

B7 - Sessional staff

Informing principles

The issue of providing induction and staff development opportunities for sessional employees is not new to USQ. In October 2002, the Australian Universities Quality Audit (AUQA) report made the following comments in relation to USQ's sessional staff.

The Audit Panel believes that the University should review the emphasis it currently places on preparing new staff for their teaching responsibilities and should consider the introduction of a formal academic induction program for all new academic staff, prior to the commencement of their teaching duties. This should also include sessional staff who undertake teaching duties (and who therefore expose the University to the same risks that tenured staff do regarding the teaching contract with students mentioned in section 2.2). Implementation of such a policy should be University-wide, although it may be appropriate to tailor the delivery locally. Ideally, staff (and particularly sessional staff and tutors) should undertake such induction prior to commencing their teaching duties, although the Audit Panel concedes the practical difficulties in implementing such a suggestion.

Following the AUQA Audit, on the recommendation of the Academic Staff Development Committee, a two day Learning and Teaching induction workshop was developed for all new academic employees. However, sessional staff were often not supported by their faculties to attend this program because of the costs associated with their attendance.

In December 2007 a paper drafted by Professor Lynne Hunt proposed the development of a framework for staff engagement for USQ. It was intended that the framework would describe:

- effective staff involvement in decision-making
- dissemination processes for essential corporate information and
- capacity-building processes including workshops and communities of practice.

In developing an Employee Engagement Framework for sessional employees, particularly academic employees, it is important to firstly focus on their induction to the University and more particularly to Learning and Teaching at USQ.

Goals

The goals of Sessional Staff development are to provide:

- a comprehensive online induction process for off-campus sessional staff and staff unable to attend regular induction sessions,
- high quality online resources for sessional staff aligned with new the Academic Professional Development plan and the newly developed Foundations courses,
- alignment of training with levels of employment, i.e. marking, tutoring, etc.,
- additional resources on the LTSU website designed to provide processes and essential corporate information for staff, and

- online (Moodle) Communities of Practice facilitated by experienced academic staff.

Strategic alignment

The design of this plan has taken into consideration many of the findings contained within the 'Employee Engagement Framework for Sessional Employees' document developed by HR.

Details of Faculty support for an 18 month period

In conjunction with the faculties LTSU will form a working party to identify specific issues related to sessional staff from a university wide and faculty specific perspective.

Faculties will be asked to provide feedback to LTSU on the ongoing development of resources provided to sessional staff.

Tasks, timelines & budgets

Tasks	Timeline
Have plan approved	April – May 08
Start training of new LTSU staff member of issues relating to sessional staff	June 08
Build and pilot online community in Moodle system	July – Aug 08
Launch sessional staff online community	Sept 08
Develop support flyers in conjunction with Foundations courses	Oct 08
Faculty awareness exercises	Oct – Dec 08
Online modules released for sessional staff	Feb 09
Evaluate first semester activities	May 09
Fine tune community and information supplied to staff prior to second semester induction.	June 09
Report on outcomes	July 09

Total Resources/ Budget Required

Academic Level C (.2) co-ordinate delivery of online Foundations resources (short term)

Academic Level B (.2) to develop support materials on the LTSU Websites and facilitate online community (ongoing).

Administrative staff (.2) to co-ordinate sessional staff participation in professional development activities (ongoing).

Required documentation and policy rewriting

If sessional staff choose to participate in the foundations program and seek academic credit for that participation HR policy will need to be developed to address the requirement of payment to the Faculty of Education for supervising that assessment.

Communication plan

Regular communication will be provided to the Deans, Senior HR personnel, the Staff Consultative Committee and Program co-ordinators.

Evaluation strategies

Ongoing evaluation of courses will be undertaken and aligned with the staff ePortfolio initiative.