

**Supporting sessional
teaching staff – to what
extent is there real
progress?**

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- ❖ An overview of sessional staff
- ❖ Mainly a UK perspective – so rather wintry!
- ❖ Recurrent theme – change for better or worse
- ❖ Initiatives and developments



A personal perspective

- I too was a sessional teacher!
- And then a researcher and advocate of change
- But also a supervisor, manager/employer and staff developer
- Tensions!!!



The sessional staff

- Why are they employed?
- Who are they?
- What do they do? And how much?
- Where do they work?
- How many are there?

- Invisibility
- Diversity and scale



A world-wide issue

- 250000 adjuncts in the USA (Barker, 1998)
- Canada (Puplampu, 2004)
- Japan (Yamanoi, 2003)
- France (Chevalier, 2001)
- Germany (Enders, 2001)
- Australia....



Issues – the downside



- Poor pay, poor conditions, poor rights, poor facilities (Allen, 2001)
- No access to promotion or careers, CPD – not a bridge but a trap (Barker, 1998; Tam, 1997)
- Lower status & esteem
- Inequality of opportunity (Bryson, 2005)
- Precariousness, uncertainty and insecurity (Findlay-Brookes, 2003)
- Underemployment (Barker, 1998; Bryson, 2004))
- Marginalisation (Bryson and Scurry, 2002)
- Fracturing of occupational identity (Abbas and Maclean, 2001) and lack of professional formation (Knights et al, 2007)

Are there any upsides?



- Depends on individual goals and aspirations and local conditions
- Many sessional staff do enjoy the role
- It can be a door into more secure roles in HE
- They demonstrate great enthusiasm and dedication and bring expertise and practical experience – and often get excellent student feedback too

Indubitably it could be rather better with proper support and better infrastructure

Why the level of neglect?



- Government – flexible labour markets vs regulation
- Funding bodies - indifference
- Trades Unions – Cinderella emerges (Conley and Stewart, 2008)
- Institutional Management – integration vs differentiation (Bryson and Blackwell, 2006)
- HEA - ambivalence




Examples of former good practice and their fate

- HEA Subject centres – focus on PGs and new teachers; mid career practitioners – **GONE**
- CETLS – Arts, Open University – **GONE**
- ADEPTT – superb resources – **FORGOTTEN**
- Individual universities – identify it as an issue, investigate, develop policy, invest resources, improvement for a while....

problematic longevity



Catalysts and fire blankets

- Emergence of champion
 - Involving the sessionals - the moral case
 - Senior management allies
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- Imperatives changing – new priorities
 - Drying up of investment
 - Turnover over of roles – loss of champion and/or allies

Embedding better practice

- Building into the culture – iterative process
- Maintaining the pressure – steering groups
- Infrastructure and process (not temporary initiative) – monitoring
- Not enough to offer ‘equal access’ to existing opportunities for academic development but...
- Specific to the needs of sessionals *and* flexible and diverse

Beaton and Gilbert (2012)



A powerful driver

- Becoming a KPI or benchmark
- Expectations
- Sectoral comparison



- Will that happen in the UK?

Where now and whither thence?

- In UK – gone quiet... happening at individual HEI level
- Focus on courses and accreditation
- Emphasis on GTA's
- The UK – Professional Standards Framework



Using open resources – a new model?

- FAVOR project – language tutors
- Sessionals are supported to produce their own resources
- Creates a community (cross-university)
- Shared broadly and creates legacy
- Flexible, dynamic and low cost
- But is that enough?



A better future?

- The rise and rise of student engagement
- Partnership and community models
- Operate best at local levels – participative involvement
- Mirrors the locus of control for sessional staff too?

