECT 2008/2009

SESSIONAL **STAFF HUB**

RESOURCES — SURVEY — FORUM

BREAKING NEWS
ONLINE RESOURCES TO HOST
INFORMATION FOR SESSIONAL STAFF

INDUCTION PORTAL

INDUCTION FOR NEW EMPLOYEES

SESSIONAL STAFF STUDY
- The Issues
- Recommendations for Improved Practice

VU LEARNING MATTERS 2008
- Inform sessional staff of progress
- Promote good practice
- Success Stories
- Innovative Teaching and Learning collaborations
- Seek Feedback

IMPLEMENT RECOMMENDATIONS
- VCAC Endorsement
- Education and Research Board (ERB)
- Staffing and Workforce Planning Committee (SWPC)
- QL&T Committee
- Education and Students Management Advisory Committee (ESMAC)

AWARD NEGOTIATIONS
- Victorian TAFE Teaching Staff Multi Business Agreement 2009 (MBA)
- Victoria University Heads of Agreement 2009 (HOA)
  o Conversion
  o Paid marking pilot
  o Increased loadings

IN PROGRESS

ADDRESS KEY ISSUES IDENTIFIED WITH REGARD TO INDUCTION, ONGOING MANAGEMENT AND CAREER AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF SESSIONAL STAFF
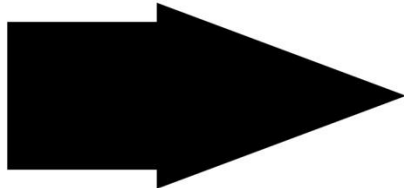
Sessional Staff Working Party Auspiced under the Quality Teaching and Learning Committee
- Review existing university guidelines and develop new guidelines for sessional staff members and those who supervise sessional staff
- Develop minimum standards for the employment of sessional staff
- Identify university areas in which cross-institutional collaboration is required to effect relatively minor changes in practice that will enhance sessional staff experiences and develop strategies to resolve current barriers to such changes
- Conduct a pilot study to trial the use of the guidelines, minimum standards and other items developed by the working party
- Develop a strategic action plan for sessional staffing at Victoria University that builds on the activities of the working party in a sustainable manner

IMPROVEMENTS TO ACADEMIC/TEACHER, SUPPORT/ MANAGEMENT AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Centre for Innovation in Learning and Teaching (CILT)
- PD and Teacher Induction
- E-learning and Technology
- Research
- Resources
Sessional Staff Forum December 2009

ONGOING IMPROVEMENTS TO ADMINISTRATIVE MANAGEMENT AND SUPPORT

- Recruitment and Selection of Staff Policy (reviewed 2009) to be implemented 2010 – clear guidelines and procedures for sessional staff
- Proposed enhancements to the Sessional Staff Hub (subject to funding)
- Monitoring and Reporting

PROMOTE BEST PRACTICE, COLLABORATE, BENCHMARK AGAINST OTHERS

TOWARDS SUSTAINABLE PRACTICE

CHALLENGES

- Implement sustainable and systemic change in a multi-sector environment
- Lack of comprehensive and accurate data on sessional staff
- Local practice to reflect organisational commitment
- Awareness of and commitment to University policy
- Faculty/School ownership/responsibility
- Resources and funding in the current climate
- Ongoing maintenance of project initiatives
- Evidence base for improved practice
- Accountability – monitoring and reporting

The Move to Stage 2

- Build on achievements in 'institutional' administrative and communication practices
- Focus on:
  - local level induction practices
  - academic management of sessional staff (including evaluation of teaching practice)
  - professional/career development of sessional staff
- Share resources and good practice
- Embed the Code of Good Practice
- Partner with other universities in research/initiatives relating to sessional staff
- Explore recognition mechanisms – functions/awards

Intended Outcomes: Learning and Teaching-Specific

- Sessional staff involvement in course design — ensures coherence

- All students receive appropriate feedback and support

- Teaching and marking is consistent across a course

- Student satisfaction with teaching is high

- Sessional staff involved in discussions relating to moderation, standards and curriculum activities

