

Ensuring Sessional Academic Success by Rethinking the Place of Academic Development

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There has been growing recognition of the contribution that Sessional Academics make to student learning in higher education; with recent studies concluding that around half Australian university teaching is now performed by casual staff [Red Report 2008; May, 2013]. However, sector-wide research and institutional audits continue to raise concerns about academic development and quality assurance, as well as the recognition and retention of Sessional Academics. In response, universities offer academic development programmes. However, while such centrally offered programmes are undoubtedly useful, they are necessarily generic and cannot address the local contexts of faculties or provide ‘on the ground’ support.

This paper presents a new, distributed model of academic support and development for Sessional academics at Queensland University of Technology. Entitled the Sessional Academic Success programme, it employs the principles of distributed leadership. Experienced Sessional academics are trained and supported to assume roles as Sessional Academic Success Advisors within their schools. Complementing our central programmes, they design bespoke, locally situated, peer-to-peer academic development for new Sessional teachers; provide ‘just in time’, safe and reliable advice; and build supportive communities of teaching practice in their local contexts. This distributed model re-envisages the forms and places of academic development and support. It helps ensure that new Sessional Academics are embraced by faculty life. And, recognizing that experienced Sessional Academics have much to contribute to the advancement of learning and teaching, it builds their capacity through leadership opportunities. As the designer/facilitator of the programme and a Sessional Academic Success Advisor, the authors take a dialogic approach and together describe the design, implementation and outcomes of the programme.