- Sessional staff development opportunities

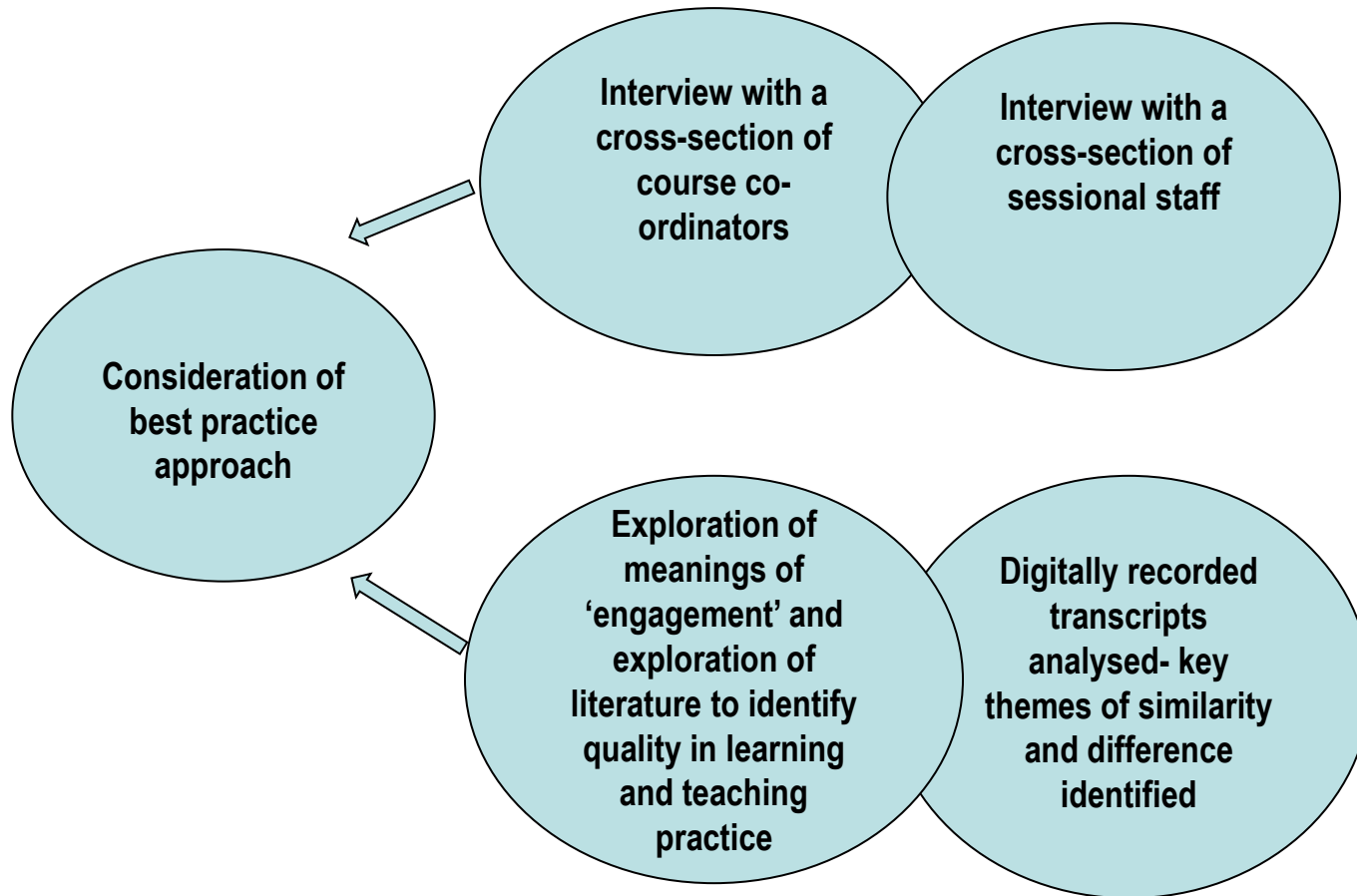**VICTORIA UNIVERSITY**
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Background to the Research Study Design

- Anecdotal evidence from managers/co-ordinators and students that sessional staff perform highly in terms of the relationships they build with students

- Research of initiatives in other universities eg: www.**class**leadership.com/

- Prompted an examination of any variance between the way the managers/co-ordinators and the sessional staff evaluate their impact

- A narrative method was used to enable examination of any variance in the way the participants understood impact

Approach to the Research

- Ethics Application

- Endorsement to undertake research from Faculties' leadership teams

- 24 semi-structured interviews conducted with managers/coordinators of sessional staff and sessional staff themselves

- Key questions included:
  - Please describe your process for evaluating the impact you have on students at the University
  - What support and/or guidance is provided to assist you to engage your students?
  - How do you know if the teaching you offer enhances the students' learning experiences?

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Research Design

Interview with a cross-section of course co-ordinators

Interview with a cross-section of sessional staff

Consideration of best practice approach

Exploration of meanings of 'engagement' and exploration of literature to identify quality in learning and teaching practice

Digitally recorded transcripts analysed- key themes of similarity and difference identified

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Theoretical approach

Narrative about engaging students

I' Self and Consciousness	IT Brain and Organism
Individual Levels Of operation presented In this axis	systems presented EG:Organic states
We Culture and World View	ITS Social systems and Environments
Levels mentioned Ranging from Pre modern, Modern, Post modern.	Modes and interaction eg:corporate states To informational and holistic meshwork's

Source: Wilber 2001:43 Integral Approach

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Analysis Method

Narratives analysed

Approach to learning and teaching

Narrative about engaging students

Approach to measuring the quality of students learning

Limitations on resources and impact on delivery of quality practice

Small Story Narrative

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Key Findings 1: 'Categories' of Sessional Staff

- Supported previous research which identified 'categories' of sessional staff

- Categories are based on motivation, career preference, employment mode and level of experience, e.g. industry expert – academic orientation, postgraduate student – industry orientation

- Articulation of how each category relates to student experience

- Builds on previous research by assessing and proposing priority types of support for each category in order to enhance the student experience

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Sessional Category	Assessment of experience and how it relates to student experience	Assessment of types of support that may enhance student experience
1. Postgraduate student – academic orientation	Experience in industry but not teaching	-Mentoring by experienced teachers -Resources about teaching expectations and managing student groups -Formal tertiary teaching qualifications
2. Postgraduate student – industry orientation	Gained qualification while working part-time in industry. Experience in group facilitation and how practical learning relates to theory	-University induction -Mentoring by experienced teachers
3. Industry expert – academic orientation	Income supplemented by teaching	-Community of practice (COP) learning focused on integrating theory and practice into teaching -Opportunities for research on scholarship of teaching and learning

Sessional Category	Assessment of experience and how it relates to student experience	Assessment of types of support that may enhance student experience
4.Academic aspirant – teaching orientation	Completing studies with prior work experience. Sessional teaching and juggling non-paid family duties. Seeking pathway into academic work	-Induction resources -Mentoring by more permanent academics
5. Casual 'by choice'	Often female and juggling non-paid family duties	-COP opportunities with a focus on innovations in learning and teaching
6. Retiree	Casual work to supplement retirement and share expertise	-Networking and COP opportunities to ensure contemporary approach maintained -Teaching technologies
7. Vocational/trade expert – practical work with teaching	In VE and want to share experience and broaden range of work opportunities. Extensive industry experience but little classroom management experience	-Mentoring with experienced teacher with a focus on classroom management -COP learning to develop knowledge in scholarship of teaching and learning

Key Findings   2

- More effective engagement with students when support is available to sessional staff

- Little evidence to suggest student experience is impacted by nature of employment (e.g. fixed term/continuing/sessional)

- No evidence that sessional staff are rated lower by students compared with other staff (student evaluation of teaching data)

- Sessional staff teaching experience and interactions with students are key factors that impact on student experience

- Crucial to the sessional staff member's effectiveness are:
  - relationship developed with the course co-ordinator/manager, and,
  - opportunities for access to institutional resources, e.g. University Induction Program, teaching and learning development, EEO training

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Key Findings 3

- Many sessional staff spend excessive time and energy overcoming barriers created by a lack of awareness, and sourcing resources that are available but it is not clear where they can be found

- Sessional staff engage students effectively despite the barriers that are presented through the nature of their employment.

- Experienced sessional staff tend to demonstrate good teaching practice regardless of level of support provided

- Sessional staff new to teaching are particularly vulnerable if not supported – potential for adverse impact on student experience

- A blend and balance of support, development and training for each sessional staff member is required in striving for the positive student experience

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How has the research informed VU Policy and Practice?

- An Interim Code of Good Practice was developed informed by good practice examples uncovered during the research

- Best practice local level induction and other resources have been shared and uploaded onto the online Sessional Staff Hub

- Contributed to 'revamp' of University Staff Induction Framework

- Contributed to review of Continuing Professional Development for Learning and Teaching Policy

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Recommendations

- Share more widely good local level induction practice across the University

- Gain formal approval for and promulgate the Code of Good Practice

- Upload additional resources, particularly teaching and learning-related, to the online Sessional Staff Hub and create functionality for online discussions

- Develop mechanisms to share knowledge e.g. good examples of evaluation of teaching practice

- Continue to work with local areas to ensure consistent good support, management and development practice for sessional staff and their managers/coordinators

- Establish Sessional Staff Advisory Group (but cost)

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